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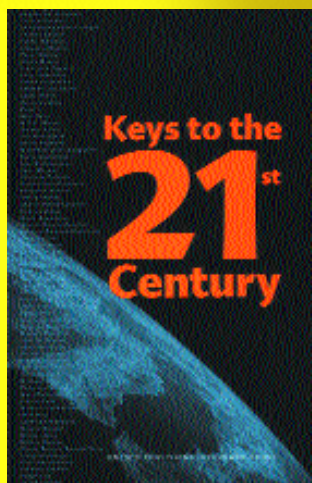


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## PEOPLE AND PLACES

### 4 Afghan women: knowledge and revolt

From the city of Faizabad—home to the only university in Afghanistan open to women—Chekeba Hachemi speaks of the suffering of her people.

Photographs by Antoinette de Jong, text by Chekeba Hachemi

## PLANET

### 10 A coastal balancing act

Tourism and sprawling cities are threatening our coastlines. Local groups have a pivotal role to play in protecting them.

Interview by Lucía Iglesias Kuntz

### 12 Dilemmas in a tropical paradise

Gerardo Tena

## WORLD OF LEARNING

### 13 Getting the spin right on history

Profound geopolitical changes have led many countries to revise their history textbooks. Falk Pingel discusses the pitfalls of the exercise.

Interview by Shiraz Sidhva

### 15 Germany: two histories reunited

Thomas Schnee

## Focus



© Tubby Bantus, Paris

## Politics and profit Scholars at risk

The end of the Cold War and the transition to democracy in many developing nations were expected to give a fresh boost to academic freedom. But everywhere, scholars are running up against multiple pressures. In some places, they risk prison or death if they are too outspoken. In the rich world, and even more acutely in the South, cutbacks in public funding are forcing universities to secure corporate funds, a trend that can provoke blatant conflicts of interest.

Detailed table of contents on page

## ETHICS

### 36 Economic rights: the big comeback

Is economic injustice one source of the September 11 attacks? For the past few years, NGOs have made economic rights a priority.

Philippe Demenet

## CULTURE

### 39 Tune into "the new conscience of Islam"

For philosopher Abdou Filali-Ansary, the meshing of religion and politics can only be loosened by providing more arenas for open debate.

Interview by Sophie Boukhari

### 42 One Islam, a mosaic of believers

Slimane Zéghidour

## MEDIA

### 44 An unseen world: how the media portrays the poor

Western viewers tend to be poorly versed on developing countries. The author of a critical study discusses why and what can be done.

Greg Philo

## TALKING TO...

### 47 Boris Cyrulnik: surviving the trauma of life

Violence and broken families are leaving a growing number of young adults traumatized. A French psychologist offers clues to recovery and "resilience."

## IN THIS ISSUE

### Freedom

The international community lagged in waking up to Afghanistan's unrolling tragedy, particularly that endured by its women. But it also ignored their fierce resistance against the oppression of the Taliban (pp. 4-9). This regime is the most extreme incarnation of religious fundamentalism, which also prevails in other Muslim countries where religious authorities uphold an ambiguous relationship with governments. For Moroccan philosopher Abdou Filali-Ansary, this meshing of religion and politics can only be loosened by providing more arenas for open debate (pp. 39-43). The need for open and scientific discussion is essential for countries around the world engaged in rewriting their history textbooks following the geopolitical upheavals of the past ten years (pp. 13-15). Open debate is also the cornerstone of university life, yet multiple pressures, both from the economic and political fronts, are hampering the sacrosanct concept of academic freedom (dossier, pp. 16-35).

### Divides

Is the deep economic divide running along the North-South fault line one of the root causes of the September 11 attacks? For the past few years, human rights organizations have made the fight against these inequalities a foremost priority, but are they being heard (pp. 36-38)? Public opinion in rich countries often seems ill-versed on what's happening in the developing world, in part reflecting the media's overarching dependence on audience ratings (pp. 44-46). Another divide is caused by the impact of violence and broken families on many teenagers. But eclectic psychologist Boris Cyrulnik says that with the right support, they have the capacity to pull through, even in extremely difficult conditions (pp. 47-51).

# Afghan women: knowledge and

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANTOINETTE DE JONG, TEXT BY CHEKEBA HACHEMI

ANTOINETTE DE JONG IS A DUTCH PHOTOGRAPHER; CHEKEBA HACHEMI IS PRESIDENT OF THE NGO AFGHANISTAN LIBRE\*

The only university open to Afghan women is located in Faizabad in northern Afghanistan, an area not under Taliban control. Antoinette de Jong photographed students there in April 2001. In this first-hand account, NGO director Chekeba Hachemi speaks of the suffering of her people, but also of their spirit of resistance. She appeals to the world community not to let Afghanistan become "an inconsolable country."



The majority of these students fled Kabul after Taliban forces captured the city and banned education for women. "In the Koran, it is stated that every Muslim has to acquire as much knowledge as possible. Men and women alike," says one student.

# revolt

It took the international community a long time, a very long time, to grasp what a tremendous danger the Taliban regime in Afghanistan posed. Dangerous for Afghans—their freedoms, their hopes for peace and their ancient culture—and for all the world's peoples. The hallucinating pictures of the September 11 events ended up convincing us that Evil was at work in Kabul. Yet, we had been warned. A few months earlier, other pictures had sparked indignation around the world: women trapped in fabric dungeons, peering at us from behind narrow bars; Afghans in *chadris*. And from behind those bars, inside those moving, ghostly dungeons, frail, angry voices spoke to us. For Afghan women are like Afghan men: courageous. Bravery is an ancestral virtue in Afghanistan. They spoke to journalists about the hell in which they were imprisoned, their dark solitude and the dark future of their people, their children and their betrothed.

They resisted. True to their reputation of pride and dignity, women living in areas under Taliban control set up underground schools, held secret press conferences and organized mutual assistance networks to defend themselves against ignorance, hunger and terror. Women who had managed to take refuge in free areas begged Western journalists to tell the whole world that Kabul had turned into a prison that would some day become a cemetery.

Why didn't we pay more attention to these women? We believed they were the latest in an endless string of misogyny's victims, one that has plagued so many places for so long. In a way, we trivialized their agony by likening it to comparable pain that others have suffered. That was a huge mistake, for the Taliban regime resembles nothing that we have ever seen, and the women of Afghanistan have been at the heart of an incomparable tragedy. Aware, concerned, empathetic women on the five continents listened, mobilized and demanded that their governments do something. But their appeals fell on deaf ears.

Yes, the officials said, Afghan women are suffering, but it's not our fault and besides, what can we do about it? Yet everything was still possible at the time. Governments could have put pressure on the Taliban and heeded General Massoud, who so feared the day when they would carry the fires of war to our own countries. That day is here. We have reacted too late, when violence ►



Professor Ali Yussuf Pur, former head of the Kabul medical faculty, teaching in the university's only classroom.

**We trivialized the agony of Afghan women by likening it to comparable pain that others have suffered. That was a huge mistake.**





## Afghan women: knowledge and revolt

This time, if we fail to hear this brilliant, exhausted nation's appeal, nothing will be left of it. The Afghans' legendary laughter will die out. And tears that no one sees will flow beneath the chadris.





© Antoinette de Jong, Panos Pictures, London

Since the Taliban came to power, photographs, television and movie images have been banned. Tapes of Titanic, one of the most coveted films, circulate underground at great risk.



According to Mari, the deputy director of the Pedagogical Institute, which shares quarters with the medical faculty, professors earn \$1.50 per month, a sum often paid with a three to six month delay.



Since the Taliban seized power in Kabul, Faizabad's population has doubled with an influx of refugees from the Afghan capital as well as from Mazar-i-Charif, where the Taliban systematically slaughtered civilians, according to student accounts.

© Antoinette de Jong/Panos Pictures, London



# Afghan women: knowledge and revolt

is the only possible response. And we have added a new burden to the already crushed silhouette of Afghan women.

Now they are wandering through the streets to the sounds of explosions beneath a sky that is raining bombs. I believe the time has come to ask Afghan women for forgiveness. Why do I say “we,” when I myself was born in Afghanistan and head a humanitarian organization that has been campaigning for years to free Afghan women? Because there are two kinds of women: those condemned to wear the *chadri*—under pain of death—and those who are free not to.

I fall into the latter category. And I want to say it again: we have not done enough. The time has come. Afghanistan is on the brink of an abyss. This time, if we fail to hear this brilliant, exhausted nation’s appeal, nothing will be left of it. The Afghans’ legendary laughter will die out. And tears that no one sees will flow beneath the *chadris*. Let’s make our own the destiny of these people whom blind History seems determined to abolish, to annihilate. Let’s not turn Afghanistan into an inconsolable country. ■



For more information on the plight of Afghan women, please refer to the UNESCO Courier issues dated October 1998 and March 2001.

*\* Afghanistan Libre (“For a free Afghanistan”) is an organization that was created to help Afghans living outside Taliban-controlled areas to start rebuilding the country. The group focuses on education, training and micro-economic projects. It is currently building a high school for 1,000 girls in the Panshir Valley, and has opened a workshop for 300 women, who attend classes in the morning and work in the afternoon.*



Students may wear lipstick, but even in this region, they shroud themselves in their chadris before heading out for the day. They live in permanent fear of the Taliban arriving in this last bulwark of freedom.

# A coastal balancing act

The rich biodiversity of coastal regions can be protected without chasing away tourism and other activities. On one condition: that local people play the lead role in steering conservation projects, says coastal expert Stephen B. Olsen\*

INTERVIEW BY LUCIA IGLESIAS KUNTZ

UNESCO COURIER JOURNALIST

**T**he first time coastal protection appeared on the international agenda was at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit. What progress has been made since then?

Quite a lot. We've gone from talking about general concepts to concrete achievements, such as the Integrated Coastal Management (ICM) programmes. To be effective, these have to involve conflicting groups such as the private sector (industry and tourism), fishermen, villagers and NGOs and make them realize that they have to work together. In 2000, there were over 300 such programmes operating in 95 countries, including many developing nations. We've also had to face the painful fact that not everything can be saved. We have to make choices because unfortunately, in some places, population pressure is so high that there's nothing left to preserve. If you visit the main Mediterranean tourist areas in Italy, Spain or Tunisia, you can see the high price being paid for ill-conceived development.

**So tourism isn't compatible with protecting coastal areas?**

Not always. That's certainly been the case in large areas of the Mediterranean and of the United States. But in many other countries, such as Cuba and Costa Rica, you can see much more thoughtful tourist development going on. A few years ago, I worked as a consultant on a project in the Sabana and Camagüey islands, off the north coast of Cuba, where the government had begun to build huge hotels almost on the beach. You reached them by *pedriplanes*, roads which crossed the lagoon and caused major ecological and water-flow problems. Under

the project, sponsored by the Global Environment Facility,<sup>1</sup> the Cubans completely changed the design, location and density of the islands' infrastructure, resulting in very elegant and environmentally friendly tourist facilities. At great expense, the *pedriplanes* were removed and replaced by structures that allowed the water to flow freely. Today, the area attracts tourists and the lagoons are in better condition.

**The second World Climate Conference will be held in South Africa in 2002. What's the message to it as far as coastal protection is concerned?**

The big challenge is to help local people change the way they live and make authorities more responsive. The problem isn't a technical one, a question of know-how or even money. You can do plenty of good things without much money, as long as you build local capacity and commitment and not just send in outside experts like me. The problem is that experts often want to create prosperity as quickly as possible without thinking about the future.

**But nearly half the global population lives in coastal areas and 12 of the world's 15 biggest cities are by the sea. What problems does this create for coastal areas?**

The problems are all to do with human activity, though they aren't the same everywhere. The most common one is the poor location of roads, docks and infrastructure along coasts; the destruction of major habitats such as coral reefs, marine and wetland food sources; and pollution of water by sewage dumping. The other big problem is over-



© William Campbell/Still Pictures, London

Is the grass growing?

fishing or fishing with aids like dynamite that damage the ecosystem. It destroys basic habitats that are key to the life-cycle of fish and shellfish. The biodiversity of a coral reef is like that of a tropical forest, so it's vital to put a stop to such damage.

**What do integrated coastal management projects involve?**

They start from the firm belief that it's much wiser to avoid damaging the environment than trying to restore what's already been lost, though the

success of the project isn't always obvious. We can apply what we have learned from working in some very extensive areas, and prevent errors and bad practices from being repeated. If we want to move towards sustainable development and conservation, we have to improve present forms of governance. Responsibility for conservation

**Can you give examples of sound coastal management?**

Well, there's Chesapeake Bay, the largest and most productive estuary in the U.S., the Wadden Sea (shared by Germany, Denmark and the Netherlands) and the Thames Estuary in England. Here in Rhode Island, the Coastal Resources Center is trying to

The key to its success has been not tackling all problems at once, but singling out two urgent ones—coastal erosion and poorly located infrastructure.

The two main causes of erosion were human—the mining of river sand (which eventually builds beaches) and the destruction of coral reefs to extract lime. Sand was used to make cement and the lime for plaster and to a lesser extent farming, because it reduces soil acidity and increases some crop yields.

Both types of mining created a lot of jobs and were so profitable that it wasn't easy to regulate them in a very poor country in a state of near civil war. But there have been some notable achievements. The two activities have been almost entirely brought under control and, more importantly, new infrastructure such as roads and hotels are built away from beaches and cliffs

The challenge to poor countries today is to use this experience and learn from the many experimental micro-projects that exist (the Tanzanian island of Mafia, the Honduran Gulf of Fonseca, the Philippines and other places), along with bigger projects over wider areas. ■

*\* Head of the Coastal Resources Center at America's Rhode Island University.*

1. *The Global Environment Facility (GEF) was set up in 1991 to protect the environment and promote sustainable development. Its members include 166 governments, the main development agencies, the scientific community and a broad range of NGOs and private sector bodies*



ing? Researchers measure progress in California's San Diego Bay.

cannot fall on governments alone—all interest groups have to be involved. Then you have to work out what to develop and what to preserve (see next page). And surprisingly, I've found you can nearly always reconcile different interests. But you really have to get a democratic process going because if you just allow technicians to work in isolation, the result is worth very little. If a project is well thought-out, the people affected by it will understand and give it their backing, because they will have been involved from the outset.

revive an abandoned industrial port filled with poor quality water. Another example is the Venice Lagoon in Italy, which is tremendously complicated but has enjoyed moderate success

**It seems only rich countries can afford to rehabilitate their coastal regions.**

Not really. Developing countries have many experimental schemes lasting four to six years, but so far few long-term, large-scale projects, such as the thriving almost 30-year coastal management programme in Sri Lanka.



UNESCO's International Oceanographic Commission will host a conference in Paris from December 3-7, 2001 called "Oceans and Coasts at Rio +10." (<http://ioc.unesco.org/iocweb>)

Coastal Resources Center:  
[www.crc.uri.edu](http://www.crc.uri.edu)

A COASTAL BALANCING ACT

# Dilemmas in a tropical paradise

"We want tourists, but not too many," say the 400 inhabitants of Xcalak, a village on Mexico's southeast coast. They've taken steps to protect the area, but that may not be enough to keep developers at bay

GERARDO TENA

MEXICAN JOURNALIST

**X**calak, on the Caribbean coast of Mexico, is no less than a paradise, blessed with 14,000 hectares of coastal land and 3,000 more of offshore lagoons. The area is part of the Meso-American Barrier Reef, the second largest in the world and home to a vast array of fish, turtles, shellfish and manatees. Its verdant expanses of tropical forest contain

Roo University and the Rhode Island University Coastal Resources Center (CRC, see previous pages), the villagers persuaded the federal government to designate the area as a national marine park on June 5, 2000. They were also named responsible for its upkeep. To protect the area and satisfy everyone's interests, the land was divided into

programmes to protect the region. Ruta Maya's goal is to include Xcalak in a massive tourist resort similar to the sprawling one in Cancún, 300 kilometres north which receives two million tourists a year. Along with improving access roads, Ruta Maya plans to build 14,000 hotel rooms.

"It would be unthinkable to stay outside this development project when you're a village whose only access road has recently been repaired after Hurricane Mitch devastated it in 1998. What's more, we're only served by one bus a day," says Lazcano. Xcalak has no electricity, but it hopes to be hooked up to the grid in a couple of months.

The villagers, however, remain wary. "They don't want huge steel and concrete buildings going up along their beaches, their wooden houses replaced or their unsurfaced streets ripped up. They want to have a say in the Ruta Maya project to make sure the development is balanced," Lazcano explains. "The coastal area is protected, but the rest of the village on dry land wants to be part of the development that's coming to the whole region. Villagers are trying to achieve that without giving up their fishing—the heart of their identity—and without harming the ecosystem."

"They're worried about their future and know that the only chance they have of preventing a tourist invasion is by getting together to preserve their community and not let it be overwhelmed by developers," he adds

Xcalak is nevertheless adapting. It can already boast a couple of small hotels, with capacity for between 12 and 30 people, and another five are planned on the outskirts. To prove their good faith, some villagers have even begun learning English and taking courses on customer satisfaction. ■

© Coastal Resources Center, University of Rhode Island, USA



A plan of Xcalak shows the marine protected area and other village sites.

spider and howler monkeys, jaguars, swamp crocodiles and 155 bird species.

Each morning, most of Xcalak's 400 inhabitants make for the sea to catch fish, lobster and conch, an activity that now competes with the first stirrings of tourism. Five years ago, the villagers realized their catches were shrinking due to the environmental damage inflicted by unauthorized fishermen and tourist guides. In response, the locals decided to look for ways to protect fish stocks and diversify their income sources.

Helped by experts from Quintana

six zones. The first was reserved for fishing, the second for tourism, the third for game fishing, the fourth for fish-breeding, the fifth was closed in winter and the sixth was set aside for conservation of plant and animal life.

This is all and well, but a greater danger seems to lie ahead. "Now, the village is threatened by a government project called the Ruta Costa Maya (Mayan Coast Road), which aims to make Xcalak part of a major tourist development plan," says biologist Marco Lazcano, executive director of *Amigos de Sian Ka'an*, an NGO involved in several



Amigos de Sian Ka'an. Apdo. Postal 770. Cancún, Quintana Roo 77500, Mexico

# Getting the spin right on history

Over the past decade, profound historical changes have led many countries to revise how they teach history in school. Falk Pingel\* looks at the pitfalls of the exercise

INTERVIEW BY SHIRAZ SIDHVA

UNESCO COURIER JOURNALIST

**To what extent do authors who revise school textbooks tread the fine line between historical truth and distortion for political or other purposes?**

Careful analysis is required to ensure that biases do not creep into texts, and there are several criteria for judging accuracy. The bottom line is that different perspectives must be mentioned, otherwise you're likely to get a biased presentation of history. This tends to be the case with how religious issues are treated, or how the so-called underdeveloped countries are presented. This can be very different from how the people concerned actually view their own culture or religion. We have found biased interpretations of the two World Wars in European textbooks, when they dealt with borders, pro-

blems with minorities or victims of persecution, for example.

**What guidelines exist for avoiding bias?**

The Institute for International Textbook Research, with UNESCO, has developed guidelines for textbook revision. There are methods on how to do a linguistic analysis of a text to gauge whether it is biased. The deeper structure of a text is analyzed to assess whether cultural diversity is respected, or whether there are racial and ethnic stereotypes

**What about the choice of authors?**

The way textbooks are written varies across different regions. In Western Europe or the U.S., a team of three or more scholars is involved in writing a

single text. An open textbook market exists so that schools have a choice. This in itself is usually a guarantee that different views are expressed. But in other regions (including some countries of East and Southeast Europe, as well as many African and Asian countries), textbooks are often written by a single author who is commissioned by the state to write according to a narrow set of guidelines.

**Is this problem more acute in certain regions?**

Yes, in former Soviet countries, but there has been a change for the better in the last decade. We've organized seminars with textbook authors from Eastern

\* *Deputy Director of the Georg-Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research, Germany, and author of the UNESCO Guidebook on Textbook Research and Textbook Revision, 1999.*

## JAPAN: AMBIGUOUS TEXTBOOKS

The committee charged with revising history textbooks meets in Tokyo's unsightly Mombusho building, which houses Japan's Education Ministry. Experts usually update textbooks every two years to incorporate new information—archaeological discoveries and decisive revelations—or make changes required by a modified curriculum. This year, the routine task provoked an international controversy.

The committee revised and approved nine high school history textbooks. All of them had to be corrected. One, published by Fusosha, which belongs to the conservative Fuji-Sankei press group underwent over 200 modifications.

