the Courier UNESCO

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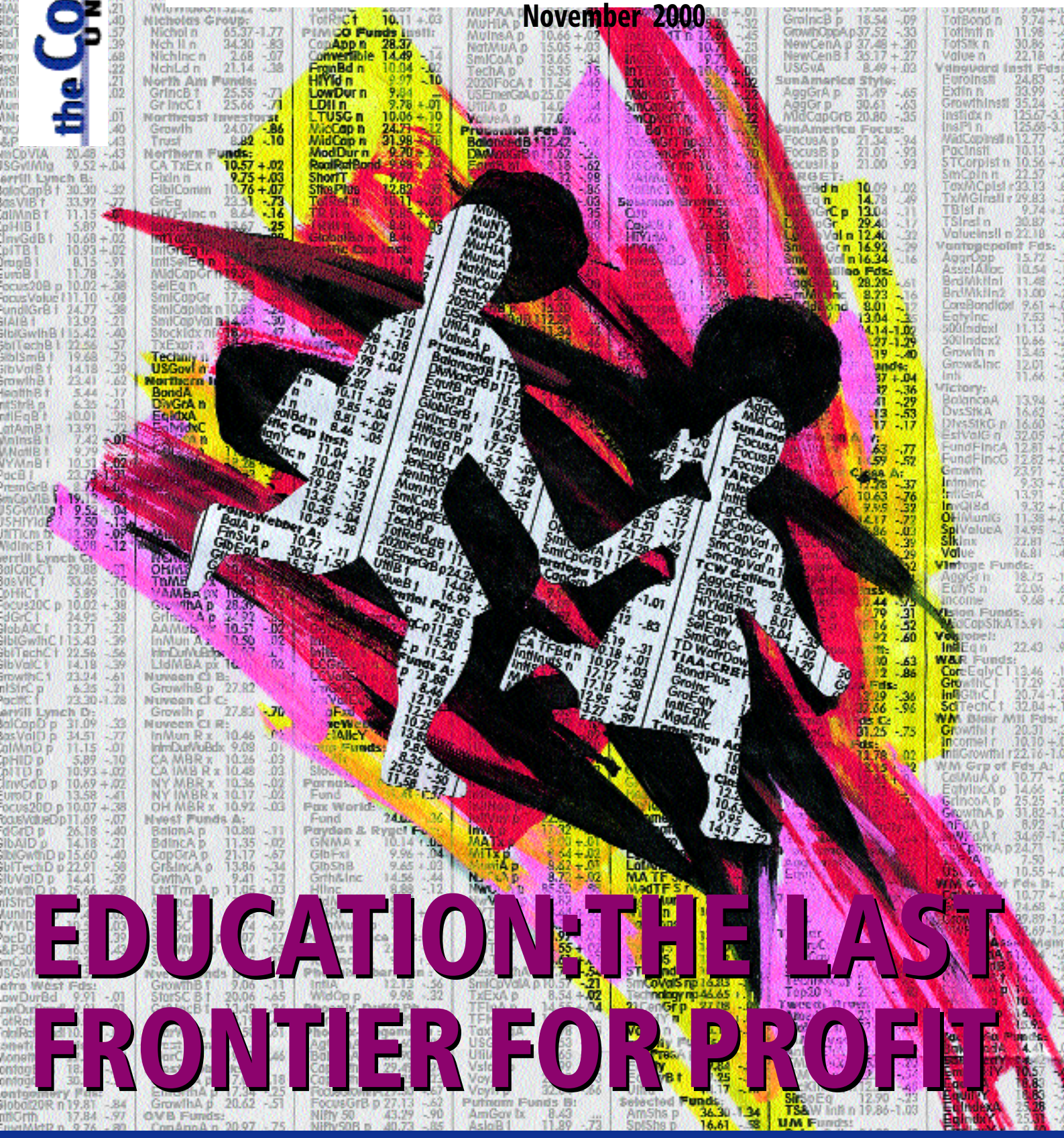

EDUCATION: THE LAST FRONTIER FOR PROFIT

Brazil turns its back on the Amazon trade

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TV: all eyes on the reality game

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© Cover by Alain Le Quernec, France

Focus

Education: the last frontier for profit

Representing a two trillion dollar budget worldwide, education is one of the last domains to remain largely in public hands. Riding on a neo-liberal tide, mounting discontent with public schools and the Internet's spread, the corporate world is putting its stamp on education. The United States is at the helm of this wave of privatization, now spreading across the globe. But is everyone profiting from this