Despite the requested corrections, the Fusosha textbook, written by a group of nationalistic professors, continues to ignore the tragic plight of "comfort women," the Imperial army's former sex slaves, most of whom were Korean. And it asserts that there is "no proof" the Japanese slaughtered 300,000 people during a massacre in Nanjing, China, in 1937.

The eight other books are less questionable but just as ambiguous. All of them say that, despite its horrors, the Pacific war ended Western colonialism in Asia. For now, Japanese students grow up with a truncated

vision of history. Nonetheless, the overwhelming majority of public school teachers has rejected Fusosha's book, and none of Japan's prefectures (each one chooses which books to include in the curriculum) has opted for it.

But what can be done about revisionist mangas (comic books), which are breaking sales records? The illustrator and polemicist Yoshinori Kobayashi has sold several million copies of *Senso Ron* ("About the War"), a picture book that glorifies the heroes of World War II. An organization of revisionist teachers, *Tsukuru Kai*, has asked him to illustrate their future works.

More alarming, polls show that Japanese teenagers, who have been disoriented by the current economic crisis, say they "enjoy" books boasting about the code of honour and the Japanese virtues of order and discipline, without mentioning the atrocities that were committed.

Casting his eye over these various trends, Dr. Aruki Wada, a professor at Tokyo University, says that "Japan still hasn't cleaned up its past." ■

Richard Werly, Tokyo-based journalist

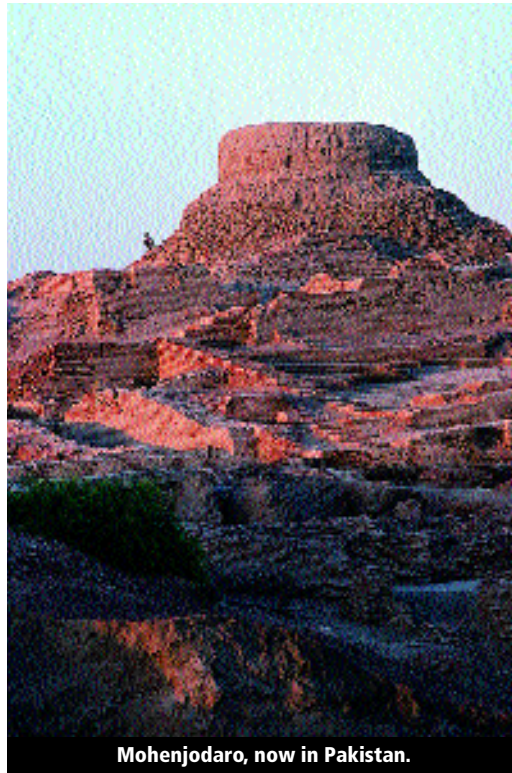
## K.N.PANIKKAR\*: RECASTING THE PAST IN INDIA

Since coming to power three years ago, India's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has actively sought to impose a new history curriculum. This attempt has nothing to do with new trends or methodology within the discipline. By restructuring educational institutions, rewriting curricula and textbooks, and making major personnel changes, the government is attempting to recast the past by giving it a strongly Hindu religious orientation.

The right-wing party now controls the Ministry of Human Resource Development (which includes Education) and the National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT) which produces most school texts. These, along with other public institutions like the Indian Council for Historical Research, are rapidly losing their academic freedom, as renowned historians are replaced by bureaucrats and academics willing to toe the political line.

The current rewriting of Indian history is part of a larger long-term political plan aimed at reordering the secular character that has informed the educational and cultural policies of the country since its independence. The BJP seeks to redefine the character of the nation as Hindu, and to lend legitimacy to the politics of cultural nationalism. To inculcate a sense of national pride, Indian history is seen through stereotypes rooted in religious identity. No aspect of history has been spared, be it social tensions, political battles or cultural differences. The achievements of ancient Indian civilization are identified only with Hinduism and are grossly exaggerated.

The BJP would have us believe that humankind and all scientific discovery, from bronze-casting to printing and aeronautics, originated in northern India, the original home of the Aryans. The period of the Rig Veda (a religious treatise) has been pushed back to 5000 B.C. against the general scholarly consensus of 1500 B.C. in order to associate the Aryans with the Indus Valley civilization which flourished in Harappa and Mohenjodaro, now in Pakistan.



Mohenjodaro, now in Pakistan.

©Paolo Kochi/Rapho, Paris

These distortions are not limited to the past. The more recent history of the national movement has been altered to glorify leaders of staunch Hindu organizations, even if they were collaborators of colonial rule.

The Hindu view attempts to exclude all those who migrated to India and their descendants as foreigners or the enemy. In reality, India's demography reflects the coming together of a variety of groups—racial, linguistic and ethnic—during the course of the last two millennia and raises the question of who the "outsider" really is.

Fortunately, there is a strong resistance from academics and historians against this trend. They are doing all they can to fight the gradual introduction of new textbooks and to uphold the country's long tradition of "scientific" history.

Ed. note: The government has defended its recently introduced National Curricular Framework for School Education which suggests that textbooks be revised. Denying that "any religious bias" had been introduced into history textbooks, the Human Resources Development minister, Murli Manohar Joshi, insisted that his government was "merely following the changes recommended by the NCERT... We have prepared the frame in the most democratic manner," he said. ■

\* Former professor at Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi. One of several eminent historians whose two-volume treatise on Modern Indian history, "Towards Freedom", was summarily withdrawn by the Indian Council of Historical Research.

Europe to teach them new methods of writing and discussing the different interpretations possible in history. This is particularly difficult when we are dealing with the Balkan wars or with the dissolution of Socialist Yugoslavia, where memories of suffering are still fresh.

### What do you see as the most serious bias in history textbooks?

The tendency to construct a continuity in time, whether of one culture, one nation and even of nation states, investing this culture, people or nation with a dignity superior to others. Some European countries, for example, say their nations were born in the 9th or 10th cen-

tury, when the nation state has only existed for 200 years.

### How can this be prevented?

Sometimes discussions are useful to deconstruct this notion of continuity over centuries. Of course, most nations trace back roots to ancient or medieval times, when social or religious patterns of dependency were much more important than ethnic or "national" groupings. The term "people" or "nation" did not have the same meaning as today. Often, textbook authors tend to put their own people or nation in the centre and diminish or exclude others believed to have less "historical" rights. Our message is:

don't dehumanize what is different from you.

### Germany over the last 20 years has developed an excellent resource for teachers on the Nazi period. Do textbooks get more accurate with the passage of time?

Yes, time does help. It is much harder to have accurate textbooks for countries still at war. The latest Palestinian texts developed by the Palestinian National Authority don't deal with the present dimension of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict at all. In contrast, Israel has an open private textbook market. Different versions are now available, but none that acknowledge Palestinian culture or history. ■

## GETTING THE SPIN RIGHT ON HISTORY

# Germany: two histories reunited

It's taken several years, but students across the country are now learning a common version of history that takes stock of everyday life and dissident movements in the former East Germany

**THOMAS SCHNEE**

JOURNALIST BASED IN BERLIN

The shock of unification reached classrooms in the “new” Länder (states) of former East Germany as the 1991 school year began. Germany was united once again. But not its school curriculum. As a result, the West German version was imposed. East German history textbooks were rejected because they faithfully reflected the ideology of the fallen regime.

“The publishers quickly brought out new books,” says Falk Pingel, deputy director of the Georg-Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research (see previous pages). “But they were just new editions of the ones written in the West in the 1980s, with an added chapter on reunification. It wasn’t at all representative of the idea East Germans had of their own history. The repressive nature of the Communist regime was emphasized, along with East Germany’s membership of the Soviet bloc. Reunification was presented as a positive thing, without mentioning the dashed hopes of those from the East.”

## Looking back without nostalgia

In the space of a year, teachers in the East had to switch to a very different version of history. “Many of them didn’t know how to explain to their pupils why yesterday’s truths no longer held today,” says Andrea Schwärmer, who had taught history in the eastern state of Thüringen. “Those teachers lost all credibility and had to resign themselves to leaving the profession.”

In the mid-1990s, the education ministers of the Eastern states, who were in charge of supervising the curriculum under the federal system, began to push for change. “Many teachers in the East requested that we come up with a less biased textbook and we did in 1995,” says Walther Funken, head of Volk und Wissen, the largest textbook publisher in

the Eastern states, based in Berlin. Once tied to the Communist regime, the publisher was taken over in 1994 by Cornelsen, a West German publisher.

“It wasn’t a matter of writing a textbook for people who were nostalgic for life in the old East Germany,” says Funken, “but of presenting in a more subtle way all the aspects of East German society through individual portraits. For example, one chapter compares the different roles of women in East and West German societies, noting the large number of them in the East’s workforce and the political and historical reasons why women in the West tend to stay home.”

Last year, the state of Brandenburg officially revised its history curriculum for the first time since 1991. More space is given to daily life in East Germany, the Nazi period and the Holocaust, a comparison between Nazism and Stalinism, as well as how citizens’ movements helped

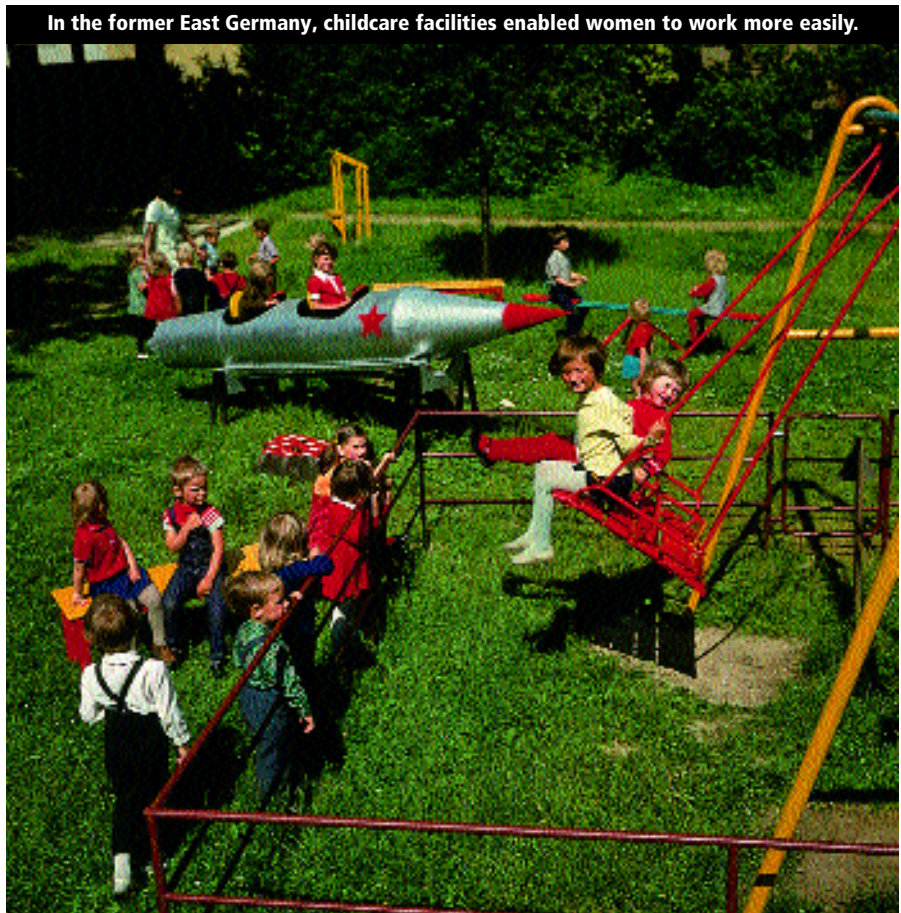
bring down the Communist regime.

## Sparking debate

“In the East,” says Pingel, “National Socialism was depicted as a perversion of the capitalist system. It was obviously not compared to Stalinism and very little was said about the concentration camps and their victims. Dissident movements weren’t mentioned either.”

The vast majority of German historians now agree on a common version of the history of East Germany, says Pingel. Because the new generations have not lived the history being taught to them, “the textbooks discuss the rise of the 1989 citizens’ movements and use a range of sources and accounts to show how young East Germans experienced reunification. This open way of teaching doesn’t present a single truth, but various points of view,” he says. “It seeks to encourage debate in the classroom.” ■

In the former East Germany, childcare facilities enabled women to work more easily.



# POLITICS Schola

## Contents

### 1 / The Money Game

- 18 **Anatomy of a corporate takeover**  
James L. Turk
- 21 **Who calls the tune?**  
Vicky Elliott
- 23 **In the name of a fair trial**  
Jeffrey Drazen
- 24 **Barbed wire in the research field**  
René Lefort
- 26 **Too poor to be free**  
Ebrima Sall

### 2 / Power Traps

- 29 **When your university closes down...**  
Donald Macleod
- 30 **In the line of fire**  
Sam Zia-Zarifi
- 32 **No apologies**  
Steve Negus
- 33 **Bound by nostalgia**  
Nick Holdsworth
- 35 **Being on alert**  
Interview with Brenda Gourley

**S**ince the first universities were born over eight centuries ago, intellectuals have negotiated the right to pursue knowledge without outside pressure, a privilege broadly known as academic freedom. This sacrosanct notion continues to be challenged on all fronts. Strapped for funds because of public sector cutbacks, universities worldwide are sealing deals with corporations. Although in some cases these alliances have proved their worth (pp. 21-22), in many others, they have led to blatant conflicts of interest and run the risk of sidelining basic research and the humanities (pp. 18-20). In response, medical journals recently took a lead in protecting academic investigators (p. 23). Meanwhile, hopes that the information revolution would spur easier access to knowledge are hampered by ever stricter intellectual property rights (pp. 24-25). Marginalized from the international community, many African researchers are forced to sell their wares. While they are no longer widely targeted on grounds of subversion, in many other parts of the world, the politics of ethnic and religious identity have placed intellectuals in the line of fire (pp. 30-31). Some, such as Afghan professor Abdul Lazard (p. 29), have managed to flee with help from the international community, others serve prison sentences (p. 32). The social climate can also curtail freedoms: in Russia, historians are running up against a reluctance to explore the darker days of the Soviet era (pp. 33-34). But scholars must seize the day and play a more prominent role in addressing pressing global problems (p. 35).

Dossier concept and coordination by Cynthia Guttman, UNESCO Courier journalist





# AND PROFIT rs at risk

O P I N I O N

## LEAVING ROOM FOR DISSENT

GILLIAN EVANS

LECTURER IN THEOLOGY AT CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY,  
PUBLIC POLICY SECRETARY FOR THE COUNCIL FOR ACADEMIC FREEDOM AND ACADEMIC STANDARDS (CAFAS)

In the first universities of medieval Europe, 800 years ago, an individual who questioned official attitudes could find himself an outlaw. The notion that there was value in challenging what society thought permissible through public debate emerged later, as a result of the religious and intellectual wars of the 16th and 17th centuries. Gradually, a tacit agreement developed between the state and universities, whereby freedom of speech in the public interest was allowed.

Governments—and to some extent university administrations themselves—are losing sight of the reasons for protecting this community that is allowed, like the court jester, to ask authorities awkward questions. Universities are increasingly seen as training centres rather than as institutions of higher learning. They are expected to produce skilled workers instead of critical scholars in societies where a computer programmer is deemed more valuable than a philosopher.

Pressure to reduce government spending coupled with rising student enrolment has driven universities world-wide

into the arms of commerce. The constant search for funding is time-consuming and inefficient. Moreover some “big name” universities attract private funding more easily than others because of their prestigious “brandnames.” When universities “collaborate” or enter “partnerships” with big corporations, the lawyers of the latter are generally far more astute in pursuing their clients’ interests than those negotiating on behalf of universities. The corporation offers a new building, salaries to attract “big leading players,” equipment. In return it may retain control of the direction of the research and even impose a new set of staff relationships.

Before, long-term posts in the universities gave scientists the opportunity and security to pursue novel ideas that arose during their work. But commercially-financed research aimed at specific projects does not allow for digression. Its prime objective is to produce the goods—marketable products—leaving fundamental science to the sidelines. The sponsor can also control the intellectual property rights and even the right to publish the project results. It can prevent the scientist from sharing research at an

international conference and can even stop his or her work if the funder doesn’t like the way it is going.

The old expectation was that scientific expertise was global in its reach and exchange. Scientists met in international conferences and gave papers which everyone could discuss. Independent, respected voices could be heard to disagree with the claims of government or corporate-sponsored research. Today, the corporations are buying up this expertise, leaving very few voices to challenge what they are telling the world.

Some international watchdogs are beginning to take action. Yet even the American National Academy of Sciences considers that it is difficult to find individuals of sufficient seniority and with visibly clean hands to form a watchdog body that would call to account those who manipulate data, appropriate ideas or bend conclusions. We need a critical mass of these brave and articulate individuals who are willing to speak out until academic freedom is restored and recognized as a protection of everyone’s freedoms. ■

# 1. THE MONEY GAME

## Anatomy of a corporate takeover

After scaling the ramparts of academic freedom through secretive funding deals, corporations are gaining a new foothold in the ivory towers by exporting a commercial culture of governance

JAMES L. TURK

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE CANADIAN ASSOCIATION OF UNIVERSITY TEACHERS, EDITOR OF THE CORPORATE CAMPUS: COMMERCIALIZATION AND THE DANGERS TO CANADA'S COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES, JAMES LORIMER & CO., TORONTO, 1999.

**T**he basic role of the university in democratic society is at risk. Alone among social institutions, the university's mission is the unqualified pursuit and public dissemination of truth and knowledge. The university serves the broad public interest to the extent it treasures informed analysis, critical inquiry and uncompromising standards of intellectual integrity.

When those who make up the university, through their teaching, research and community service, struggle to push beyond conventional wisdom, they often threaten those in power with a vested interest in the status quo. Throughout history, academic staff

who take their mission seriously have sometimes found themselves at odds with dominant religious groups, with governments and the state, and with the corporate sector.

Recently, corporate involvement in the university has provoked the most concern. Strapped for funds because of public sector cutbacks, universities have turned increasingly to the private sector for support, often considering corporate proposals that would have been anathema previously. The very concept of philanthropy has changed. Gone are the times when donations were made without strings. Today, the donor expects something in return.

## THE BIRTH OF ACADEMIC FREEDOM

**U**niversities as autonomous communities of teachers and students are a creation of the medieval West. The earliest such centres of higher learning sprang up in Bologna and Paris around 1200. Others soon followed in Oxford, Cambridge, Montpellier, Toulouse, Padua and Salamanca. There were over 60 by the late 15th century. The men who formed them, such as the philosopher Siger de Brabant, the theologian Thomas Aquinas and the physician Arnaud de Villeneuve, met, often with scant resources, to study various disciplines, including philosophy, medicine, law and theology. Soon they were fighting for their autonomy, in other words for the freedom to organize their courses as they saw fit, teach the students of their choice, confer diplomas and hire professors.

At a time when law was fragmented into many customs and essentially protected the local people, universities, which drew teachers and students from far and wide, inspired mistrust from the authorities and townsmen. They needed special protection.

Once acquired, autonomy did not necessarily mean total independence. It had to be guaranteed by a higher authority who granted written privileges. For a long time, the Church kept all forms of teaching under its control. It was the Pope who granted the earliest university privileges, riding roughshod over those who traditionally supervised schools: bishops, towns and the prince's local representatives, insofar as the secular powers also intervened very early on.

The expression *libertas scolastica* appeared in Paris in 1231. To a certain extent, academic freedoms coincided with what we call freedom of teaching today, but they still remained under the Church's tight control. Above all they involved the right to live and work in peace, and exemption from city taxes,

military service and arrest, trial and imprisonment.

Academic freedoms borrowed much from ecclesiastic liberties: students and teachers, whether men of the cloth or not, were in a situation comparable to that of clergymen, who were subject only to ecclesiastical courts, which had a reputation for being more fair. They could only be tried by their own institution — professors and the rector, the elected head of the university — or by the pope or his representatives.

As such, one of the main aspects of academic freedom was the emergence of separate university courts that meted out their own justice, setting teachers and students apart from the rest of society. The law was the same throughout the West for everyone who belonged to those supranational institutions that were, in essence, the first universities.

In the late Middle Ages, the rise of state-like entities meant that academic freedoms became part of a new political framework, as simple practices exempt from common law and still subject to revision. A venerable vestige of the one-time independence and privileges granted by the prince, they now acquired an ambiguous status. ■

Jacques Verger, professor of medieval history at the Université de Paris-Sorbonne, author of "French Universities in the Middle Ages" (published in French by Brill, Leiden, 1995).

A good deal of discussion has focused on purely commercial deals which involve the adornment of universities with corporate logos and advertising, or provide suppliers, like soft drink companies, with exclusive rights on campus. While such deals raise legitimate concerns and have provoked student protest, the bigger danger lies in relationships that threaten university autonomy and academic freedom. For example, corporate donations to universities are often made in utmost secrecy. The details of the deal remain undisclosed to the university senate or the larger university community. Canada's largest and most richly endowed university, the University of Toronto, signed secret deals in 1997 with the Joseph Rotman Foundation (\$15 million for the Faculty of Management Studies), CEO Peter Munk of Barrick Gold and Horsham corporations (\$6.4 million for the Centre for International Studies) and Nortel (\$8 million for the Nortel Institute for Telecommunications). The deals allow the corporations unprecedented influence over the academic direction of University of Toronto programmes.

### Mounting unease

For example, the Rotman agreement initially called for "the unqualified support for and commitment to the principles and values underlying the [donors'] vision by members of the faculty of management." The Munk donation obligated the Center of International Studies to assure that this project would "rank with the University's highest priorities for the allocation of its other funding, including its own internal resources."

In the U.S., the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) gained considerable notoriety in the early 1990s, when for a fee of \$10,000 to \$50,000 per year, it provided corporations privileged access to its faculty and to their research reports. The institute advertised its readiness to place the expertise and resources of all its schools, departments and laboratories at the disposal of industry.

The trend has been gradual, but unease is mounting about overly close relations between corporations and university-based researchers. Several high-profile cases have fuelled the debate. In the UK, the editor of the *British Medical Journal* resigned as a professor at Nottingham University over its decision to accept more than five million dollars from British American Tobacco towards an international centre for corporate responsibility. In the U.S. and Canada, the cases of Drs. Nancy Olivieri (see next page) and David Kern, among others, stand as blatant illustrations of the corporate threat to academic freedom and integrity. While serving as a consultant to a company producing nylon flock, Kern, the director of occupational medicine at Brown University's Memorial Hospital (U.S.), found evidence of a serious new lung disease among

the company's employees. Going against the will of his university and the company that threatened to sue, Kern published his findings. His position at the university was eliminated. In the same year, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control officially recognized the new disease, flock worker's lung.<sup>1</sup>

The fact that university administrations did not side with their faculty in both these cases signals a profound change at work within academic institutions. Corporate-dominated university boards increasingly



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choose top administrators who support a corporate model of governance. And universities increasingly operate in market-oriented cultures, in which social value is measured by short-term market relevance. There is money for computer science and business administration, not for philosophy, history, theoretical physics or the arts.

The risk, however, is that universities may quickly run up against the limits of their own game. We know that public underfunding makes universities more vulnerable to corporate enticements. But there is no evidence to suggest that private corporate donations ►

**Restriction on academic freedom acts in such a way as to hamper the dissemination of knowledge among the people and thereby impedes national judgement and action.**

Albert Einstein,

## UNESCO'S ONGOING ENGAGEMENT

In 1950, UNESCO convened a conference in Nice (France) at which universities spelt out three principles for which every higher learning institution should stand: "the right to pursue knowledge for its own sake and to follow wherever the search for truth may lead; the tolerance of divergent opinion and freedom from political interference; the obligation as social institutions to promote, through teaching and research, the principles of freedom and justice, of human dignity and solidarity..."

Academic freedom became a subject of intense debate in the international community towards the end of the 1980s, partly linked to the fall of many totalitarian communist regimes and the spread of democracy. Since then, a string of declarations has been passed relating to academic freedom. In 1997, UNESCO's General Conference adopted a recommendation concerning the Status of Higher Education Teaching Personnel, which states that the principle of academic freedom should be "scrupulously observed." The landmark World Conference on Higher Education (1998) also stressed that academic freedom and university autonomy were basic and inalienable conditions required for institutions to carry out their mission. UNESCO is preparing a world report on the subject and is heading an initiative to draft an international instrument to reinforce the principle. In June 2001, UNESCO also launched the Network for Education and Academic Rights (see p. 30), which aims to bring greater international attention to academic violations. For more information, see [www.unesco.org/education/wche](http://www.unesco.org/education/wche) ■

can even begin to replace cuts in public funding. In Canada alone, over two billion dollars would have to be earmarked for universities to restore funding to its level ten years ago. Proof that corporate funding is not filling the gap is that many countries are dramatically raising tuition fees, which undercuts wider accessibility for students

But there are powerful pockets of resistance. On several occasions in recent years, students and faculty have stood up against blatant commercialism on campus. In Canada, the alarm was sounded two years ago when an expert panel published a report recommending that commercialization become the fourth mission of the university, alongside research, teaching and community service. It also recommended that tenure and promotion be more closely tied to engaging in commercial activities. In opposition, the Canadian Association of University Teachers drafted a letter to the prime minister that collected 1,500 prominent signatures in three days. At stake are concerns about corporate interests shaping the research agenda. The issue gained renewed resonance this fall, when a dozen of the world's leading medical journal editors took steps to better protect academic investigators (see p. 23).

Without academic freedom and autonomy, universities cannot fulfill their public obligations. Academic staff have no choice but defend their right to undertake critical analysis, publish their findings so the public can decide, and encourage students to question conventional wisdom. Upon these initiatives, the future of universities depend. ■

1. *Eyal Press and Jennifer Washburn*, "The Kept University." *Atlantic Monthly*, March 2000, p.42.

## NANCY OLIVIERI: "YOU CAN'T LEGISLATE INTEGRITY"

If fiction is a gateway to understanding real life, then John Le Carré's most recent novel *The Constant Gardener* is recommended reading. Dr. Nancy Olivieri, a professor of medicine at the University of Toronto, was among the top-notch scientists he spoke to while researching his murder mystery that takes readers on a dark journey through the pharmaceutical jungle, from Africa to the rich world.

An expert on thalassemia, a widespread and serious blood disorder, Olivieri has been at the heart of a swirling controversy since 1996, when she stood up to Apotex, a pharmaceutical company with which she had signed a contract. During clinical trials in the mid-1990s of potential treatment for the blood disorder, she discovered that it could have serious side effects in some patients.

When she approached Apotex with her negative findings, they shrugged the matter off. She turned to the hospital's Research Ethics Board, which reviewed the case and recommended that she draft a revised patient consent form stating the contra-indications. "Seventy-two hours later, Apotex sent me a letter saying 'you're fired. If you say anything, you're sued.' Three days later, they came and swept all the drugs off the hospital's shelves," recalls Olivieri.

Most disturbing is that neither the university nor its reputed affiliated teaching hospital supported her efforts to disclose, calling the case "a scientific debate." She was stripped of her responsibilities as director of the hospital's haemoglobinopathy programme. The conflict of interest turned out to be bla-

tant: the university was expecting a \$20 million donation from Apotex.

"Governments have to understand that pharmaceutical companies are filling a void created by cutbacks in public research money," says Olivieri, asserting that scientists have "zero" margin of manoeuvre. "If you blow the whistle there is nothing to stop the university from firing you. Drug companies can destroy you. And you can't legislate integrity."

The case provoked an international outcry, with the world's leading thalassemia experts travelling to Canada in protest. Under pressure, the hospital announced that it would conduct an external review of its policies. Despite claims by Apotex that Olivieri's study was flawed, the *New England Journal of Medicine* published her findings.

"This is at heart a public health issue, and I have total confidence that the facts stand. The story is not over," says Olivieri. During recent work in Sri Lanka, she spoke with several patients who had never been told about the drug's risks, nor that it was experimental. The drug was licensed in 1999 for specific use in Europe, where Olivieri has brought a legal challenge to the EU's agency charged with approving new drugs. She affirms she'll never sign another contract with a pharmaceutical company although she'll likely remain a whistleblower: she's on a sabbatical in the UK, studying for a masters in law and medical ethics. ■

## 1. THE MONEY GAME

Who calls **the tune?**

A landmark "strategic alliance" clinched by the University of California caused an uproar in the academic world, but for a rising generation of scientists, the deal probably contains what the future will be made of

VICKY ELLIOTT

JOURNALIST BASED IN SAN FRANCISCO

In 1998, the University of California at Berkeley concluded a \$25 million, five-year agreement with the Swiss company Novartis that has come to be regarded as a watershed in the relationship of industry with higher education.

For the first time, the work of an entire university department, not just that of its individual members contracting independently, was to be underwritten by a multinational company, with interests in health care, agribusiness and nutrition.

The corporation, through the Novartis Agricultural Discovery Institute, newly set up in La Jolla, California, was to provide roughly one-third of the budget of the university's Department of Plant and Microbial Biology for five years. In return, the Swiss company won an unprecedented privilege: the first right to negotiate a license to one-third of the patentable discoveries made in any of the department's laboratories.

Was this a sellout or an inspired coup? Industrial sponsorship of academic research was nothing new; by 1998, nine percent of all research at American universities was sponsored by corporations, a total of \$2 billion as compared with the \$13 billion spent by the federal government that year. But where faculty members or research teams had made grant proposals individually for funding to underwrite their work, this agreement appeared to constitute the plundering of public resources by a private corporation.

### Shopping around for optimal conditions

The university's need to reassess its sources of revenue was recognized in 1993, when Chancellor Chang-Ling Tien set up a Biotechnology Planning Board to look into long-term relationships with industry. The idea was to tap into the universities' right to license their inventions, first granted by the Bayh-Dole Act of 1980.

According to Gordon Rausser, an agricultural economist who was dean of the College of Natural Resources during the negotiations, the panel, which brought members of the university together with more than a dozen representatives from private industry, spun its wheels for a few years, failing to attract sponsors. Since the 1960s, federal funding for



Bioengineered crops: a windfall for agricultural faculties?

the agricultural sciences remained essentially flat, while medical and engineering schools have taken an increasing proportion of the spoils nationally.

"The question we faced was: How do you go about positioning yourself to advance your interests?" Rausser says. Rather than go out begging, the university set out what it considered its optimal conditions for a partnership. Several companies expressed interest, some of which wanted to be able to cherry-pick scientists whose work might be ripe for commercial application. Only Novartis was willing to allow the faculty the degree of intellectual freedom it was looking for, or as the agreement puts it, "unrestricted funds to support general, non-targeted research."

In return, the Agricultural Discovery Institute was granted a 30-day review period to take a first look at research coming out of the department before it was published, and a further 90 days to decide whether to request that the university pursue a patent protection on it. Brian Wright, a Berkeley agricultural economist who has worked on intellectual property, points out that the rights to first negotiation under the agreement does not give the company the right to buy, "only the right to pay enough so that the university's willing not to offer it to anybody else." This was hardly giving up the store. ▶

**Suppose that humans want to be free from the meddling of technocrats and commissars, bankers and tycoons...or anyone else who tries to wish freedom and dignity out of existence.**

Noam Chomsky,  
American linguist  
(1928-)

Such distinctions were lost in the furor following the announcement of the agreement, given the climate of public resistance to bioengineered crops. Advocates of ecologically sustainable agriculture in particular were outraged by what they felt to be an institutional endorsement of biotechnology.

Pies were thrown at two of the principals and the Students for Responsible Research coalition denounced the agreement's "narrow focus on profit-oriented and controversial biotechnological research." Berkeley's Academic Senate fiercely debated whether the agreement had been too hurriedly pushed through and how it might compromise academic integrity.

One of the agreement's features that most rankled in Berkeley was that two Novartis representatives would sit on a five-person committee that would decide how to allocate the funds for research every year. But Steven Briggs, who heads the La Jolla Institute, since renamed the Torrey Mesa Research Institute, notes that this provision was included at the request of the faculty, not the company. Rausser argues that it was conceived as a way to gain industry intelligence into whether comparable research might already be under way in the private sector.

### **Funding the unexpected**

According to department chair Andrew Jackson, the two Novartis representatives essentially concurred in the first years of the agreement with decisions reached by the faculty. "I don't feel there's any problem with academic freedom at all," he says. Paradoxically, the Novartis deal gave the faculty leeway to pursue imaginative projects in basic science for which they might not otherwise have been able to secure financing. Little room now remains in the allocation of federal revenue for "funding the unexpected," as one emeritus professor put it. Given the intense competition for funds, a conservatism prevails on the national review boards that favours experiments that are not likely to fail.

The members of the department were at liberty not to take part in the agreement: of 30, one opted out and two abstained on principle. Many faculty members are grateful for the chance to pursue work that federal agencies might not have funded. "This is a godsend," says Loy Volkman, an insect virologist. "We have poor funding from the state, and have to find up to 70 percent elsewhere. And usually, the payer gets to call the tune."

The agreement allows the university unusual freedom in negotiating the patents it would retain. The University of Washington's arrangement with

Monsanto, by comparison, allows the company both to file the patent and to see it through to publication, an abdication of control that Berkeley would never assent to, according to Carol Mimura, of its Office of Technology Licensing.

### **A mousetrap or sign of the times?**

Since the agreement was reached, Syngenta (as this branch of Novartis was renamed) has optioned the rights to seven patent applications, of which four arose from projects funded in part by the La Jolla Institute, and three were solely funded by it.

A younger generation of scientists, aware that their working lives will call upon them to operate both in and out of the ivory tower, appears to have made peace with the deal. "It's a sign of the times," says Michael Goodin, a post-doctoral student. "This is the environment we will be operating in. The only other resource is public funding, and it's not there."

At the annual retreats held by the institute, both faculty and graduate students report that they have been surprised by how freely ideas can be exchanged with outside scientists. Nevertheless, at hearings in California's state capitol last year, Democratic Senator Tom Hayden characterized the agreement as "usurpation of democracy by the biotech industry," and Senator Steven Peace, chairman of the

budget committee, raised the issue of accountability, denouncing the reporting requirements built into the agreement as "a mousetrap that nobody from a distance can ever audit."

An internal university committee was to have filed a report on the agreement halfway through its course; it is unlikely to be completed before the fourth year.

Meanwhile, because Syngenta is in theory free to revoke its funding at a year's notice, the faculty have continued to apply for other funding. The jury is still out on whether Syngenta is likely to have gained much more from the agreement than an observation post from which to keep abreast of the latest developments in a world-class university. With the shrinking of the economy and the company's investment in transgenic crops now in question, it seems unlikely that the agreement will be renewed.

The hopes of generous financing for universities from biotech companies that seemed likely a few years ago now appear misplaced. The Novartis agreement may itself go down as yet another inconclusive "experiment" in the university's history. ■

**Paradoxically,  
the deal gave  
the faculty  
leeway to pursue  
imaginative projects  
in basic science.**

## 1. THE MONEY GAME

# In the name of a **fair trial**

Medical journals play a pivotal role in establishing a drug's safety. To curb the influence of private firms on reporting results, the most prestigious journals are tightening publication guidelines

JEFFREY DRAZEN

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OF THE NEW ENGLAND JOURNAL OF MEDICINE, PROFESSOR OF MEDICINE AT HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL

**C**linical trials are a building block of current medical practice, carried out to show the advantages of a new approach to treatment. But just doing the trial is not enough: scientific rigour requires that it undergo peer review and publication in a medical journal before changes in clinical practice can occur.

Physicians who had no part in the trial closely examine it for potential flaws and provide advice to journal editors. The latter assume that the authors helped design the study, had full access to the data and all relevant information before interpreting the data. Once published, physicians can make informed decisions, confident that the medical journal is providing a full and unbiased appraisal of the treatment.

But recent developments have put this procedure to the test. Two decades ago, trials were done by an alliance between academic investigators and commercial sponsors. Academics were largely responsible for designing trials. The sponsor provided the money and material required to handle the huge volume of data. Manuscripts reporting trial results were jointly written by academic and commercial sponsors; when they were submitted for publication, the major authors were often the academic scientists who had performed key roles in the trial, giving it enhanced credibility.

Much of this has changed. Over the past decade, many academics have moved to industrial posts. As a result, sponsors now have substantial expertise in trial design, performance and data interpretation. Scientists working for industry are more likely to design trials which cast their product in a favourable light. Rather than including academic investigators from the outset, these individuals may be presented with a trial that has already been designed. The sponsor, who often prepares the manuscript for submission to a medical journal, holds, and may limit access to, all the data. The problem is that the sponsor is not dispassionate about trial results.

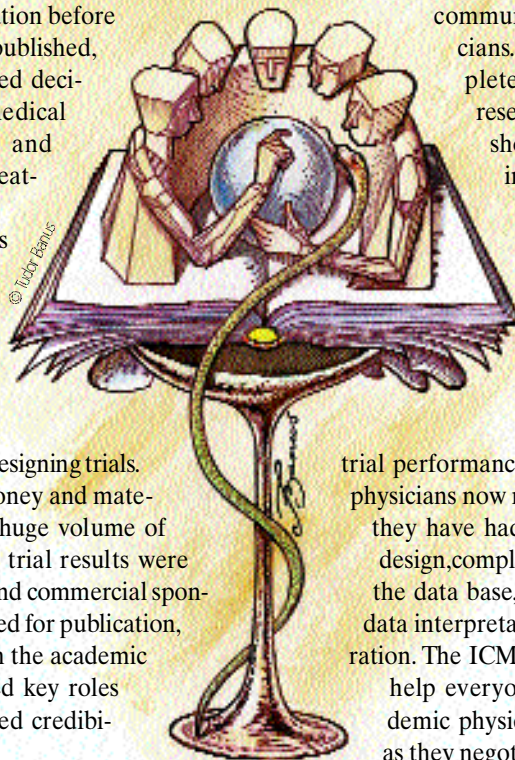
There have been a number of well-publicized cases (see p. 20), where sponsors have suppressed results of clinical trials. What bothered editors the most, however, were related practices that occur much more commonly, but in less egregious fashion. A sponsor may prepare a manuscript in which all the data of importance are not included or in which the unwanted side effects of a new approach to therapy are minimized. Putting an interpretational spin on reported data is not fair to the patients who volunteered for the trials or to the broader

community of patients and physicians. We deserve to get a complete and unbiased report of research results; drug marketing should not be a consideration in preparing a report.

In September 2001, the International Council of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE), an alliance of the editors of 12 general medical journals, adopted new rules concerning the ethics of clinical

trial performance and reporting. Academic physicians now need to give assurances that they have had a meaningful role in trial design, complete and unlimited access to the data base, and an uncensored role in data interpretation and manuscript preparation. The ICMJE believes these rules will help everyone. They will provide academic physicians with needed leverage as they negotiate research contracts with sponsors and will empower them to analyze all the available data fairly. They will aid patients and physicians by providing additional assurances that all the information about a new treatment is provided. They will help commercial sponsors by levelling the playing field.