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Shopping he

Menswear in Bloomington,Minnesota (United States).

aven

PHOTOS BY MARCO PESARESI,TEXT BY VICENTE VERDÚ

MARCO PESARESI ISAN ITALIAN PHOTOGRAPHER.
VICENTE VERDU IS A SPANISHJOURNALISTANDWRITER , ANDWINNER
OFTHE ANAGRAMA ESSAY PRIZE IN 1996

They are the ultimate entertainment destinations: walled kingdoms outside space and time
where the weary can give free rein to the pleasure principle and consume in a holiday spirit

© Marco Pesaresi, Agenzia Contrasto.

Like a cosmos where the light never dims, shopping malls play multiple roles in modern-day culture: that of a Godless paradise, of a timeless space, of an absolute getaway without landmarks. The shopping mall is an entertainment venue, and its greatest achievement lies in cultivating the fantasy that one has stopped existing in some way without ever really dying. With its background music, controlled climate and round-the-clock operations, the polished halls of a mall stand as a metaphor for a happy trip to nowhere in particular—a perfect holiday.

In contrast to the places where people work, the shopping mall acts as an oasis where the world of holidays is in incessant rebirth and regeneration, as an enclosed space where time never acquires a restrictive dimension, where sensations obey the calls of seduction, availability, flattery and reward instead of duty and penance. Streets in shopping malls are circuits turned towards providing entertainment or pleasure, just as holidays, at least in their intent. The world's largest mall—Canada's West Edmonton in the western province of Alberta—covers a space equivalent to 100 football pitches, and according to Jeremy Rifkin, author of *The Age of Access*, contains the largest indoor amusement park in the world, the largest indoor waterpark, a golf course, 800 shops, 11 department stores, 110 restaurants, an ice-skating rink, 13 nightclubs and 20 cinemas.

The plans for the planet's very first mall were drawn up in 1924 by J. C. Nichols in Kansas City, and the centre that resulted, with its Mediterranean architecture, tiled fountains and cast-iron balconies, became the prototype for those built after World War II. All shopping malls currently boast similar fountains, waterfalls, tropical plants, ocean blue patios, marble ▶

The shopping mall acts as an oasis where the world of holidays is in incessant rebirth and regeneration

Shopping heaven

Gadgets. Bloomington, Minnesota.

sightlines and the latest pop tunes. This host of links between the holiday and the shopping centre helps alleviate the distress caused by regimented time.

There are no clocks in shopping centres, and no impatience over wasting valuable time. In contrast to nature's boundless space, the mall offers an illuminated cavern that has neither beginning nor end, but is shaped like a Moebius strip. Within it, time is shattered, and what is left in place is space made fun.

The average American, according to sociologist William Kowinski, author of the *The Malling of America*, visits a shopping mall every ten days, and spends over an hour and a quarter there on each occasion; the most frequently given reason for this pilgrimage is a desire for "entertainment." Indeed the shopping malls of the future have been billed as entertainment centres in which people will be able to shed the burden of their own selves. Minnesota's Mall of America, which until just recently was the largest in the world, is visited by over 45 million people each year, among them package tourists from Australia. The place has become a kind of sacred site of the sort discussed by the late Romanian philosopher Mircea Eliade. It has the same power of attraction as Mecca or the Vatican, where one has to go at least once in a lifetime.

Working is the mundane side of life, but being a consumer is potentially its most poetic or symbolic pay-off. While the average worker is asked to be realistic and pragmatic, consumption can stimulate every possible dream, even the dream of salvation in the form of liberation from the constraints of space and time.

Nothing seems to threaten this walled kingdom protected by security guards and watched over by increasing numbers of closed circuit cameras. Sociologist Peter Hemingway has argued that the mission of mall architects and designers consists in providing a sugared dream, where one can buy, play and experience without ever having to go outside—where one can change experience like one switches television channels, using the credit card as the all-powerful *Open Sesame*.