Medical treatment has been substantially advanced by new medical devices and pharmaceuticals. We want this progress to continue, but we want to be sure that the process of reporting trials is as free as possible from commercial bias; we believe that these new rules will help achieve this end. ■



**The scientist must be free to ask any questions, to doubt any assertion, to seek for any evidence, to correct any errors.**

J. Robert Oppenheimer,  
American physician  
(1904-1967)

## 1. THE MONEY GAME

# Barbed wire in the research field

As patent claims surge and intellectual property rights are tightened, researchers are struggling to safeguard the free movement of information, a key condition for pursuing their work

RENÉ LEFORT

DIRECTOR OF THE UNESCO COURIER

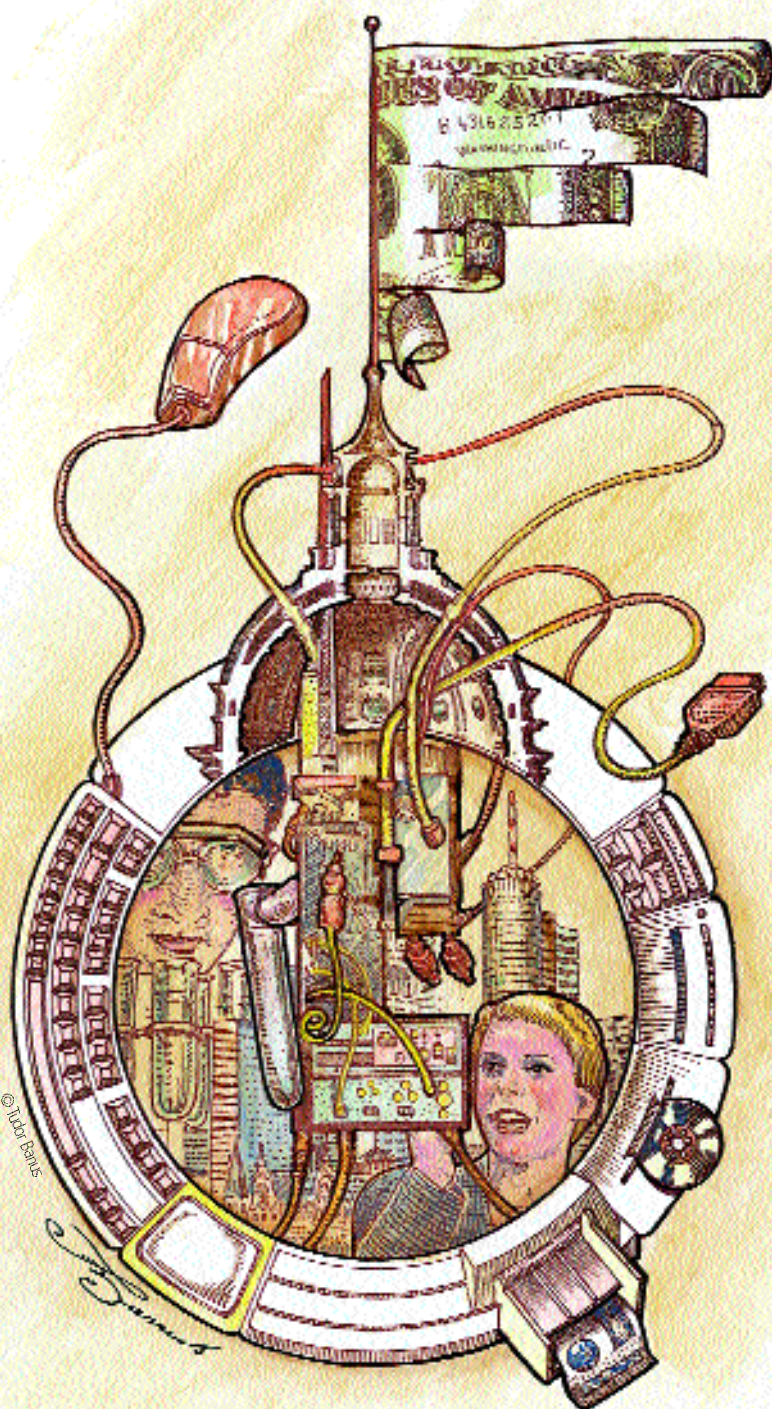
**W**e're said to be living in the knowledge society, but does this mean that knowledge is easier to come by and moving about more freely? Has access to knowledge—a basic academic freedom—improved? Technological strides undoubtedly make for easier access to information. But the movement of knowledge is more than a matter of technology; it is also governed by intellectual property rights, which impose their own limits. What is the “right balance” between private ownership of knowledge and distributing it to the public free of charge?

Many scientists, feeling their freedom is under threat, have taken action. MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), one of the leading university research centres in the United States, recently announced that it is putting all its courses and teaching resources on the web free of charge. Furthermore, over 22,000 scientists from 161 countries have launched a boycott of science publication editors and started campaigning for a “public science library.”

### Legal hurdles

“We really don't see why we should hand our royalties over to a publisher whose goal is first and foremost a lucrative one, when we have done all the work,” says boycott participant Michael Ashburner, a biology professor at Cambridge University in the UK. “These publishing houses set such exorbitant subscription prices that even in rich countries, it's sometimes impossible to gain access to some information. You can imagine where that leaves scientists in developing countries”

In the past few years, technological progress has prompted the U.S. Congress and the European Commission to strengthen intellectual property rights. These reforms gained a global character under the aegis of the World Intellectual Property Rights Organization (WIPO) and the World Trade Organization (WTO), through the TRIPS accords (Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights). Since 1995, any state engaging in trade has had to comply with this new legal order that covers such sensitive matters as the length of time a text can be protected by copyright and possible legal



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exceptions to this (known as “fair use”). By and large, exceptions cover private copy (for personal, non-commercial use only) and quotation rights for scientific, educational and academic purposes.

Under cover of international standardization, the length of time literary or artistic intellectual property can be protected has just been increased from 50 to 70 years after the author’s death. Concretely, this means that less scientific information is freely accessible in the public domain.

Furthermore, computer product manufacturers have developed “technical measures” to fight “piracy” and prevent copying (of software, databases and so on), which keeps users from enjoying their full rights under the principle of fair use. Worse, trying to steer around these “technical measures” could spell legal trouble. Soon, anyone who tries to exercise legitimate copyrights could be prosecuted!

More generally, the scope of information and knowledge that qualifies for protection is on the rise. Biotechnology, the human genome and even stem cells are starting to enter this domain, creating tight restrictions on genetic research. The same goes for “teaching methods” and databases. For a while now, there have even been attempts to protect ideas and algorithms. So far, they have been unsuccessful. Major companies such as British Telecom have filed for patents on hypertext links, others have done the same in the multimedia field. The more patents there are, the more research becomes fragmented and compartmentalized. The end result is that researchers’ freedom is restricted.

The risk is that intellectual property rights become so tight that activities relating to free academic exchange are legally endangered. For example, a Princeton University professor has stopped teaching a course on certain software encoding techniques out of fear that communication companies will take him to court. And an MIT student asked one of his professors to sign a confidentiality agreement before reading his thesis!

Looking at these trends, one can only begin to question the purpose of intellectual property rights. The main one is to guarantee the universal spread of knowledge and inventions, in exchange for protection from the community for a limited time. The desire to balance out the community’s and inventors’ interests is embodied in the protection time limits and the principle of fair use.

The debate is raging between those who advocate longer time limits for protecting works and scientific information, and those who argue that society needs freer, more universal and less expensive access to knowledge. This debate symbolizes the

quest to achieve social acceptability for what has become commonly known as “the knowledge society.”

In an economy of globalized knowledge, the issue is crucial for developing countries, which hold just three percent of the world’s patents. The 1999 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report stated that “tightened intellectual property rights keep developing countries out of the knowledge sector,” adding that the “relentless march of intellectual property rights needs to be stopped and questioned.”

As researchers from the industrialized countries see the results of their work come under tighter protection, their counterparts in the South have less and less access to the scientific information required for developing products geared towards local needs. For example, dependence of poor countries on imported medicine, which is expensive and inaccessible for most of their populations, continues to grow.

On the other hand, Western researchers have free access to the scientific information passed down

from one generation to the next in developing countries. Since patent laws do not recognize traditional and indigenous forms of knowledge, some scientists have leapt at the chance to patent them to their benefit. In 1995, the UNDP reports that two researchers from the University of Mississippi Medical Center were

granted the U.S. patent for using turmeric to heal wounds, an art that has been practiced in India for thousands of years. To get the patent repealed, the claim had to be backed by written evidence—an ancient Sanskrit text!

To fund research in the world’s public interest, some organizations, such as the Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research, suggest taxing patents registered with the WIPO. In 1998, a tax of \$100 per patent would have brought in \$350 million, a sum well above MIT’s annual budget (\$226 million). More generally, the legal framework of intellectual property should spur access to all forms of knowledge, because that is clearly in the general interest. The issue will be on the agenda of the World Information Society Summit, slated for 2003. ■

**“Tightened intellectual  
property rights  
keep developing  
countries out of  
the knowledge sector.”**

**Academies that  
are founded at  
public expense  
are instituted not  
so much to  
cultivate men’s  
natural abilities  
as to restrain  
them.**

Baruch Spinoza,  
Dutch philosopher  
(1632-1677)



[www.unesco.org/webworld/observatory](http://www.unesco.org/webworld/observatory)  
[www.publiclibraryofscience.org](http://www.publiclibraryofscience.org)  
UNDP Human Development Report, 1999.

1. *The WIPO says that between 1980 and 2000 the number of patents granted in the world doubled and requests for patents increased ninefold.*

## 1. THE MONEY GAME

# African scholars: too **poor** to be **free**

The governments of many African countries have eased their pressure on universities but economic interests are now turning up the heat, as market value becomes a yardstick for measuring relevance

**BASED ON AN INTERVIEW WITH EBRIMA SALL**

A GAMBIAN RESEARCHER AT THE SWEDISH-FUNDED NORDIC AFRICA INSTITUTE AND FORMER HEAD OF AN ACADEMIC FREEDOM PROJECT WITH CODESRIA (THE COUNCIL FOR DEVELOPMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RESEARCH IN AFRICA, BASED IN DAKAR, SENEGAL)

**No trace of slavery ought to mix with the studies of the freeborn man. No study, pursued under compulsion, remains rooted in memory.**

Plato,  
Greek philosopher  
(428-348 B.C.)

In many African countries, academics have found that the threats to their freedom have profoundly changed over the past decade. Political pressure has steadily given way to economic constraints.

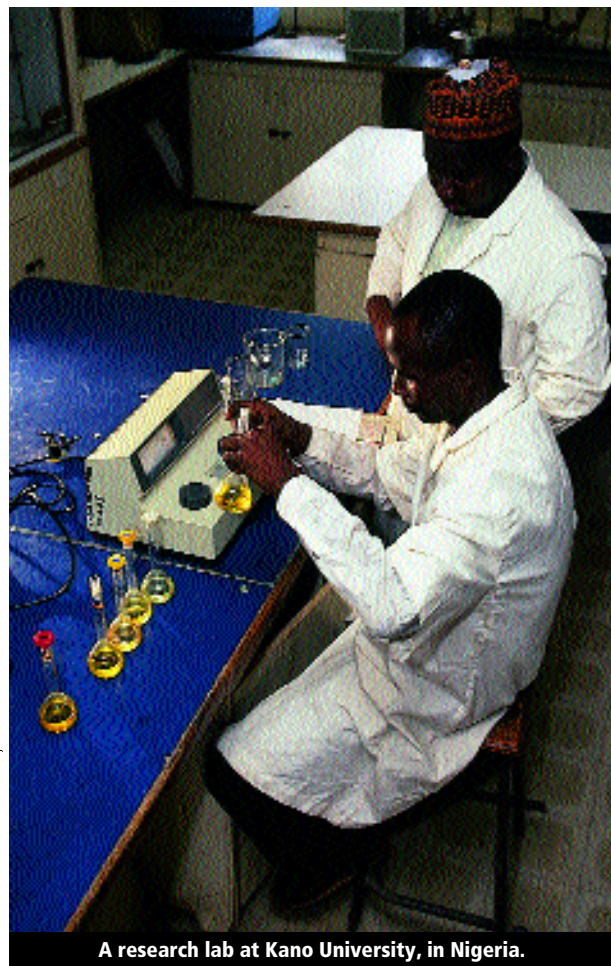
After independence, academic freedom was not a priority for the new states and some even dubbed it a “bourgeois concept.” A university was supposed to serve the nation and its development—by working with the government. This very quickly led to repression of dissent, along with the arrest and imprisonment of many university teachers and students and, under the harshest regimes, even their murder. Universities, which had grown from six in the early 1960s to 120 by the late 1990s (excluding South Africa), became a thorn in the side of the dictatorships.

### When generals take the reins

To dampen these hotbeds of subversion, subjects considered dangerous were simply banned. After 1968 student riots, political science and sociology were forbidden in Rwanda and Senegal. A few years later, law was banned from universities in Mozambique. There was censorship everywhere, especially in Kenya, Malawi and South Africa under the apartheid regime.

More recently, troops occupied the campus of Lumumbashi University (in the former Zaire in 1990), police attacked students in Yopougon (Côte d’Ivoire in 1991), many dissident Hutu and Tutsi university teachers were killed during the 1994 Rwandan genocide, intellectuals were murdered in Algeria and Nigeria’s military rulers liquidated university administrators and replaced them with former generals.

But in the last 10 years or so, African academics have seen their fields of research expand as governments have embarked on the road to democracy. Their lives are at risk now in only a few countries, such as Burundi, and censorship is fading.



A research lab at Kano University, in Nigeria.

Other threats have arisen however. At the end of the 1990s, one out of three countries in sub-Saharan Africa was at war. Many universities were destroyed (see box below on Sierra Leone) or reduced to virtually nothing. Today, the main threat to academic freedom in Africa is economic. Badly paid university teachers often have several other jobs and little time for research. Lack of access to information technology and other means of

research and publishing further marginalize African researchers from the global academic community.

The universities, which have been “sacrificed” over the past 20 years on the altar of structural adjustment programmes, are desperately short of money. There are more and more strikes—often brutally suppressed—and some institutions are trying to work together to meet the new challenges of globalization. One positive development is that in the era of the knowledge economy, international funding agencies, especially the World Bank, recognize that higher education and research can no longer be dismissed as unnecessary “luxuries.”

But universities now have to come up with “productive” results. Applied research now tops the list of budget priorities and research projects are judged on their “market value.” Basic research and the humanities have been sidelined. Universities, traditionally held up as “models,” have become commercially-oriented. Makerere University, in Uganda, and others raise money by selling services. It is true that academics

are paid more in such institutions, their labs have new equipment and their foreign benefactors sometimes protect them from local political pressures. But they end up serving the funding agencies—tailoring their research to these agencies’ objectives and even becoming consultants for their development projects. Sometimes the academics are just left to implement the projects and are

quickly dropped if they try to have a say in how they should be conducted. This happened to a group of Sudanese economists after they protested about an International Labour Organization project.

The market has yet to provide adequate solutions to Africa’s problems. Tanzanian jurist Issa Shivji neatly summed up the plight of African intellectuals a few years ago: “You

know what you can expect from the state and how to resist,” he said. “But you don’t know what the market has in store for you. The state lets you know that it is out to hang you, so you can put up a fight. The market gives you a long rope to hang yourself.” ■

**Universities have been  
sacrificed over  
the past  
twenty years  
on the altar  
of structural  
adjustment programmes**

## SIERRA LEONE: A RESEARCHER ON ALL FRONTS

After an extremely brutal civil war that began in 1991, Sierra Leone is juggling with a shaky peace process. Chris Squire, a thermodynamics professor at the head of the mechanical engineering faculty at Fourah Bay College, explains what academic freedom means in a country at the very bottom of the United Nations Human Development Index.

“I taught in the agriculture faculty at Njala College, 150 kms from the capital, Freetown, until 1995. When the rebels arrived, life became impossible, so we moved to Freetown. But we couldn’t get away from the fighting and lawlessness. A shell destroyed the roof of my mechanics workshop and we were burgled.

“The university—which Fourah Bay and Njala are part of—is now starting to recover. Njala had 2,000 students last year, up from 900 the year before. While I don’t know of any teachers who have not been allowed to publish, I don’t know any who have been able to complete a research project because there’s simply no money or physical resources to be had.

“I earn \$300 a month, paid regularly by the government. But all the teachers know the university can no longer rely on government funding alone. We have to explore other paths.

“My department has 300 students and we’re looking for outside funding. We managed to get some old computers and other equipment from the Food and Health Organization. More importantly, we’re obliged to run some commercial activities to make money. We’ve begun making a limited series of doors and

windows in the workshop and we’re thinking of turning out spare parts and household utensils as well. This small-scale production will also give my students practical experience.

“I’m also part of a social science research team looking into ways to restore peace, funded by Sweden’s Nordic Africa Institute. It might be very remote from my training but it’s a matter of survival—for me, because I want to continue my research, and for Sierra Leone, which has to figure out how to end the fighting. I don’t receive a regular income from this work and I’ll get paid when it’s finished.

“I’m also involved with another project, in association with a Nairobi-based university network with NGO status called Science and Technology Policy Research. I want to see how local farming, health and education can be revived at the local level. The vicious circle of violence in Sierra Leone has deep political, social and institutional roots.

“If we want to really set things right here, we can’t just rely on foreign help. That applies to agricultural production as much as to the future of our institutions, which survive precariously with scant resources. The university is a case in point.” ■

## INDIA: CHECKS IN THE SYSTEM

When India liberalized its economy in 1991, the expertise and research facilities of the country's Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) came to be particularly coveted by multinationals, especially in the drugs and chemicals sector. Grouping 80 percent of the country's national laboratories, the council, which concentrates on industry-oriented research, found itself before new dilemmas.

Already in 1986, a government review advised that the council would have to earn a third of its funding from external and private sources. Today, nearly 70 percent of the council's external earnings (Rs. 2550 million, or \$55 million) comes from the government sector and about 10 percent stems from contractual research for multinationals. The rest comes from Indian industry. As government funding becomes tighter, a new balance is slowly being struck between companies and academic institutions. "Academics are facing increasing competition from the fast-growing consultancy research sector, which is less constrained by traditions of independence and objectivity," observes Anil Agarwal, chairperson of the independent Centre for Science and Environment in New Delhi.

But CSIR's director-general, Dr. Mashelkar, argues that private research—which only involves two percent of the council's scientists and seven labs—does not alter priorities. Critics within the system, however, say that major changes in the research culture are evident in the seven labs concerned, which include the National Chemical Laboratory (NCL) in Pune and the Indian Institute of Chemical Technology (IICT) in Hyderabad. A single project for SmithKline Beecham at IICT, worth \$100,000, is said to have engaged eight PhDs, 12 postgraduates and several technicians for a year. This diversion of high-calibre scientists from serious research to routine testing and data gathering for multinationals is a growing source of concern. The pressure to

earn money has led to a decline in new ideas within the institute, insiders say. The average earning from a contract project today is about Rs 1.9 million (\$42,000) as against Rs 0.5 million (\$11,000) about five years ago. Dr. K. V. Raghavan, director of IICT, however, believes that contract research has exposed its researchers to new drug production methods that could be relevant to India's future needs.

While Dr. Mashelkar acknowledges the future risk of research priorities being overturned by foreign contract research, he says that there are sufficient checks in the system to ensure that it does not dominate a lab's agenda.

In a recent statement, Agarwal called upon institutional heads like Mashelkar to "set up procedures to regulate their public-funded scientists as they promote greater interactions with industry." He points out that a professor at the prestigious Indian Institute of Technology in Delhi recently released a study, funded by the Indian Oil Corporation, claiming that the introduction of CNG (compressed natural gases) would increase pollution levels in the city. The Delhi government has imposed use of CNG in public transport. Agarwal, who has waged a long battle against pollution in the capital, compares research to an iceberg. "The public interest could just be the visible tip, with private interest being the invisible bulk," he warns. ■

R. Ramachandran, senior correspondent, Frontline magazine, India

## LATIN AMERICA: CLOSED DOORS

Like thousands of other researchers throughout Latin America, Gisella Orjeda left her native Peru in 1996. After years of effort and frustration, this distinguished 41-year-old biologist decided exile was the only way to continue the kind of academic career she wanted.

She graduated from Peru's National Agricultural University and received a grant to complete her doctorate at Birmingham University in Britain. Orjeda has been working since last year at France's National Sequencing Centre (Genoscope), where she is doing research on the rice genome. Research in Latin America, she says, is "one big mess," pointing to scant resources, facilities and coordination. Worse still, it has no real objectives.

"In Peru, biologists can't just decide what field they want to work in after graduating. There aren't any research institutes, so scientists have only two choices—working in a university, without resources and sometimes even without a research programme, or joining the International Potato Centre, a Lima-based body that funds research in developing countries. As it groups researchers from around the world, it's very hard to land a job there. This means you end up working in whatever project has a vacancy and not in one that you've chosen."

Orjeda was lucky enough to be accepted by the centre, marking a first step in her international career. Those who cannot get such a prestigious visiting card face a grim reality. Peru, like most Latin American countries, earmarked just 0.25 percent of its GDP for research at last count in 1984, according to

UNESCO. In the United States, the figure is 2.63 percent but this does not include the huge amount of research funded by the private sector.

"That makes all the difference," she says. "There's no privately-funded research in Peru. Big international firms don't come looking for scientists in our countries. Why should they? They prefer to hire people in rich countries who have worked on specific projects and published their work. In Peru, there are barely any scientific journals."

Orjeda can't accept that science is such a low priority in many developing countries. "Putting money into our young minds is the best of all investments, the only alternative to pull us out of underdevelopment," she says. She also deplores the fact that what little the government does spend on research only benefits other countries when the scientists emigrate.

Would she like a big transnational company to pay her to run a research project in Lima? "That would be wonderful," she says. And if they asked her to hand over the rights to the results of her research? "Hardly any scientists anywhere have control over their results," she says. "My contract with Genoscope states clearly that my research belongs to them. To pretend otherwise is just wishful thinking." ■

## 2. POWER TRAPS

# When your university closes down...

Since the 1930s, an organization in the UK has assisted refugee scholars in pursuing their academic careers. Abdul Lazard, a professor from Kabul, is among those who have managed to continue their research

**DONALD MACLEOD**

JOURNALIST FOR THE GUARDIAN NEWSPAPER

**T**hermal engineering is not usually seen as politically dangerous and in normal circumstances, a scientist working on solar powered desalination would be welcome in an arid land like Afghanistan. But circumstances have not been normal in that unhappy country for a long time.

At Kabul University, Professor Abdul Lazard and his colleagues struggled with shortages due to the long civil war and declining numbers of staff and students (a majority of them women in the early 1990s), but they were able to pursue research and teaching. The holder of a Russian masters degree, Lazard held senior positions at the university and had five textbooks and more than 30 published articles to his credit. Kabul University was badly damaged during the factional fighting between mujahedin groups after the fall of the Russian-backed Najibullah government, but it was not until the victory of the Taliban that it was closed completely in 1996.

### Uphill struggle

Lazard's academic work came to an abrupt halt and his wife, Pashtoon, lost her job as a teacher when women were forbidden to work. For his children, especially his four daughters, educational prospects were bleak. He worked for the Red Cross, in charge of distributing food to 40,000 widows and disabled people. But he was arrested, beaten with Kalashnikovs and thrown in prison on suspicion of giving information to anti-Taliban forces. Contacts in the Red Cross got him released, but knowing his life was in danger he fled to Pakistan, where his wife and children followed later.

He arrived in Britain in December 1998, where resuming his academic research proved an uphill struggle. After a frustrating 18-month wait while his application for asylum was approved, he eventually secured a place at South Bank University in London to pursue his research. He was helped financially by the Council for Assisting Refugee Academics, a body founded in 1933 to assist Jewish academics and other victims of the Nazi purges of universities. CARA also

helped to secure visas for his family, whose last members arrived a week before the American bombing of Afghanistan started. Speaking at the launch of the the Network for Education and Academic Rights last June in Paris (see p. 30), Lazard warned that Afghanistan had become a "roundabout of anti-civilization.... Vying to be the world's biggest supplier of opium, a safe-haven for terrorists and religious extremists, a place with massive destruction of human rights, particularly women's rights, Afghanistan poses threats to regional and international peace and stability."

Against this sombre backdrop, his research into desalination techniques has been progressing at South Bank, where he is building an experimental model of a small solar-powered plant. In September, he presented his results to an international conference and has been approached by companies to patent his ideas. "If I get the results that I obtained from mathematical modelling, it will be the most cost effective and most efficient desalination technology in the world," he said.

CARA points out that the payback Britain has enjoyed from helping refugee academics is out of all proportion to the tiny investment: since the 1930s, refugee scholars have included 18 Nobel prizewinners. While the locations of persecution have changed, the problem remains. CARA is now helping more than 30 refugee academics, including an Iraqi paediatrician who helped the Kurdish population, a parasitologist from Somalia and an Ethiopian pathologist who arrived in London with five bullets still in his body.

But the thirst for education is powerful. On her second day in Britain, Lazard's daughter Shogofa was enrolling in college: she intends to become a doctor. ■



Professor Lazard, reunited with his family in London.



For more information on CARA, see:  
[www.academic-refugees.org](http://www.academic-refugees.org)

## 2. POWER TRAPS

# In the **line of fire**

In the name of ethnic purity, religious conviction or even secularism, scholars and their students are targets of oppression in a large swathe of countries. Academics are stepping up efforts to marshal public opinion

**SAM ZIA-ZARIFI**

DIRECTOR OF THE ACADEMIC FREEDOM PROGRAMME AT HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

**A**cademic freedom is a highly sensitive barometer of respect for human rights within a society. Respect for academic freedom indicates acceptance of open debate and protection of differing ideas and groups; its absence fosters a climate of ignorance and intolerance—a perfect breeding ground for extremism. Strong evidence for this proposition comes from Afghanistan, where the Taliban's first actions were to shut down most higher education centres and ban women and girls from attending school. But in less extreme forms, governments around the world justify violations of human rights by casting all critical thought as an attack on public morality, national security, or cultural purity. Naturally, some of the first victims are aca-

demics whose job it is to question all aspects of their own civilization, from its scientific theories to cultural constructs.

Attacks on academic freedom are not limited to the Taliban or to the Islamic world. For instance, academics have recently come under official or public pressure in the United States and Canada for questioning various aspects of their governments' past or projected policies. In the current climate, the right to speak out is of utmost importance, lest American universities return to the dark days of anti-Communist hysteria.

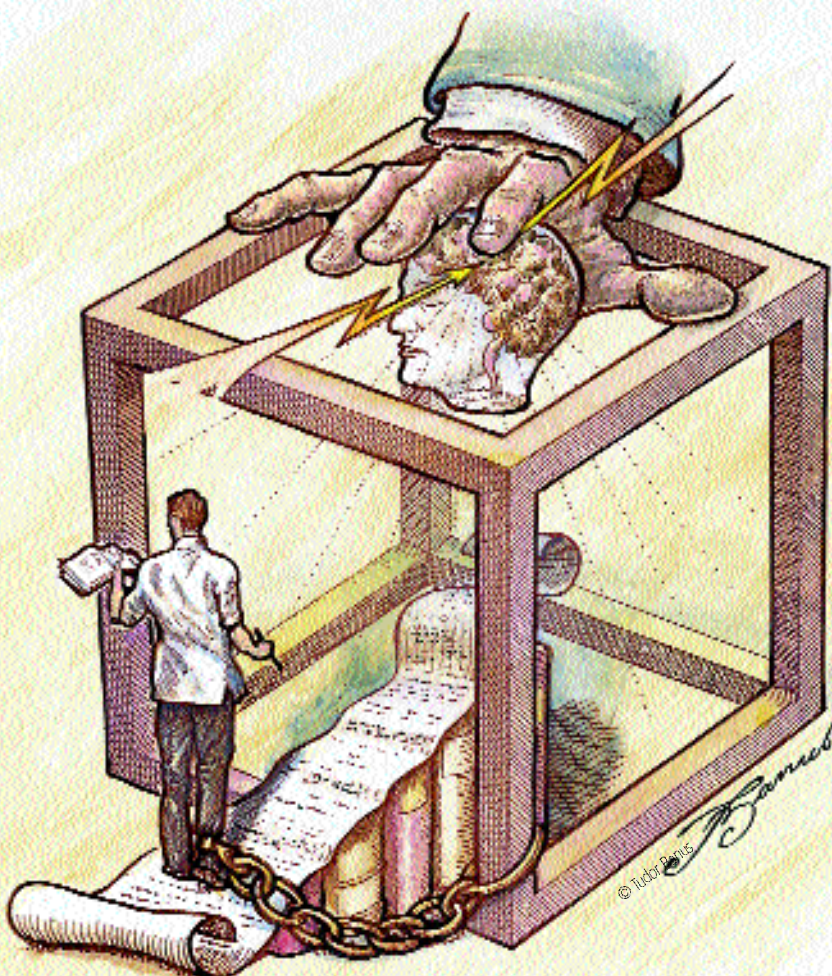
During the Cold War, attacks on academic freedom had an apparent ideological rationale. Each side attacked those thinkers who questioned their society's reigning dogma: dissidents were subjected to witch hunts and intellectual (and physical) exile. In many countries, the response was more violent, though no less predictable. Activist teachers and students were killed, maimed, jailed and silenced in Latin America, Africa, and the Middle East, in China and Korea (North and South), by governments allying themselves with one of the dominant super-powers.

### **Rising pressure**

With the fall of the Berlin Wall, it was expected that human rights—and academic freedom in particular—would improve. The belief was that there would be no need to punish academics in a world seemingly focused on economic development, especially where they were instrumental in creating and fostering the newly emerging notions of financial, intellectual and cultural globalization.

But the end of the Cold War and the advent of easier global communications have placed academics even more directly in the line of fire. Their relatively high level of interaction across borders enables them to judge their societies in comparison with others, and to point out their governments' shortcomings to their students and the public. With another international conflict simmering, the pressure to curb academic freedom is sure to grow.

A variety of new, troubling excuses are now invoked to justify oppression of educators and their students. The politics of ethnic and religious identity



are chief among them, as governments define themselves as protectors of a particular orthodoxy—be it ethnic purity, religious conviction or even secularism—and persecute those who question it.

Academics in predominantly Muslim countries have borne the heaviest burden of this new type of oppression. From Indonesia and Malaysia to Pakistan, throughout Central Asia and the Middle East and all the way to North Africa, scholars and their students face tremendous pressure. These countries fall under three broad categories.

First are those countries where religion is an official part of the governing ideology. In Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran and Saudi Arabia, governments justify attacks against their academic critics on the basis of ostensibly protecting the faith. In Pakistan this year, a professor of hygiene was sentenced to die for questioning whether the Prophet of Islam would have been able to observe proper religious demands before his divine ordination. In Iran, where academics and students have been debating the concordance of their ancient religion and the modern world, scores of scholars (including several clerics and theologians) have been jailed for supposedly insulting religious sensitivities. In these countries, harsh repression is often excused by the supposed threat posed by foreign ideas.

Second, where the governments have officially embraced a “secular,” non-religious ideology, like Turkey and many of the Central Asian republics, even exhibiting piety can lead to official harassment. Invoking a nebulous Islamic threat to their orders, authoritarian governments have maintained their rule by restricting all scholars who criticize it.

Third, in the majority of predominantly Muslim countries, governments have used the supposed tension between Islam and the West to justify years of administrative mismanagement, fiscal corruption, and political repression. Tunisia and Egypt, two countries cast as stalwart allies of the West, tolerate neither religious nor liberal criticism of their governments. Instead, pious scholars are silenced based on the supposed threat they pose to the political order; the officially sanctioned religious establishment is then mollified by government attacks on academics who criticize injustice using the language of liberal democracy.

The politics of ethnic identity have also fuelled attacks on academics. In Yugoslavia, social scientists and historians were called upon to justify the excesses of ethnic rivalry. When this attempt invariably failed, the Milosevic government initiated a purge of Serbian universities. In Indonesia, academics in areas with ethnically distinct populations—such as the restive Aceh province—came under pressure from the government to squelch any discussion of greater local autonomy. In Turkmenistan, the teaching of all foreign

## A GLOBAL WATCHDOG

Launched in June 2001 with seed money from UNESCO, the Network on Education and Academic Rights (NEAR) serves as a clearing-house for information regarding attacks on academic freedom worldwide and also strives to increase contact between groups monitoring such attacks. The network is developing links with civil society at large to marshal opinion against violations of academic freedom. Reports of abuses are posted at [www.nearinternational.org](http://www.nearinternational.org). NEAR will alert those able to take action to protest to governments and international agencies. ■

languages has been banned in the name of fostering Turkmen science.

A troubling new dimension of the limits imposed on scholarship has been the “privatization” of assaults on academic freedom. Militant opposition groups are increasingly willing and able to attack academics who call for reason. In Spain, academics in favour of a peaceful resolution of Basque demands suffer intimidation at the hands of the separatist movement. And in Colombia, both pro-government paramilitary groups and the guerrillas they fight have taken to attacking universities in order to silence their critics.

But there is a significant countervailing trend. In the past few years, academics have been increasingly willing and able to work on behalf of their oppressed

colleagues. All the characteristics that mark scholars and students for persecution—their critical minds, their access to information from inside and outside their own borders—also allow them to defend each other.

The response of the academic community worldwide to China’s arrest earlier this year of several scholars on espionage charges is instruc-

ive. Over 400 China specialists from some 15 countries signed a petition in support of the scholars, calling on the Chinese government to substantiate its charges and to adhere to domestic and international standards of judicial process. The petition was released to the media with the cooperation of several prominent academic groups. The U.S. government interceded with China on behalf of those academics who were American citizens or residents. Three were released soon after they had been convicted by tribunals widely described as falling short of proper judicial standards. While international academic support played a pivotal role, several scholars—the exact number is unknown—languish in detention on vague and unsubstantiated charges.

The international community of scholars can lobby effectively on behalf of persecuted colleagues, but this requires cooperation over time—precisely the support offered by the Human Rights Watch academic freedom programme, and more broadly, the Network on Education and Academic Rights. ■

**The characteristics  
that mark scholars  
and students  
for persecution also  
allow them to defend  
each other.**

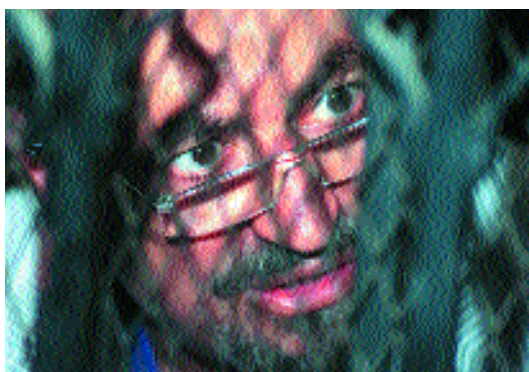
## 2. POWER TRAPS

# No apologies

Since last May, a distinguished Egyptian sociologist has been in prison, allegedly for tarnishing the state's reputation. His case stands as a warning to fellow intellectuals

STEVE NEGUS

JOURNALIST BASED IN CAIRO,  
FORMER EDITOR OF THE CAIRO TIMES



© Amr Nabil/AP/Sipa, Paris

In the heat of the trial.

**There is only one good, knowledge, and one evil, ignorance.**

Socrates,  
Greek philosopher  
(470-399 B.C.)

**W**hen sociologist Saadeddin Ibrahim was sentenced to seven years in prison in May 2001, a round of shock reverberated through Egyptian civil society.

The government has always upheld its right to suppress political Islamists even as they appease social conservatives by cracking down on the heterodox fringe. Ibrahim, 63, did not fit either of these extremes. An internationally respected scholar, his seminal research on the social origins of militant Islamist groups appears to have had a major impact on the government's strategy for fighting them. In the 1990s, the sociologist was given a prime-time TV spot to address the nation on confronting extremism. He had close ties to the first lady, Suzanne Mubarak, and wrote articles in the state-owned press.

Unlike many state-sponsored scholars, however, Ibrahim never tempered his views on the regime. He openly discussed the problems of Egypt's Christian "minority" (the very use of that word violates nationalist taboos because the Egyptian state considers the Copts an integrated part of the nation) and was critical of the Arab world's lack of democracy. One theory attributes his downfall to his coining of the word "Gomlukiya" (Republic) to refer to Arab states where the presidency is handed from father to son.

In May 2000, Ibrahim's Ibn Khaldoun Centre for Development Studies was raided. He and 27 of his colleagues were arrested and eventually charged with "tarnishing the reputation of the state" and "accepting foreign funding without permission" as well as embezzling money from his donors and bribing state television officials. The

investigators showed particular interest in a programme to monitor parliamentary elections scheduled that fall.

Ibrahim was given one final chance. In September 2000, according to one of his lawyers, he was released on the understanding that if he kept quiet, the charges would be dropped. Instead, he continued to speak out about his case and announced that he would continue to monitor the elections. Four days later formal charges were filed against him.

### Uneven support

During the four-month trial that opened in November 2000, the prosecution denounced Ibrahim in speeches laced with flowery rhetoric. "Given its role in the region it is not surprising that Egypt should be the subject of defamation," said chief prosecutor Sameh Seif, "but what is cause for wonder is that it comes from within, from those who share our lives yet leave only harm and pain in their wake." The sociologist was labelled a "swindler" and a "genius at deception," who concocted false reports about Egypt and sold them abroad. The defense argued, among other points, that any number of organizations accepted foreign funding and published reports that could be considered critical of the state. Ibrahim was convicted on three of four counts (he was acquitted of the bribery charge) and sentenced to seven years in prison; six of his co-defendants received two- or five-year sentences, and the 21 others received one-year suspended sentences.

Because of Ibrahim's extensive connections abroad, and his dual Egyptian-American nationality, the Egyptian regime faced a rash of harsh editorials after the conviction. The *Washington Post* asked the U.S. to remember the verdict when Egypt's aid package came up for review. Although some of Ibrahim's fellow academics have rallied to his defense, the majority has not. According to former diplomat and political writer Hussein Amin, "this is mostly due to envy. He is considered the foremost Egyptian intellectual by the West. He's made a lot of money and gets invited to many seminars." Throughout the trial, the local press was more interested in playing up his alleged treason than defending his freedom of expression.

Some of Ibrahim's colleagues expect him to be released this winter. He is reportedly in poor health. The fate of his co-defendants is unsure. For now, Ibrahim's case stands as a warning to fellow academics. According to a joint statement by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, the trial "falls in the context of a number of blows intended to muzzle civil society in Egypt." ■



## 2. POWER TRAPS

Bound by **nostalgia**

In Russia, a new generation of historians is in the making, but society at large does not seem pressed to question the darker moments of the Soviet era. For now, nostalgia holds the high ground

NICK HOLDSWORTH

CONTRIBUTOR TO THE TIMES HIGHER EDUCATION SUPPLEMENT AND SEVERAL BRITISH NEWSPAPERS; AUTHOR OF THE BOOK MOSCOW: THE BEAUTIFUL AND THE DAMNED, LIFE IN RUSSIA IN TRANSITION (ANDRE DEUTSCH, LONDON, 2000).

**R**ussian writer Viktor Astafiev is no stranger to controversy. A war veteran, the 77-year-old Siberian is renowned for his ruthlessly truthful stories about the Great Patriotic War, as World War II is known in Russia.

But when his latest book, *The Jolly Soldier* was published last year, even a writer of the stature of Astafiev, regarded as one of Russia's greatest living authors, was unprepared for the rabid reaction he met. Astafiev, who lives in the Siberian city of Krasnoyarsk, was pilloried in the press and vilified by regional politicians for his uncompromising portrayal of the horrors of the Soviet military. Upsetting some of the holy cows of Russian wartime myth, notably on how the nation united to throw off the fascists with total resolve, Astafiev describes how ill-trained boys were thrown into battle and Red Army soldiers used as cannon fodder. He also dispels the myth that peoples of the Soviet Union were unanimously opposed to the German invaders, instead showing that the latter were initially welcomed as liberators from Stalin's tyranny.

### Return to old habits

Members of the city council, many of whom, like Astafiev are a product of Soviet wartime Communism, voted to scrap a small local pension he was paid. Distressed by the furor, Astafiev, 77, was admitted to hospital with heart trouble. Now back at home, neither he nor his friends in the city will talk about an episode that strikes at the core of a new phenomenon in post-Communist Russia: historical denial.

The Astafiev incident is but one acute example of a growing trend in Russia away from the academic and intellectual openness that accompanied the first flush of freedom after the collapse of the Soviet Union ten years ago.

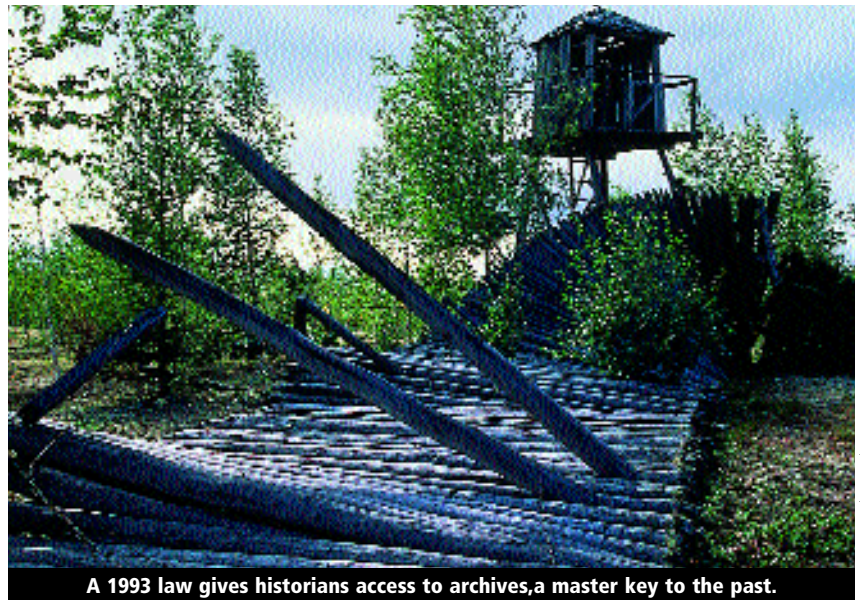
The upheavals that followed the failed coup by Politburo hardliners in August 1991 disrupted all the norms of accepted Soviet-era secrecy. For two years, researchers, both Russian and foreign, had a heyday as archivists opened their doors in the heady atmosphere of freedom. Following the 1993 stand-off between Boris Yeltsin and reactionary political forces, the new power consolidated its position. The process of forming a new Russian state called for a review of

security structures and secrecy rules. As a result, a new law on state secrets was adopted, ruling that the majority of documents must be declassified and made public after 30 years.

While the Russian Academy of Sciences is working with history faculties around the country to develop a new cadre of young historians, researchers now investigating the grim world of the Soviet past report an increasing reluctance of many archivists to allow access to party, secret police and government documents despite the 1993 law.

The retreat from the openness of the early post-Communist years began towards the end of the Yeltsin era. The work of the state body responsible for declassifying secret documents ground to a halt two years ago, and directors of once open and helpful archives have returned to the old Soviet habit of saying "no" to virtually all sensitive requests, academics say.