Loudspeakers, closed circuit cameras, video recorders and monitors are integral parts of a system that is aimed at the production of a totally autonomous universe. Inside the mall's walls, it can be spring even if snow is falling on the streets outside, or autumn though it is baking hot under the summer sun. Weather has no real meaning,

Working is the mundane side of life, but being a consumer is potentially its most poetic or symbolic pay-off

and is only a pretext for a change in fashion. Different segments of the mall can resemble Thailand, the Tyrol, China or Canada, since its inner space has been transformed into a dolled-up universe, just like paradise. In Scottsdale, Arizona, the Borgata reproduces the Tuscan village of San Gimignano in the middle of the desert, while Olde Mistic Village in Connecticut is a carbon copy of the main street in a New England town from around the start of the 17th century. The vogue for copying, a key trait of global society, has forged an alliance with the shopping mall in its bid to make places and dates vanish. In the inaugural ceremony for West Edmonton, one of the centre's creators, Nader Ghermezion, declared that people would no longer have to "go to New York, Paris, Disneyland or Hawaii. We can offer you all that here!"

Assembled under one roof, built to copy the best of all worlds, with a selection of the best the globe can offer. Whereas any given shop in a city has had to choose its urban location in accordance with historical and geographical dictates, the shopping mall is free from any such demographic tradition—indeed it is free from history entirely. The main criterion for a mall's location is simple: how fast people can get there. ▶

Father and son. Bloomington, Minnesota.

Big or small? A shopper ponders in the Gum, Moscow (Russia).

Shopping heaven

Sweet and sour. Taipei (Taiwan).

A quiet moment in the Forum des Halles, Paris (France).

© Marco Pesaresi, Agenzia Contrasto.

The mall is constantly changing its appearance, anchoring itself to an evolving present in a magical process

All the fun of the fair. The Gum,Moscow.

The mall is constantly changing its appearance, anchoring itself to an evolving present in a magical process that eludes all threat of death. Freed from the pull of gravity, the mall is now society's most revered safety valve, with such importance as a social and political symbol that terrorists intent on disrupting normal life choose it as a prime target. By planting a bomb in a mall, they attack the contemporary vision of dreamland. In this "spaceship," the city's most benevolent and leisurely impulses are now distilled. The world of work, illness and repression has been extracted; all that remains is soft-flowing leisure and purchasing power.

Independent, beyond the pull of gravity, open all hours, without prisons, sweet-smelling, tropical and radiant,the shopping mall is a parody of utopia. Mornings are the same as afternoons, Sundays as Mondays, China as Argentina, Rome as New York; potential purchases are in abundance, changing only to match the spiral of constant progress and advertising themselves as the best items going. Faced with this spectacle, the visitor is invited to partake of the profusion as if he or she were on holiday and about to dive into the sea.Buying becomes like dipping in the ocean—disappearing, forgetting oneself and everything else. All becomes one in the newest passion of the day. ■

Brazil turns its back on the Amazon trade

For the first time, the Brazilian public has joined the ecological campaign to save the rainforest

BY DIANA ALVES

BRAZILIAN JOURNALIST SPECIALIZING IN THE ENVIRONMENT

Brazil's ecologists and rural landowners will remember 2000 as the year of confrontation. Both wanted to decide the future of the world's biggest biological reserve. A mass petition, protest demonstrations and a torrent of 20,000 e-mail messages supported the country's non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and blocked an amendment to the national forestry regulations that would have increased by a quarter the number of trees that could be legally felled in the Amazon region, which lost an estimated 532,000 sq km of forest between 1978 and 1997.

At the height of the confrontation last May, a public opinion poll showed that 88 percent of the electorate would vote against parliamentary candidates who backed the amendment. Ninety-three percent of those questioned said protecting the environment did not hinder the country's development, while 90 percent believed that cutting down more trees would not help reduce hunger. Even more important was the finding that in a country where few people read newspapers, 63 percent said they had closely followed the debate, mostly through radio and television reports.

The financial press was firmly against the amendment too. "There is not a single argument that can justify this disastrous measure," said the influential newspaper *Gazeta Mercantil*. "Brazil has plenty of fertile land. There are more than 100 million hectares of unused land alone in the *sertão*," the scrubland that covers a quarter of the country. Amazonia has lost 60 percent of its original vegetation through the spread of soybean farming and especially pasture land for cattle.

Another major Brazilian newspaper, *O Estado de São Paulo*, summed up the worries about the future with a headline that asked: "What kind of air are we going to breathe?" The popularity of the ecologists' campaign could be seen through the fact that characters in the cartoon strip *Mónica*, which appears in dozens of newspapers, were dressed in mourning clothes as a sign of protest.