Nikita Petrov, a reputed scholar and expert on the NKVD (Stalin's secret police), who now works with the Moscow-based human rights organization Memorial, claims that "it is much more difficult to gain access to archives. There is a growth both in the tendency to keep documents secret and to commercialize them—to charge for access" ▶



A 1993 law gives historians access to archives, a master key to the past.

© H. J. Bulgar/Studio X, La Bènéte

Many archivists are from the old guard, and a nostalgia for the past combined with growing use of nationalist symbols to rally an economically and socially troubled country allows them to slip back into their old habits.

Petrov acknowledges that the 1993 law is remarkably democratic and workable, and that Memorial has relied upon the threat of using it to force a number of archives to give access to specific documents. The challenge to academic freedom is not yet a legal one,

through its humanities and scientific foundation, makes grants available to allow for an average \$100 monthly top-up to normal salaries.

“With the exception of a few difficulties accessing some archives or funding sources, we are working now as we always have. In fact, at international conferences our American colleagues are surprised at how fierce and controversial the debates are between Russian researchers on historical issues,” she says.

A move by the Academy of Sciences earlier this year to force all researchers to report contacts with foreigners caused many to fear the re-introduction of Soviet-style controls, but nothing came of it, she said.

Petrov believes the trend to greater secrecy reflects a desire to draw a comforting cloth of nostalgia over current difficulties. “There’s an inner unwillingness to understand the criminal past of the country. Teachers, doctors and other state workers are paid little and struggle to make a living. In these circumstances people often seek mental comfort in the past,” he says. The Astafiev case is a sad illustration of this—someone does not want the truth to be known. But we must take courage from the fact that Astafiev wasn’t imprisoned. Even if his oppressors had this desire, today they can’t do it.”

### Teenage truths

Others are taking courage from what a new generation growing up in Russia is making of the country’s past. Irina Scherbakov, a professor of



A grim reminder of a Soviet gulag in Siberia.

he says, but a social and personal challenge that is often harder to identify and combat. There’s been no change in the law, but the spirit of Russia has shifted in the last couple of years, he suggests.

Petrov’s experience is not shared by all. Natalia Yegorova, deputy director of the Institute of Universal History, which is part of the Russian Academy of Sciences, scotches all talk of curbs to academic freedom, apart from the recurring and thorny issue of poverty-level pay.

“Unfortunately it is true that the state commission for declassifying documents has not been working for the past two years, but access to archives very much depends on which archive you go to. There are different rules in different places. Many archives, including much of the higher (Communist) party archives, are no longer secret.”

Working on Soviet foreign policy and the Cold War, Yegorova says the main forces limiting her work are financial. The Academy of Sciences, however,

history at the Russian Humanitarian University in Moscow, recently organized a nationwide contest through Memorial encouraging schoolchildren between 14 and 18 years old to send in essays and illustrations about Russia in the 20th century. She received over 3,500 contributions: “Children’s entries drew on interviews with their grandparents, Soviet-era documents from archives, family diaries and photographs. Although the sample is not scientific, their responses give confidence for a more frank appraisal of our history,” Scherbakov said. “Many of them treated the past critically. It really gave us a big dose of optimism.”

It’s a bright beacon in an otherwise bleak landscape, Scherbakov concedes: “People do not want to analyze or argue about the Soviet period; they prefer nostalgia. Life today is too hard and many, especially older people, are loathe to face up to their own responsibilities for the part they played during those times.”

# Being on alert

Academics around the world should be engaging much more forcefully in the search for social justice, says Brenda Gourley, vice-chancellor of the University of Natal in South Africa\*

INTERVIEW BY CYNTHIA GUTTMAN

UNESCO COURIER JOURNALIST

**Y**ou often lament the gap between the academic world and pressing social realities.

You certainly feel that in Africa. I'm living at the epicentre of an HIV/AIDS epidemic: the province of KwaZulu Natal has the highest rate of infection in the world. In this context, AIDS becomes a human rights issue. I don't know that universities are engaging enough in addressing such issues on public platforms at a time when social justice is so manifestly not part of our world. Yet it is our social responsibility to do so. Whether you call it academic freedom or university autonomy, academics are a kind of independent estate which should be providing intellectual leadership, all the more so in these very difficult times. Not doing so can only be regarded as an ethical failure. I also worry, however, about a creeping anti-intellectualism that undervalues the reflective impulse in favour of a tough-minded and often short-sighted pragmatism.

**How can the university go about addressing poverty and inequality?**

In the late 1980s, we took the bull by the horns and started a "Strategic Initiatives" dialogue during which we engaged with many different communities in the country by asking how the university could accommodate their concerns and play a role in the transition from apartheid to democracy. This helped us to anticipate and to talk with a wide range of people, some of whom we saw as part of a government-in-waiting.

Take the example of our agricultural faculty. For years it focused on training commercial farmers. Today, it has broadened its focus to include small-scale farming, food security and poverty alleviation, and the faculty has lost none of its standing. There are other issues with which the university should be *intensely* engaging. Law faculties, for example, should be taking the lead in framing AIDS as a human rights issue.

**Fears are often voiced about academic freedom being undermined by economic pressures. Do you experience this in your daily work?**

I have confidence in our ability to draw the line and to walk away from whatever is going to

compromise our integrity. All over the world the public purse is being stretched to accommodate rising numbers of students in higher education. I have spent a large amount of my time trying to secure funding. I put funders on the line just as I put academics on the line. With regard to medical and social research on HIV/AIDS, a field in which we are very active, I appeal to the moral conscience of funders. I remind them we are all living in the midst of one of the greatest catastrophes that has befallen humankind.

**Does the university have to be organized differently to play an effective role in society?**

I argue vigorously for universities to actively try and make their borders more permeable, more porous. We cannot pretend to know everything, or to represent all society's constituents and interests. Yet they are all important to intellectual life and to an understanding of what universities can contribute. Partnerships are essential to this understanding.

**Not only with the corporate world however.**

By no means. We've had remarkable partnerships with community organizations dating back to the apartheid era when we housed 84 NGOs on our campus. This was extremely beneficial for the university: we were exposed to a wide range of social issues, notably demand from NGOs for support in conceiving and managing projects. NGOs are the fastest growing movement in the world and universities are not doing enough to create education for future leaders in this field. To meet demand, we recently created a Centre for Civil Society which focuses on NGO-related study. I've also pushed very hard to get a compulsory community service component integrated into our degree programme. It's a very powerful learning tool but also a very effective way of getting things done on the ground because you can harness so many students to the collective effort.

**Do think there is a need for an international instrument on academic freedom, as has been proposed?**

Yes. We've seen terrible infringements on academic freedom in Africa and elsewhere. If other academics don't speak up about these violations, who will? None of us can be complacent in any way about the dangers of such violations. ■

\* Professor Gourley is also Vice-Chancellor elect of the Open University in the United Kingdom.

**To a degree, academic freedom is a reality today because Socrates practised civil disobedience.**

Martin Luther King, American pastor and civil rights leader (1929-1968)

# Economic rights: the big comeback

Is the economic divide a root cause of the September 11 attacks? For several years, human rights organizations have made the fight against economic injustice a top priority

**PHILIPPE DEMENET**

UNESCO COURIER JOURNALIST

One after the other, the major NGOs campaigning for civil and political rights rallied in the mid-1990s to the banner of "economic rights." Marching behind it was the long-established International Federation of Human Rights Leagues (FIDH) and its 105 national affiliates along with Human Rights Watch and its supporters in the academic community.

Even more remarkably, the emergency medical aid organization Doctors Without Borders, which has 2,000 volunteers worldwide, launched a campaign in 1996 for access to basic medicines. And finally, Amnesty International and its one million members joined this movement last August.

"We have to be consistent and relevant," say these organizations to explain the move. Governments have to be criticized for their failings in health and education policy, transnational companies for their hypocrisy in doing business in places mired in poverty, and international financial institutions for being blind to the social effects of their programmes.

## Beyond the Cold War

Have they been slow in waking up? Economic rights were legally enshrined in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Adopted by the UN General Assembly on December 16, 1966 (along with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights), it came into effect 10 years later and has been signed by 141 countries. Governments are expected to take steps to improve the living standards of their people by ensuring adequate food, clothing and housing, the right to a job,

training and a "fair" wage, the right to join a trade union and go on strike, and the right to health care and education.

For many years, the covenant was hampered by its ambitious reach and by the Cold War. Communist countries hailed its principles, while the West remained primarily interested in civil and political freedoms. Though they were dedicated to defending all human rights, some organizations such as the FIDH in practice focused only on civil rights.

"You have to remember that in the 1970s and 1980s, many dictatorships—communist, Latin American, Asian and

**"It won't be easy. Figuring out the effect of an economic investment on human rights is much harder than working out how it affects the environment."**

African—made defending civil rights an absolute priority for us," says FIDH executive director Antoine Bernard. The resurgence of economic rights was one by-product of the collapse of the Berlin Wall and globalization. With the spread of the market economy, multi-party political systems and technological change, globalization has meant "growing wealth for some, but destitution and despair for many," says Pierre Sané, former secretary-general of Amnesty International,<sup>1</sup> in the organization's 2001 annual report.

Since the expansion of Amnesty's mandate, its researchers and campaign directors have felt more at ease. "Until now, we were calling the famine in Sudan

the result of the forcible movement of people in violation of their civil and political rights," says Amnesty researcher Bénédicte Godériaux. "Now we can look at things in a different way, such as whether people have access to food."

## Avoiding platitudes

But as Bernard points out, "it's easier to fight for an opposition figure's freedom than for a change in a structural adjustment policy." Freedom may be the same indivisible principle the world over, but one cannot necessarily ask for the same level of access to health care or employment in a rich country as in a poor one. "We have to be able to set minimum standards," says Joanne Csete, an expert on HIV/AIDS and children's rights researcher with Human Rights Watch. "That way even the poorest countries can start applying them."

Some campaigners are already overwhelmed by the vast range of economic rights and some enquiry reports read like catalogues of complaint. Last June, Human Rights Watch published a report on Kenyan children affected by AIDS. After a long section on the impact of the epidemic in Africa, the report called on the Kenyan government to ensure that all children of primary school-age attended school. "We're trying to suggest some practical steps to governments," says Csete, who wrote the report, "but maybe we've been over-optimistic in this case."

In an effort to avoid such platitudes, she says, Human Rights Watch has decided to focus on "situations where arbitrary action by governments involves violation of economic and social rights."

Amnesty has vowed to maintain its traditional moral authority by pinpointing individual rights violations, without comment, then following them up with a thorough and impartial investigation.

“We’re going to try to establish if someone’s physical and mental integrity has been violated through a denial of economic rights,” says Salil Tripathi, who runs Amnesty’s economic relations and human rights campaign. “It won’t be easy. Figuring out the effect of an economic investment on human rights is much harder than working out how it affects the environment.”

For example, how do you measure the impact of sealing-off the Palestinian territories on the economic and social rights of their inhabitants? The FIDH has tried to do this. “We noted the tonnage of tomatoes exported from Gaza, before and during the closure,” says Bernard. “Then we compared the figures and calculated how much income the farmers and their families had lost.”

Another difficulty is that with the wider field of action, there are far more potential targets. As well as heads of state, the usual subjects of reports and petitions, there are now international financial institutions and multinational companies.

But these firms, which are private bodies, are in no way bound by UN covenants. “Company bosses are human beings too,” says Amnesty spokesman Kamal Samari. “We can persuade them that making profits doesn’t have to go hand in hand with a lack of morality.”

### Drawing up voluntary conduct codes

Long before Amnesty embraced these extended goals, Sané was a pioneer of the new approach. For four consecutive years, he went to the annual meeting of world economic leaders in Davos (Switzerland) to plead the case for active support of human rights. He also met the heads of oil companies and urged them to draw up voluntary codes of conduct that would help the firms comply with certain moral limits.

Leading human rights organizations have chosen to work with multinational firms rather than enter into a potentially costly confrontation. “We don’t draw up codes of conduct ourselves, but if a firm asks our opinion, we emphasize two

points,” says Tripathi. “That implementation of the code should be verified regularly by an independent outsider—an academic, NGO or firm of auditors—and that the code is applied at all levels of the firm and in all its activities, not just at headquarters.”

Some companies, such as Shell, BP, Levi Strauss or Reebok, have adopted codes themselves. But their behaviour has not always been in line with their promises, as Amnesty discovered in the case of the Canadian oil firm Talisman Energy, which was operating in southern Sudan amid a civil war. In May 2000, an Amnesty report, *The Human Price of Oil*, accused government troops and their militias of “serious human rights violations” in the region of the oilfields, including massacres of civilians and forced displacement of people. The report noted that government troops were in charge of protecting Talisman’s installations.

After this report and others, the company devised a code of conduct, appointed a full-time human rights officer and said it would examine its “corporate ▶



© Rhodri Jones/Panos Pictures, London

In eastern Ecuador: how do you measure the damaging effects of the oil industry on the economic rights of local inhabitants?

social responsibility” in a professionally audited annual report. Amnesty objected to the company’s 2000 report on grounds that it “underplayed the serious violations being perpetrated.”

### Seeking moral approval

Multinational firms, eager to win any kind of good conduct tag, are reaching out to human rights organizations. “They contact us regularly, saying they want our opinion, but they really want to use us to get a stamp of moral approval,” says Bernard.

The most damning resources human rights organizations have for now are “free speech” and exposing an offender to “public disgrace.” Bernard says these are just “symbolic weapons, but they can damage the public reputation of a company or country.”

One result of the campaign has been to force the International Monetary Fund (IMF) into changing its language and priorities. Since 1999, says the assistant

director of the IMF’s European office, Sergio Pereira Leite, “we’ve been stressing that social expenditure, such as health and education, should be maintained in countries whose balance of payments we’re trying to improve. We no longer talk about ‘structural adjustment’ programmes but ‘poverty reduction and growth.’ Now it’s time for us to expand our relationship with human rights organizations.”

Some bodies, such as the FIDH, would like a stronger instrument, such as an “international economic tribunal” where victims, represented by human rights organizations, could lodge complaints against governments and multinational firms for violating their economic rights. The proposal has aroused great hostility, but those who believe economic rights should be a matter of law point to the 1961 European Social Charter adopted by the 41 member-states of the Council of Europe.

A committee of independent experts who monitor the Charter’s application

hears complaints from recognized NGOs. In 1998, Portugal was formally asked to put an end to child labour and in 2001, Greece was criticized for laws that implied a version of forced labour.

“The laws of business should not be considered as being above international agreements on human rights,” says Sylvia Ostry, of Toronto University’s Munk Center for International Studies. “The real test is probably going to be about access to anti-AIDS drugs South Africa and Brazil have already rejected international business rules on intellectual property in the name of the basic human right to good health.” ■

1. *Now UNESCO’s assistant director-general for social and human sciences.*

## César Carrillo\*: “The right to life in Colombia”

### What do you think of the new tendency of many NGOs to include economic rights alongside their demands for civil and political rights?

Many of them hadn’t previously considered us defenders of human rights, but they’re looking at things differently now. In Colombia, trade unionists have fought hardest for civil and political rights, as well as for economic rights. In our country, the priority today is defending the right to life. Our union has organized activities to expose the abuse many communities suffer and to defend the victims. We also campaign against the government’s failure to address human rights violations.

### Many people have been killed in these campaigns.

Trade unionists in today’s Colombia are heroes. More trade unionists are murdered here than in any other country on earth. Figures compiled by the Workers’ Trade Union (USO) show that 10,000 trade union members are directly under threat. Amnesty International listed the murders of 112 trade unionists in Colombia last year and 93 more up to August this year. More than 50 members of the USO alone have been killed in recent years. In my view, this is because criticism of us has been distorted to link us with the guerrillas, making us a target for the paramilitary. And the state doesn’t do enough to protect us against these attacks.

### Do you see any difference between violations of economic rights and human rights?

The most important rights for me are civil and political rights. Mine have been violated because I’m prevented from carrying out my trade union work. Having said that, economic rights are basic ones that enable people to lead a decent life. But, as I say, more important than that is the right to life itself. ■

Interview by Asbel López, UNESCO Courier journalist

\* César Carrillo was head of Colombia’s main oil industry union, the much-persecuted Unión Sindical Obrera (Workers’ Trade Union, USO), from 1988 to 1995. He and 15 colleagues were arrested in 1996, and Carrillo spent 18 months in prison. At the end of 1998, following the murder of his lawyer, Eduardo Umaña Mendoza, he was forced into exile after receiving death threats.



A billboard advertisement in Esfahan for an Iranian movie.

© Getty Images/Paris

# Tune into the “new conscience of Islam”

There is a reformist current in Islam, one that takes a critical approach to its origins. For Moroccan philosopher Abdou Filali-Ansary\*, if Muslims had more room to freely debate issues, religion and politics might no longer be so closely entwined

INTERVIEW BY SOPHIE BOUKHARI

UNESCO COURIER JOURNALIST

Since the 19th century, many Muslim thinkers have sought to “reform” Islamic thought. But their efforts have hardly led to modern Muslim regimes. Why not?

When there’s a crisis, people tend to go back to their roots. In the 19th century, the reform movement was very strong because, with the colonial conquests, modernity suddenly burst into *dar el-islam*, the “house of Islam.” Modernity meant people changing their relationship with both the world and themselves. For the first time, through science, they realized that many things, such as certain weather

patterns or illnesses, were not a matter of fate. The social order no longer seemed impossible to change either. Revolutions could sweep away despots and people could improve their living standards.

From India to North Africa, a great wave of thinkers arose to declare that Islam, in its earliest form, was in fact moving towards this powerful modernity. But Jamal ad-Din al-Afghani in Iran, Mohammed Abduh in Egypt and others didn’t follow the example of Christian reformers, who swept away previous interpretations in order to

look at the scriptures themselves with a fresh eye. These intellectuals regarded the history of the first Muslims as a reference point, on par with the Koran and the *Sunnah* (see glossary p. 41). Their return to the roots of Islam was defensive. They wanted to reassure Muslims, to boost their confidence by telling them that their religion favoured progress.

The most important event in the

\* Editor of the North African book review journal *Prologues* and author of a number of books on Islam.

recent history of Islamic thought came later, in the 1920s, with a schism in the reform movement. On one side was Hassan el-Banna, an Egyptian famous for founding the Muslim Brotherhood, and on the other, Ali Abderraziq, also from Egypt, who was the forerunner of the critical movement within Islam.

Having translated his work, I can say he was the first one to go back to the roots with a critical eye. He emphasized that the basic tenets of Islam, obedience and consultation, are not rules of political organization but moral values. In return for being obeyed, a person with responsibilities—family, business or political—must avoid making decisions alone like a tyrant and take into account the views of those he leads. Abderraziq showed that while the Islamic political order is built by Muslims, there is no religious duty to do so. You can see there's a big difference.

**But the Prophet Mohammed founded an Islamic city that has fuelled the imaginary universe of Muslims. What's more, he was a warrior himself.**

What the Prophet founded at Medina wasn't a political entity. It was a religious community. Mohammed was born in a society where there was no state. The tribes were constantly at war with each other, except for four months of truce every year. He tried to preach in this environment for 10 years but the only followers he drew were the rejected—the slaves, women and minority tribes. So he left for Medina in 622 (in the Hegiran calendar), where he managed to reconcile two enemy tribes and set up the first Muslim community. It was a sort of anti-tribe, which ruled out identifying oneself with a particular clan. You joined it because you wanted to become a Muslim, by simply taking an oath (a profession of faith). But this community was attacked by other tribes and the Prophet had to defend himself and become a warrior.

At the time of his death, Arabia had embraced the new religion and he was planning an expedition to bring the new message to Syria. The circumstances of history made Medina a centre of religious proselytism. But the orders Mohammed left behind were clear: never use force to convert people. **But there is a very violent verse in the**

**Koran which says: "So when the sacred months have passed away then slay the idolaters wherever you find them, and take them captives and besiege them and lie in wait for them in every ambush."**

Yes, that *sura* is very violent indeed. It was revealed to the Prophet in a war situation, when the polytheists were threatening the very survival of the Muslims. Alongside this verse, I'd quote another of the Prophet's commandments: "Beware, respect people, do not rip up trees, burn houses or rape women." This is what drew people to Islam.

**After Mohammed died in 632, the**

has never been written.

**Why not?**

No authority allowed it. In the 20th century, the critical movement continued to be sidelined but it stayed alive. Ali Abderraziq has had many spiritual heirs, such as Mohammed Mahmud Taha in Sudan, who was hanged by Sudanese President Jaafar el-Numeiry in 1985 and whose writings sell tens of thousands of copies. Today you have the Tunisians Mohammed Talbi and Abdelmajid and Mohammed Charfi, and in Pakistan Fazlur Rahman and Abdul Karim Surush in Iran. They all



**This manuscript, kept in Uzbekistan, is the earliest known written version of the Koran. It is on UNESCO's Memory of the World register.**

**Muslim community became a proper state.**

Muslims were immediately divided over this. Those who defended an empire (caliphate) led by a chief "elected" by an assembly, carried the day. The supporters of Ali, who wanted a state run by the Prophet's family, created Shiism. But a third branch is always forgotten. These were the earliest Muslims, such as Malik ibn Nuwaira and Abu Dharr, who said: "We're a religious community, so why set up a state?" They were executed or forced out. Over the centuries, many thinkers who've taken up their ideas have met the same fate. Their history

point out that advocates of the "state" triumphed for historical reasons and based themselves on one of many possible interpretations of the canonical texts. Obviously, these people don't go out and kill....

**But leaving history aside, there are sizeable obstacles to criticism of the Koran, such as its "uncreated," basically divine nature.**

This notion developed much later, three or four centuries after the Prophet's death. It began as a minority view but the theologians who argued for it were so badly persecuted that they won the support of the masses and



so managed to impose it. Even more important is the fact that the famous concept of *sharia*, conceived as a law which is meant to govern every aspect of a believer's life, took shape nearly 200 years after the Prophet's death. This must be stressed because it marked an extremely important break with the past. It was established by Mohammed Ibn Idriss Shafi'i, a brilliant young intellectual born 150 years after the Prophet died. Early Islam only talks about *hudud* (limits and restraints) imposed by God, rather like the commandments not to kill people or seize women. Islamic jurists draw on it in different ways to give laws and customs an ethical basis. But Shafi'i went much further and used the *hudud* in the Koran to come up with rules for every aspect of human behaviour.

**At every stage in Islam's history, it's always the hardliners who win. Why?**

Because very early on, politics seized on religion and subsequent religious debate was always dominated by political considerations and "instrumentalized" for partisan ends.

**Let's talk about this modern fundamentalist branch of Islam born in the early 20th century, at opposite ends of what you call the critical movement. Why has it been so popular?**

Fundamentalism is driven by two major forces that are crushing us like jaws of steel. It's been supported by local regimes and by the new world order dominated by "the West." It's also been used everywhere to combat the left and liberation movements. As Charfi pointed out in his book *Islam and Freedom*, Arab and Muslim regimes didn't just fund movements but drew up education policies aimed at teaching the fundamentalist view of Islam. So the idea of a lasting confrontation has been planted in people's minds.

The younger generations are cut off from universal ideas. Philosophy is no longer taught in Muslim countries or else in such a minor way as to have little effect. The other major force driving fundamentalism has to do with international politics and economic relations between North and South. Since rich countries support despotic regimes, the mosque is the only place

where the local and world economic order can be contested. Add to that what are perceived as attacks from the outside, such as massive Western support for Israel and the bombing of Iraq, Srebrenica (Bosnia) and now Afghanistan. The media also carry a heavy responsibility because they only talk about Islam when there are attacks and pretend not to know that fundamentalists are a minority. All this is setting the scene for a new Hundred Years' War and creating an extreme division between Islam and the West.

**So you agree with Samuel Huntington's ideas on the "clash of civilizations."**

No. Huntington depicted this clash as something almost biological, as if we were all fundamentally different, as if culture was a kind of second nature. In fact, the clash is a historical construction, a product of specific conditions and political choices.

**So you don't see Islam as hostile to democracy and human rights...**

Democracy and human rights are recent victories won by humanity. The values that the fundamentalists and Huntington say are Western are in fact universal. Democracy is like fire or Arabic numerals—the property of humankind. Islam is neither for it nor against it. A Muslim can only be against it if he accepts the historical interpretations of the Koran as "uncreated" and the *sharia*—these fantasies that came later and claimed religion must rule everything. Of course, Westerners were the first to achieve democracy, but they did so in special historical circumstances and they too had violent arguments before doing away with part of their religious heritage.

In Muslim countries, the critical school of thought might have a chance if there were minimal conditions of freedom. Look at the recent history of Iran. In the 1950s, the country was at about the same stage of development as Greece. If the CIA hadn't overthrown Mohammed Mossadegh in favour of the Shah, he would probably have used the country's oil to move towards democracy.

But the Shah suppressed all dissent and accepted U.S. domination. Once again, Muslims were forced back to the roots of their identity in Islam. Even

**GLOSSARY**

**Kharidjism:** A dissident sect founded in 657 and characterized by its rigorism. Has continued as the **Ibadite** sect, represented in Muscat (Oman), Zanzibar (Tanzania), Djerba (Tunisia) and in the Algerian Mzeb.

**Koran:** from the Arabic "reading," "recitation." The sacred book of Islam was revealed by God to the Prophet by the angel Gabriel. It is composed of 114 **suras** divided into verses.

**Sharia:** The sacred law of Islam embracing the entire Islamic way of life.

**Shiism:** A minority branch of Islam dating back to the first decades of the Islamic era. Its followers split from the Sunni mainstream to form the party of Ali, a direct descendant of the Prophet. Today, Shiites are divided into many sects, including the **Duodecimans**, the **Ismailites**, the **Druze**, the **Zaydites** and the **Alawites**.

**Sunnism:** The main branch of Islam, which labels itself as "orthodox." It emphasizes fidelity to the **sunna**—the body of customs and practices based on the Prophet's words and acts. Sunnism is divided into four legal schools: the **Hanafi** (dominant in Syria, Turkey, Central Asia, India and China); the **Maliki** (Maghreb, sub-Saharan Africa and Western Europe); the **Shafii** (Egypt, Iraq, east Africa, southern Arabic peninsula, Indonesia, Malaysia) and the **Hanbali** school (Saudi Arabia).

**Wahabism:** A strictly orthodox Sunni Muslim sect, founded by Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahab (1703-92), who called for a return to the earliest doctrines and practices of the religion. Ibn Saud made it the official doctrine of his kingdom (Saudi Arabia) founded in 1932 with British support. ■

left-wing Iranians eventually supported Khomeini as a way to fight the Shah's dictatorship. Twenty years later, in 1997, more than two-thirds of Iranian voters put their weight behind Mohammed Khatami, a supporter of this critical school of thought that I call "the new conscience of Islam." ■



For an extensive database on Islam, see [www.fondation.org.ma](http://www.fondation.org.ma)

## TUNE INTO THE "NEW CONSCIENCE OF ISLAM"

# One Islam, a mosaic of believers

Allah is one but Islam is a mosaic. The Muslim world is a linguistic tower of Babel, an ethnic patchwork, a geographical puzzle and a political kaleidoscope offering a picture of extraordinary doctrinal diversity

**SLIMANE ZÉGHIDOUR**

JOURNALIST FOR THE FRENCH WEEKLY LA VIE, AUTHOR OF  
DAILY LIFE IN MECCA, PUBLISHED  
IN FRENCH IN 1990 BY HACHETTE

The word Islam derives from the Semitic root *slm*, which means both "peace" and "prosperity." Even much earlier than the Koran, that root could be found in the name Salem, the Canaan deity who became the god of Ur-Salem, the City of Salem, Jerusalem. Names such as Salomon, Salome, Salmanassar (the king of Assyria), and the word *shalom* (a greeting that means "peace" in Hebrew and Aramean) and *salam* in Arabic, also stem from *slm*. For Muslims, "Islam" means

"surrender," entrusting oneself to the will of God. According to the Prophet Mohammed, its basic ethic can be summarized by "worshipping God without associating anything with Him, observing the canonic prayer, paying the mandatory alms, fasting during the month of Ramadan, offering food to the hungry and the greeting of peace to neighbours as well as strangers"

Today Islam refers to both a religion and a civilization, but the faithful would rather use the term *umma* when referring to the Muslim world (the community of the faithful), or the expression *dar el-islam* (the house of Islam).

That spiritual dwelling stretches from Indonesia to Morocco, the Arctic Circle to the Tropic of Cancer. It encompasses 57

states with very different political systems ranging from the medieval emirate to the constitutional republic and everything in between: ultra-conservative, Islamic-Christian, modernist and secular regimes. These countries are divided into allies and enemies of the United States, free-market and socialist economies, rich and poor.

Few people are aware that one in three Muslims lives in countries dominated by other cultures, including Catholicism (France, Belgium), Protestantism (United Kingdom, United States), Orthodox Christianity (Russia, Macedonia), Judaism (Israel), Hinduism (India), Buddhism (Sri Lanka) and Confucianism (China). In all, Mohammed's disciples—Turks, Kurds, Persians,

## PHILIPPE FARGUES\*: THE END OF PATRIARCHY?

A radical change is underway in North Africa and the Middle East: fertility rates may still be just above three children per woman, but they are falling rapidly. In Lebanon, Tunisia and Iran, the rate has already dropped below the reproductive level of 2.1 children per woman. Algeria, Morocco, Libya and Egypt follow close behind.

A major divide no longer separates both shores of the Mediterranean. In Tunis, the figure stands at 1.55 children per woman, the same as in many European cities. Muslim culture can no longer be called an obstacle to modern demographic behaviour. Iran, under an Islamic regime, witnessed the most dramatic change of all—a drop from 6.4 children per woman in 1986 to 2.06 in 1998. In 12 years, the country travelled the distance the West took more than a century to cover.

Special circumstances such as civil conflict, wars, embargoes and the economic crisis have certainly contributed to reducing fertility rates. But the decline has more to do with irreversible worldwide trends—the growth of towns and cities, more children (especially girls) in school and the increase in service sector jobs.

The trend is undermining the patriarchal order that has governed family structures since time immemorial and left its mark on political allegiances. It rests on two pillars—obedience of the younger to the older and of women to men. Lower fertility rates challenge the first: an only child has no younger sibling to watch over.

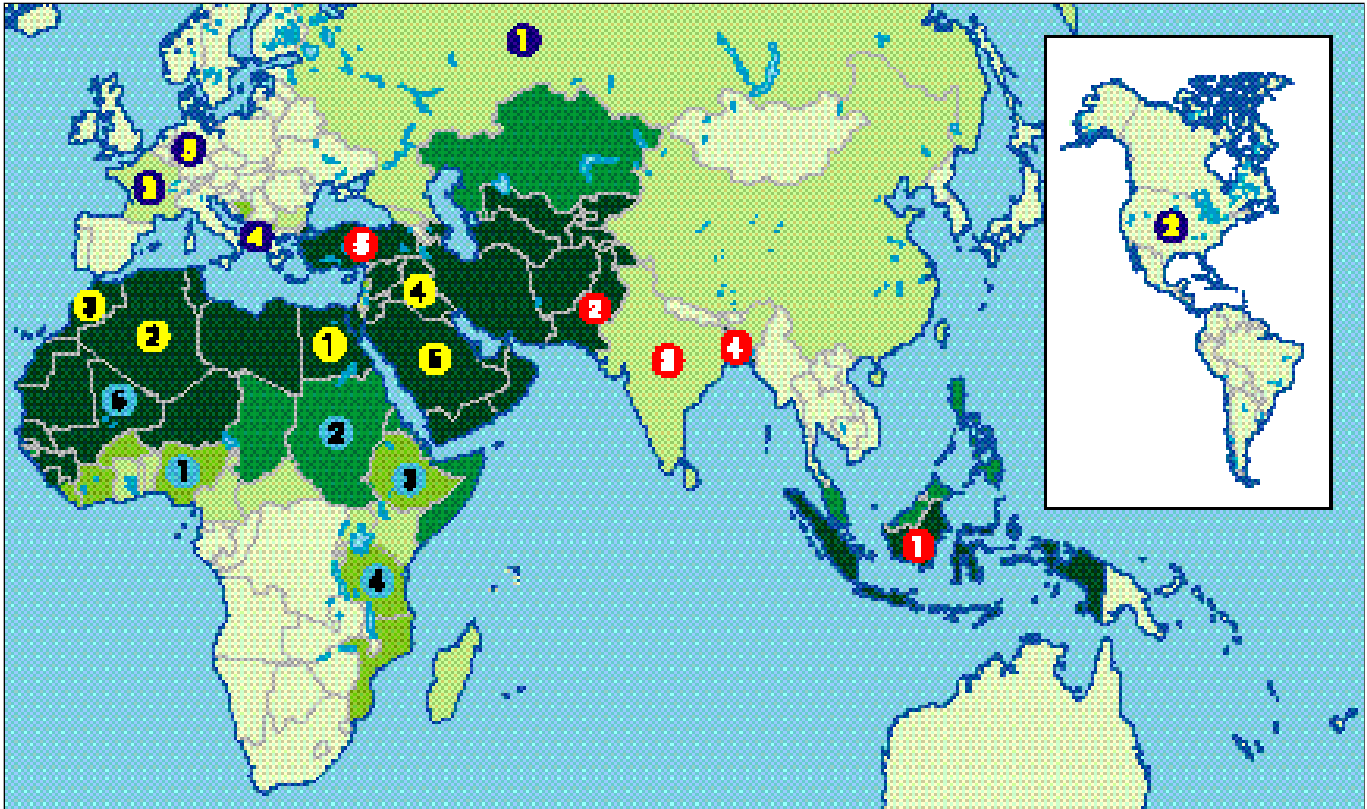
The second, still part of legislation based on the sharia law, is threatened by changes in society. Girls have better access to education and are marrying later. Through work, they're entering a world of men outside their own

family. And there are more single women—something hitherto unknown. The advent of the two-child family does not mean that the days of zero population growth are here. Birth rates were at their height between 1980 and 1990 and their spectacular fall since then will not be felt on the labour market until between 2005 and 2015.

But there is cause for optimism. For a very brief moment in history, 25-year-old adults are in an exceptionally privileged position. They are more numerous than ever to share the burden of caring for their elders. Given their low fertility rates, they can count on their savings and investments going towards improving their living standards, rather than being absorbed by population growth as in the past.

But to convert this theoretical advantage into something concrete, this generation must have a chance to put savings aside, which implies having work. In most countries of the region, tremendous improvements in education and an increase in the number of graduates have fuelled ambitions. But all too often, youth find themselves confronted with unemployment, or forced to opt for jobs that are below their qualifications. ■

\* Senior researcher at the French National Institute for Demographic Research in Paris, author of a recent work on demography in the Arab world.



Percentage of Muslim population by country: 0 to 4% 5 to 24% 25 to 49% 50 to 74% 75 to 100%

	Muslim population (millions)	Muslim population (%)		Muslim population (millions)	Muslim population (%)
<b>Arab World</b>			<b>Asia (not including Arab states)</b>		
1 Egypt	58.6	90	1 Indonesia	182.6	87
2 Algeria	30.5	99	2 Pakistan	134.5	95
3 Morocco	28.8	99	3 Bangladesh	114.1	88
4 Iraq	22	97	4 India	121	12
5 Saudi Arabia	21.3	97	5 Turkey	65	90
<b>Africa (not including Arab states)</b>			<b>Americas / Europe*</b>		
1 Nigeria	53	43	1 Russian Federation	14.6	10
2 Sudan	25.6	72	2 United States	4.1	1.9
3 Ethiopia	21.1	33	3 France	3.2	5.5
4 Tanzania	13.1	37	4 Albania	2.4	70
5 Mali	9.6	90	5 Germany	1.7	2.1

\* According to other sources, the Muslim population in the Russian Federation is between 8.5 and 21 million, in the U.S. between 6 and 7 million, and 4 to 5 million in France.

The five countries with the largest Muslim population in each of the world's main regions.

© Source: Britannica Book of the Year 2001.

Arabs, Malays, Berbers, Slavs, Chinese and Africans—are spread out over a vast area, from the Javanese jungle to the Sahara desert, the Himalayan mountains to the steppes of Central Asia.

The same diversity can be found on the level of doctrine. As Mohammed himself predicted, Islam has split into 73 different persuasions, currents, denominations, confraternities and sects, including Sunnites, Shiites, Kharijis, Zaydis, Alawites, Ahmadis, Alevites, Ibadis, Bohras, Qadianis, Bektashis and Druzes. One in ten believers is Shiite, while the majority

are Sunnite. Although this branch is considered “orthodox,” it is divided into four major legal and theological schools (Hanafi, Shafii, Maliki, Hanbali), each of which dominates one swath of *dar el-islam*. As a result, the *umma* has as many faces as Christianity. There is no single, accepted authority. That accounts for why it is difficult, if not impossible, for a consensus to emerge on any point of faith, dogma or politics.

Islam has no equivalent of the pope nor of the Vatican, but there are several intellectual centres. The Shiite world,

which is limited mostly to Iran, has a veritable clergy led by an ayatollah, the highest “rank” in the religious hierarchy. Sunnite Islam, in contrast, has no hierarchical structure. However, El Azhar, the theological university in Cairo, serves as an intellectual centre for *ulemas* (the doctors of Islamic law) around the world. Nevertheless, El Azhar is a state institution whose rector is appointed by the Egyptian president. In Tehran, Cairo and elsewhere, religion remains very closely linked to political power, when it does not outrightly contest it. ■

# An unseen world: how the media portrays the poor

Following the attacks on the United States, many commentators have pondered the Western public's ignorance of life and issues in the developing world. The author of a major study discusses why this is so, and what can be done

**GREG PHILO**

PROFESSOR OF COMMUNICATIONS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW AND RESEARCH DIRECTOR OF THE GLASGOW UNIVERSITY MEDIA GROUP

For over 30 years, numerous academic studies of how news flows between the developing and the developed world have reached the same conclusion: far from being two-way, news circulates in a deeply uneven and distorted manner. "Not only is there a quantitative imbalance in news flow, with the Third World receiving far more material about the First World than vice versa," says media theorist Annabelle Sreberny, "but the continual coverage of the global centres of the industrial

world contrasts with the intermittent images of the south in crisis."

One frequent criticism has been that news focuses on disasters and conflicts without explaining the complex social and political histories behind them. The role of the West also tends to be ignored—notably when African countries were deployed as pawns in the Cold War.

Major news services such as BBC, ITV, Agence France-Presse and Reuters

have all been accused of offering very limited accounts of the developing world. In the U.S., journalist Mort Rosenblum has attacked the obsession of media controllers with ratings and their promotion of what they see as entertainment rather than reliable information. A study by Steve Askin found that in 1992, the story of hunger in Africa was only deemed suitable for U.S. coverage when it was discovered that elephants were also dying in the drought.

But are TV audiences really this shallow? It is a critical question that very few studies have tackled. One survey in Scandinavia found that press coverage of the developing world was dominated



Not just an "African" issue: a miner in Angola.

by war and conflict, but that readers actually said they wanted more on local culture and “normal” life. In Britain, meanwhile, a major project was recently commissioned by the Government’s Department for International Development out of concern over how TV’s depictions of the developing world could affect public attitudes.\*

A companion study by the Third World and Environment Broadcasting Trust (3WE) interviewed 38 senior broadcasters and programme makers, helping bring to light the assumptions made about reports from poor countries. As the Director of Programmes at Carlton Television in London commented: “I know from past experience that programmes about the developing world don’t bring in the audiences. They’re not about us, and they’re not usually about things we can do anything about.”

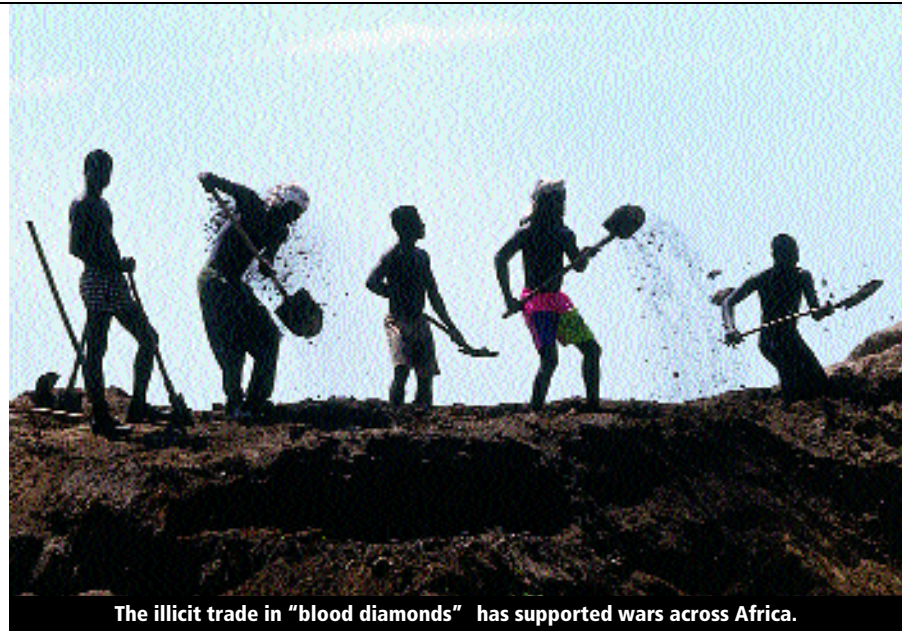
### A negative diet of images

It is not hard to see the effects of such assumptions on coverage. A report for 3WE concluded that the total output of factual programmes on developing countries by the four terrestrial channels in Britain dropped by 50 percent in the 10 years after 1989. Our own study showed that when the developing world is featured on British news, a high proportion of the coverage is related to war, conflict, terrorism and disasters. This is especially so for the main television channels, with over a third of coverage on BBC and Independent Television News (ITN) devoted to such issues.