Brazilian public opinion, which is now in tune with what many international bodies and organizations have been advocating for years, has switched as a result of the economic disaster of unregulated logging

"For the first time Brazilian society is reacting, organizing itself and getting results through a major campaign that started inside the country," says Eduardo Martins, until last year head of the federal environment agency, IBAMA. "In Amazonia, the proposed amendment was denounced by sectors that have never stirred before, such as the middle class and the local media," declares biologist Adalberto Veríssimo, a researcher with the Institute of People and the Environment in Amazonia, IMAZON, one of the region's most respected NGOs. "Everyone understood that a public resource was about to be destroyed without generating any kind of development."

Brazilian public opinion, which is now in tune with what many international bodies and organizations have been advocating for years, has switched as a result of the economic disaster of unregulated logging. Most of the destroyed forest areas have become pasture land or soybean, palm, coffee and black pepper plantations. These foreign crops, which are ill-suited to poor soil and heavy rains, have had a hard time growing over two-thirds of the deforested area. Half the 20 million hectares of pasture are also in a miserable state.

Low yields made farmers look for new land, causing deforestation to increase year after year—always in vain, however, because 78 percent of the soil was too acidic and had little natural fertility. Along with this vicious circle, there were transport problems. It takes several days by river to get from the ranches deep in the jungle to a port from where crops can be sent out to domestic and foreign markets.

So although 14 percent of Amazonia's virgin forest has been destroyed, it is still a poor area and its 20 million inhabitants—three-quarters of whom live in towns—only produce seven percent of the country's GDP. Per capita income there is below the national average, while the region's main export, Brazil nuts, is only worth about $3 million, far behind the $230 million earned from the urban production of syrups for soft drinks.

The waste of sawmills and the defiance of loggers

A recent survey carried out by IMAZON for the World Bank showed why farming in the region is so difficult. It noted that 18 percent of the Brazilian part of the Amazon was given over to cattle-raising. That area, in the far south of the Amazon, is the most deforested part and has a low annual rainfall of 1,800 mm. To the north is a mixed zone that has a little more rain and where farming is still feasible, despite a host of insects and plant diseases. In the remaining 45 percent of Brazilian Amazonia, where heavy rain falls each day, the only viable large-scale economic activity is forestry. "Here and in the mixed zone, logging is as profitable as agriculture," says Veríssimo, one of the experts involved in the survey. "That shows forestry is the best thing for Amazonia."

But the timber industry has not managed to make use of this natural resource without destroying it. Nearly three years ago a European Commission report blamed the industry for 72 percent of deforestation, and said its activities ▶

A bird's-eye view of deforestation in Amazonia.

The nine states making up the Amazon, which spans 5.5 million km².

were much more harmful to the forests than felling by farmers or ranchers. The sawmills also waste an enormous amount of timber, sometimes as much as two-thirds of the trees felled. Even worse, most timber firms do not obey the law. "The strategic affairs ministry says about 80 percent of the timber is illegally chopped down in the region and forest management schemes are mostly ignored," says a survey put together by Greenpeace.

What are these schemes? First, there is the battle to keep current forestry regulations on the books and strictly enforce them. During the 1960s, each landowner was required to preserve 50 percent of the forests on his land. As deforestation sped up, parliament decreed in 1996 that 80 percent must be preserved. President Fernando Henrique Cardoso sided with the ecologists, saying that "forestry regulations are needed to ensure the survival of Amazonia, which belongs to Brazilians but also to humanity as a whole."

A haven for biodiversity is the last farming frontier

Brazil contains the planet's richest biodiversity and the widest range of plant species. A sixth of all the world's birds live there, an eighth of all amphibians, one in every 11 mammals and a 15th of the world's reptiles. Five thousand different kinds of trees grow in the Amazon, against North America's 650.

Another scheme currently on the books is the Pilot Programme to Preserve Tropical Forests, funded by the G7 countries, the European Union and the Brazilian government, which have together contributed $280 million to support sustainable use of the forests. The programme is the biggest multilateral investment in the environment ever made in a single country.

As well as these schemes, there is the Amazon Region Protected Areas Programme, backed by Brazil, the World Bank and other international bodies, such as the World Wildlife Fund and the World Bank Forest Alliance Programme. It aims to convert 10 percent of Amazonia into protected areas. Twelve million hectares are already protected, and the goal is to increase that to 37 million hectares—an area the size of Germany.

All these conservation measures are opposed in varying degrees by Amazonian landowners, who see the region's 5.1 million sq kms as the last agricultural frontier, with unlimited possibilities for growth. They say society owes them something for having stopped felling on part of their lands to help safeguard the environment, and are demanding monetary compensation.