Much of the remaining coverage is given over either to sport or to visits by westerners. For example, in our sample the Bahamas were in the news because Mick Jagger and Jerry Hall had paid a visit there, and some countries were featured simply because the balloon belonging to Virgin’s boss Richard Branson had floated over them.

One reason for these changes has been the greatly increased competition for audiences following the rise of satellite and cable channels. Combined with the onset of a free market from the 1980s and general television “de-regulation,” this has led to a commercial obsession with grabbing viewers’ attention—a kind of “watch me and buy something culture.”

Yet this is not necessarily what television viewers want. When we actually



© Paul Lowe/NewsWorld/Rephoto, Paris

The illicit trade in “blood diamonds” has supported wars across Africa.

interviewed audience groups, we found that people’s attitudes were rather different from what the broadcasters had assumed. Some people *were* completely “turned off” from the developing world (about 25 percent of the sample), but the reason was in part the constant negative diet of images they were given. As one interviewee put it: “Well every time you turn on the TV or pick up a paper, there’s another (war) starting or there is more poverty or destruction. It is all too much.”

Nearly all the people interviewed recalled negative images since that was largely what they had been exposed to on television. Levels of interest, however, were not nearly so uniform. What actually bothered a majority of viewers was that they simply

did not understand the images they were being shown. As one put it: “I have a constant sense of not being properly informed about background to issues and things like that.”

A frequent complaint was that journalists merely took for granted that the audience knew what the story was about. In the course of this study, we worked very closely with journalists and some confirmed what the viewers were saying. One commented to us that news reporters were effectively told not to focus on explanation, but to go for eye-catching events like fighting, shooting or riots. As

he put it, they had been stopped from doing “explainers”—now it was “all bang, bang stuff.”

As a result of this work, we began to discuss with journalists how TV coverage might be improved. We agreed that we would conduct a new pilot study in which BBC journalists joined a focus group of “ordinary” TV watchers. The purpose was to examine what these viewers understood (or didn’t) from a TV news report, and then to discuss this with the jour-

nalists who had actually made the news item. We also wanted to find out how much the viewers’ understanding of the story affected their level of interest in it. David Shukman from the BBC was one of the journalists present, and we began by watching two news reports that he had

**I asked the group how they thought weapons were paid for... I proceeded to ask them if anyone was wearing a diamond.**

presented on the continuing war in Angola and the terrible effects which land mines had on the local population.

His report contained very distressing images and had a strong impact, producing great sympathy from the viewers. Yet it also had the normal negative effect of being interpreted as one more set of war images from Africa. The viewers’ response was that it was sad, but nothing really to do with them since nothing could be done. The news report had noted that the oil and diamond trades financed the crisis, and that because of corruption within Angola, people in that country

## SORIOUS SAMURA\*: CONTEXT IS THE WATCHWORD

I think that coverage of Africa has mostly been aimed at stereotypes, whereby the Western media go to countries but never take the time to go deep into stories—they just come out with quick-fix stories that fail to explore the context of why and how. With enough context, with enough detail, people will understand Africa is not just a continent of killers, that there are causes and there is conflict much as there is in Kosovo and Chechnya.

When I took the rushes and the script for my film *Cry Freetown* [about the brutal rebel invasion of Freetown in 1999] to broadcasters, everybody looked at the footage and thought it was too shocking for viewers. But my argument to Channel 4, ITN and CNN was that this was reality. It happened. And bear one thing in mind: much as you can say it was graphic, there were children sitting there as it was happening and they didn't have the opportunity to switch off or look away.

In the images I shot of killing, raping and maiming, I wanted to shock the world. Imagine a war that had been going on for eight or nine years, but which nobody in the outside world had heard about because the media failed to report it. So I thought: let's surprise the viewers for a change by explaining the background, then bringing in the graphic pictures. And I think it worked.

But I strongly believe the watchword has to be context. When I saw the news of what happened in the U.S. in September, I never for one minute saw any of those kinds of graphic images, even though 6,000 people died. Perhaps Western viewers have matured to such an extent that it's not necessary to shock them anymore. They will understand, they will imagine those scenes. But in the case of Africa, Western viewers still don't understand, and the reason why they sometimes think we're barbaric is that they see stories and stereotypes told without any context—they think it's



"I wanted to shock the world."

Africa, another flood, another famine and so on.

The first aim in all my stories is to look at how business and partnership in the past between Africa and the West have gone wrong. I try to find something to prick the conscience of Western viewers. In the case of *Cry Freetown*, it was easy to point to the diamond trade between Western mining companies and rebels. My film *Exodus* [about migration from Africa] reminded the West that it had been to Africa in the past, it had raped the land, it had taken without permission. To get the West interested, I try to get the Western taxpayer to understand that their governments and money have been used to create confusion and corruption.

I would also like to tell stories that are positive and work for Africa. My recent documentary about Uganda was an attempt to look for hope, but sadly enough the same issues kept coming back—lack of education, neglect of youth, corruption. This is the reality. It's what I've got to talk about.

In Africa, we don't have the power to use the media to change attitudes or perceptions. We have the expertise, we have committed people who are not in the pockets of politicians, but we don't have the money or resources. If we can get the West to partner us and air those stories, that would help create this kind of change. ■

\* Born and raised in Sierra Leone, Sorious Samura received a UNICEF grant 12 years ago to study film-making in Britain. Since then, his documentaries *Cry Freetown*, *Exodus* and *Walking on Ashes* have been shown on Channel 4 (London) and CNN.

profited from the war. This fitted the viewers' notions that it was basically an "African" problem, because as they saw it, African people were simply not very good at governing themselves.

At this point I intervened in the discussion and introduced some new information. I asked the group where the mines and munitions had come from. The group reasoned that they came from industrialized countries, and that Britain, America and Eastern Europe sold armaments. I then asked how they thought the weapons were paid for. The answer was through the sale of diamonds, oil and by money laundering, all of which had been mentioned in the news item. I drew their attention to suggestions that the City of London was involved in the illicit transfer of large sums of money from Africa (e.g. *London Evening Standard* 20/10/00). I proceeded to ask them if anyone was wearing a diamond.

We eventually did this exercise with three different groups and in each of them there was a very surprised reaction

to this question and great shock at the implication that if they purchased a diamond in Britain, it could be paying for landmines. I then pointed out to them the illicit trade in "blood diamonds" and how this supported wars across Africa. In all of the groups, the new information provoked a very animated discussion and led the viewers to ask why such background was not given on television. The journalists were grilled on this by group members, who believed that the news was being censored, though the journalists denied that this was the case.

### Enlightening viewers

The important point to emerge from this study was that the interest of the viewers in the group increased greatly once they understood the political and economic links underpinning the conflicts witnessed on television. Most crucially, they realized that they were involved themselves and no longer saw the problem as just an "African" issue. If people understand that global political and eco-

nomical relationships are fostering problems, then they can also see that these relationships can be changed. The sense that "nothing can be done" is altered, and audiences start to see the world quite differently.

Our research was significant in that it enabled journalists and academic specialists to work together to improve the quality of news and its capacity to explain. If this collective work is now pursued, it may be possible to develop new structures and practices for reporting on the developing world. ■

\* *The study was undertaken by the Glasgow Media Group and examined both television news content and the reaction of audience groups. A fuller version of the results of the Glasgow Media Group studies is available as "Audience Interest and Understanding of News Programmes," [www.gla.ac.uk/Acad/Sociology/media.html](http://www.gla.ac.uk/Acad/Sociology/media.html).*

# Boris Cyrulnik

## Surviving the trauma of life

Trauma and anxiety are the lot of a growing number of young people, as violence holds sway and traditional notions of the family disintegrate. But there are roads to recovery, says French globetrotting psychologist, Boris Cyrulnik



© L. Montier/Gamma, Paris

**Y**ou must have been quite intrigued by the descriptions of the September 11 terrorists in the media. These young men had fairly balanced childhoods and were quite educated. Yet they turned into violent fanatics. How do you explain that?

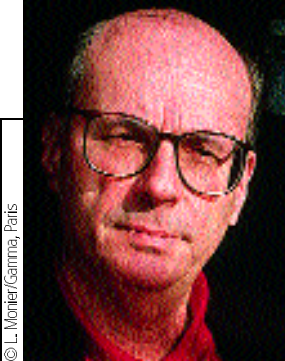
By their total lack of empathy. Germans became Nazis in exactly the same way, by not being able to imagine someone else's world. For them, you had to be blonde, dolichocephalic (having a long head) and not Jewish. All other people were inferior beings. The terrorists in the U.S. attacks had good upbringing and education but they never learned to accept forms of human existence other than their own.

### Why not?

In some Muslim countries, fanaticism is manufactured. Just like in France, where people were taught to hate Germans after the 1870 Franco-German war. Teachers were actually paid to tell children they would be glorified if one day they went off to "smash" the Germans. I've seen the same thing in the Middle East. I've seen books that told little boys that if they died for religion, they'd go straight to heaven to live with Allah. These schools that teach there is only one truth, are schools of hatred.

### But some of the terrorists were children of immigrants who adjusted well in Europe...

These individuals never made it through adolescence into adulthood. There are more and more young people in



© L. Monier/Gamma, Paris

## “When you don’t know who you are, you love it when a dictatorship takes charge”

Europe who fail on that score, about a third of the total, because we don’t know how to help and support them properly. They drift and become perfect targets for sects and extremist movements. When you don’t know who you are, you love it when a dictatorship takes charge of you. The moment you submit to a master, to a single message, you become a fanatic. Many people are also suffering from a growing sense of anxiety over globalization. They feel depersonalized and disconnected from their feelings. Disturbed people feel secure obeying someone who tells them what to do. Submission is a good way for them to get rid of their anxiety.

**So you don’t think economic globalization induces a kind of “collective global subconscious” that helps us to come to grips with all the ideas and information coming at us from all sides?**

No. On the contrary, if I want to see the world, I have to accept that I won’t understand everything. Identity is like speech. When a baby is born, it has the capacity to make several thousand different sounds. But to speak, it has to whittle them down to between 100 and 300, according to the language. The same principle applies to forging an identity. I must give up a thousand elements or dimensions which cannot be integrated into the person I want to be. Today, with globalization, a lot of people are looking to their roots to “whittle themselves down” in order to forge an identity.

**So people return to their roots because the Western “model” is spreading too fast?**

Some people are fanatically seeking refuge in their roots. But this approach leads to alienation. Since it’s the West that has the weapons, the money and the technology, there’s a very good chance Western attitudes will become globalized and spread across the world. Either you unhappily submit to this trend or your hatred of the West increases, which is what is

happening today. Imaginary identities, many hundreds or even thousands of years old, will continue to resurface. It’s as if the only choice is between “de-identification” and alienation.

**Is there a compromise solution?**

Yes. To avoid feeling alienated, people must recognize that an identity is like a patchwork of different elements. All identities are the product of a father’s and mother’s past and of a religion everyone interprets according to their cultural surroundings. In France, for example, Bretons are very proud of the painted crockery made in Quimper but not many know that the style was invented by an Italian who emigrated to Brittany a century ago.

**You’ve talked about the serious problems of today’s teenagers, who are “drifting” more and more. Yet children have never been better understood by society than today, so why are so many youngsters becoming neurotic, committing suicide and taking to crime?**

That isn’t a contradiction. Progress always has a price. The price of freedom is anxiety. Today children get help to develop

their personalities and become aware of all kinds of things. They’re more intelligent and more lively, but also more worried. We look after them very well when they’re young and then we abandon them as soon as they’re teenagers. Society doesn’t take over where parents leave off. So a third of all teenagers fall apart, usually after leaving high school. To avoid that, we need more social and cultural structures that will help them give meaning to their lives by encouraging them to be creative, to speak openly, to reach out to each other. But we don’t do that.

A teenager’s problem lies in the question: “What am I going to do about what I’ve been made into?” To answer that, they must be surrounded by the warmth of feeling that comes from a group, from friends, from the confidence of being able to find a job. But the technological revolution has been so massive that schools now have a monopoly on social selection—they determine the possibilities open to an individual. If a boy or girl blossoms, they do well in school and learn a skill. They’ll be among the two-thirds of teenagers who benefit from the improved facilities and support available in early

## THE UNCLASSIFIABLE CYRULNIK

**B**oris Cyrulnik is, beyond a doubt, resilient. Despite a war-wracked childhood and the deportation of his parents, he still managed to become a distinguished scholar and well-balanced individual: happy with his family, respected by his peers and famous for his many books.

Born in Bordeaux, France, in 1937, Cyrulnik only refers to his personal wounds in “third person,” while writing about children. Clearly, this is a man who has learned to transform weakness into strength. “I was never put on the ‘conveyor belt’ of life—I’ve always made my own path,” he says. “I do only what is absolutely required to be considered ‘normal.’”

Instead of distancing himself from people, his personal trauma drove him to try to understand what it means to be human. After studying medicine, he followed diverse branches of psychology, such as neuropsychiatry and psychoanalysis, before breaking the sacrosanct barriers between academic disciplines. Yet by moving into fields like ethology (which focuses on animal behaviour), the maverick scholar made considerable enemies in the scientific community.

This anti-specialist, globetrotter and incurably curious academic has never hesitated to question some of the dogma of psychoanalysis. While Freud holds guilt responsible for neurosis and social discontent, Cyrulnik feels that there is a “good” kind of guilt, through which “we try to avoid causing harm because we can empathize with others. This is probably the basis of morality.” ■







## "In most cultures, victims are regarded as guilty of something"

appendage of a man. There was order in every facet of life. Individuals—just about all women and most men—were psychologically crushed. Only a minority, about two percent of the population, was able to develop healthily. And so they married to pass on their property and other goods. But this version of a traditional family wasn't very common at the time because most workers didn't get married, since they had no property to pass on.

That society has disappeared and there are fewer and fewer traditional families, but the model is still in people's minds. And the laws are only just starting to change. When there's just one concept around, it takes a long while for people to change their attitudes. You have to wage "a war of words," writing and debating, to drive things forward. You can invent a thousand different variations of the family as long as children still have a place where they're protected, where there's love and growth and where some things, like incest are absolutely forbidden, while other rules can be negotiated.

**The idea of resilience you discuss in your**

**recent books<sup>1</sup> is becoming very popular. Why?**

Epidemiological research by the World Health Organization shows that one out of two people has been or will be seriously traumatized at some time during their life (by war, violence, rape, cruelty, incest, etc.). One in four will experience at least two serious traumas. The rest are also bound to fall on some hard times. Yet the notion of resilience, which is a person's ability to grow in the face of terrible problems, had not been scientifically studied until recently. Today, it's all the rage in many countries. In Latin America, they have resilience institutes, in Holland and Germany they have resilience universities. In the United States, you hear the word all the time. The World Trade Center towers have even been nicknamed "the twin resilient towers" by those who want to rebuild them.

**So why wasn't this idea investigated earlier?**

Because for a long time people have despised victims. In most cultures, they're regarded as guilty of something. A woman who's been raped, for example, is often condemned as much as her attacker because "she must have provoked him," it is said. Sometimes a victim is punished even more than an aggressor is. Not so

long ago in Europe, an unmarried woman who had a baby was thrown out on the street while the father risked virtually nothing.

This disdain or hatred has also been directed against the survivors of war. The families and villages of these victims are suspicious and say: "He's coming home. That means he must have hidden somewhere or collaborated with the enemy." After the Second World War, the most deadly in human history, things swung to the other extreme. The victims became heroes. By pushing these individuals into making careers as victims, societies found a convenient way of downplaying the crimes of the Nazis. The fact that these victims survived was used to downplay the savagery.

At the time, René Spitz and Anna Freud<sup>2</sup> described children whose parents had been killed in the wartime bombing of London. They were all profoundly impaired and shut-off people, suicidal and unable to relax their bodies. When Spitz and Freud saw them again a few years later, they were amazed at how well they'd recovered and wrote that these abandoned children had gone through four stages: protest, despair, indifference—all students learned about those three—and then recovery, which nobody was interested in stu-

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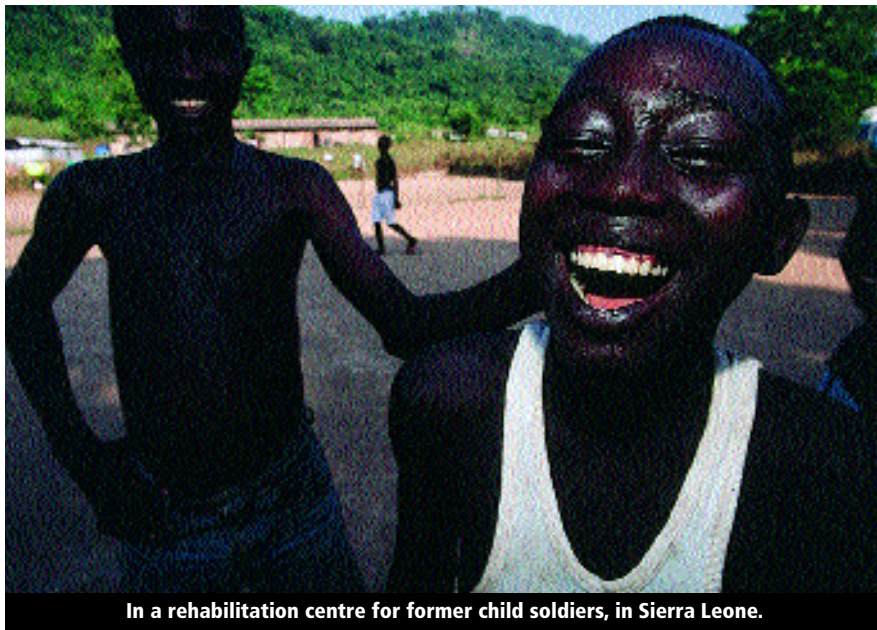
dying.

### How did resilience become accepted among psychologists?

The word, which comes from the Latin "resalire" (to jump up again), appeared in the English language and passed into psychological parlance in the 1960s thanks to an American psychologist, Emmy Werner. She had gone to Hawaii to assess the development of children who had no family, didn't go to school, lived in great poverty and were exposed to disease and violence. She followed them for 30 years and found that in the end, a third had learned how to read and write, acquired a

If you give them a chance to make up for lost time and to express themselves, nearly all—90 to 95 per cent—become resilient. They have to be given a chance to be creative, to test and prove themselves as kids, through things like joining the scouts, studying for an exam, organizing a trip and learning to be useful. Problem youngsters feel humiliated when they're given something, especially if there's a lecture along with it. But they regain their balance when asked to give something themselves.

When they grow up, such children are drawn to selfless professions. They want others to learn from what they've gone through. They often become teachers,



In a rehabilitation centre for former child soldiers, in Sierra Leone.

skill and started a family. Two-thirds of them were still in a bad way. But if people were just machines, all of them would have failed.

### What's a typical resilient child like, socially and culturally?

There is no typical profile. But a traumatized child can still be resilient if she or he has acquired a gut or primitive confidence in the first year of life. Such children take the attitude that "I've been loved therefore I'm worth loving, so I live in hope of meeting someone who'll help me resume my development." These children feel a lot of grief but still relate to other people, give them gifts of food and look for an adult they can turn into one of their parents. Then they give themselves a narrative identity – "I'm the one who was... sent to the camps, raped, forced to become a child soldier" and so on.

social workers, psychiatrists or psychologists. Having been problem children themselves helps them to identify with and respect those who have been psychologically hurt. ■

### INTERVIEW BY SOPHIE BOUKHARI

UNESCO COURIER JOURNALIST

1. *Boris Cyrulnik is the author of over a dozen works. The Dawn of Meaning was published by McGraw-Hill in 1992.*
2. *Both are psychoanalysts, one American (1887-1974) and the other the daughter of Sigmund Freud (1895-1982).*

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