An all-party parliamentary commission, headed by the pro-government centre-right deputy Mosir Micheletto, tabled a draft law at the end of 1999 to allow a very flexible interpretation of the forestry regulations. Micheletto's bill stipulated that half of Amazonia's ranchland should remain uncleared, but that Amazonian state governments would be able to grant special logging concessions on a case by case basis. Estates of less than 25 hectares, meanwhile, would be exempted from all conservation regulations.

During a demonstration in favour of the new proposal last February, 600 members of the National Agricultural Federation made a nationalistic protest against what they called "the harmful interference of national and foreign ecological organizations in drafting punitive laws which hinder national development."

Environment Minister José Sarney Filho, the National Environment Council (CONAMA) and the NGOs responded by pointing out the need to continue preserving 80 percent of the Amazonian forest. For six months, they organized public debates all over Brazil.

Battles among the region's shareholders

The ecologists overwhelmingly support the government's stand. Their main criticism is that the scrubland areas of the Amazon must also be safeguarded, since—contrary to most people's beliefs—jungle is not the only native vegetation in the Amazon. Environmental NGOs say it is not enough to leave only 35 percent of the ranchland in this ecosystem untouched, as CONAMA proposes, let alone descend to the 20 percent threshold in the Micheletto proposal. Either way, it would seem hard to ignore Brazilian public opinion, which now broadly agrees with arguments that until recently were dismissed as unpatriotic and slavish to foreign interests. ■


Reducing the rainforest to ashes to make way for cattle ranchers.

Brazil turns its back on the Amazon trade

WHERE THE RICHES LIE

The preservation of forest areas can only be funded through regulated and sustainable use of the rest of the Amazonian jungle

BY DIANA ALVES

BRAZILIAN JOURNALIST SPECIALIZING INTHE ENVIRONMENT

At stake are not just the millions of square kilometres of jungle or the 14,000 million cubic metres of timber growing in the region, or even the fact that it is a biological reserve that contains a third of the world's plant and animal species. Behind the dispute that has set off so many debates in parliament over much of the past year are advocates of two very different models of development.

Rural landowners naturally want to continue chopping down trees to clear land for cattle or agriculture. Environmental organizations want to protect specific areas of tropical forest as agents of climate regulation, a source of future medicines, a place for scientific research and home to many indigenous tribes, while leaving the logging industry to use the rest of the jungle in a sustainable fashion.

The economic feasibility of the landowners' stance has already been challenged by the facts, while the ecologists' plans are only feasible if accompanied by a myriad of other measures. Ecotourism is one possible source of revenue, as is use of the jungle's pharmaceutical or biotechnological resources.

But the region's main income would still come from logging. There has been significant progress in this activity, such as the planting of a million hectares of trees for timber in the past seven years. A score of Amazonian sawmills have pledged to rotate their use of forest areas and allow the forests to regenerate. One such company, Mil Madeireiras, was awarded a quality certificate by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), the chief monitor of sustainable forestry development, after dividing 55,000 hectares into 30 lots with a rotation system to ensure that each lot was only touched every 30 years. The firm also has a 25,000 hectare reserve which it preserves permanently. Another 17 companies are willing to follow the example of Mil Madeireiras and hope to get certificates from the FSC. Among them is Cikel, the region's biggest sawmill.

But "certified" companies such as these are still rare among hundreds of semi-legal competitors. Most of the 1,600 sawmills in the Brazilian Amazonia are small or medium-sized outfits that account for 70 percent of total production. "Illegal timber will always be cheaper," says Adalberto Veríssimo, a biologist with the Institute of People and the Environment in Amazonia. He is counting on two government measures to speed up regulation of logging.

The first is the National Forestry Programme being drawn up by the Environment Ministry to encourage new tree plantations and protect existing ones. The other is to make companies bid for logging permits. Veríssimo says the government will have more control over felling if it is done on publicly owned land.

"The best thing would be to designate commercial and ecological areas and see which ones should be protected and at what cost."

Apart from logging, the possibility of planting new areas that will act as carbon sinks (in an effort to limit climate change in accordance with the Kyoto Protocol), has sparked the interest of several of the region's landowners. A pilot project is under way on the island of Bananal, in the far south of the region, sponsored by a foundation linked to the U.S. electricity multinational American Electric System. This aims to preserve 200,000 hectares, as well as plant 240,000 saplings and recover 800 hectares each year.

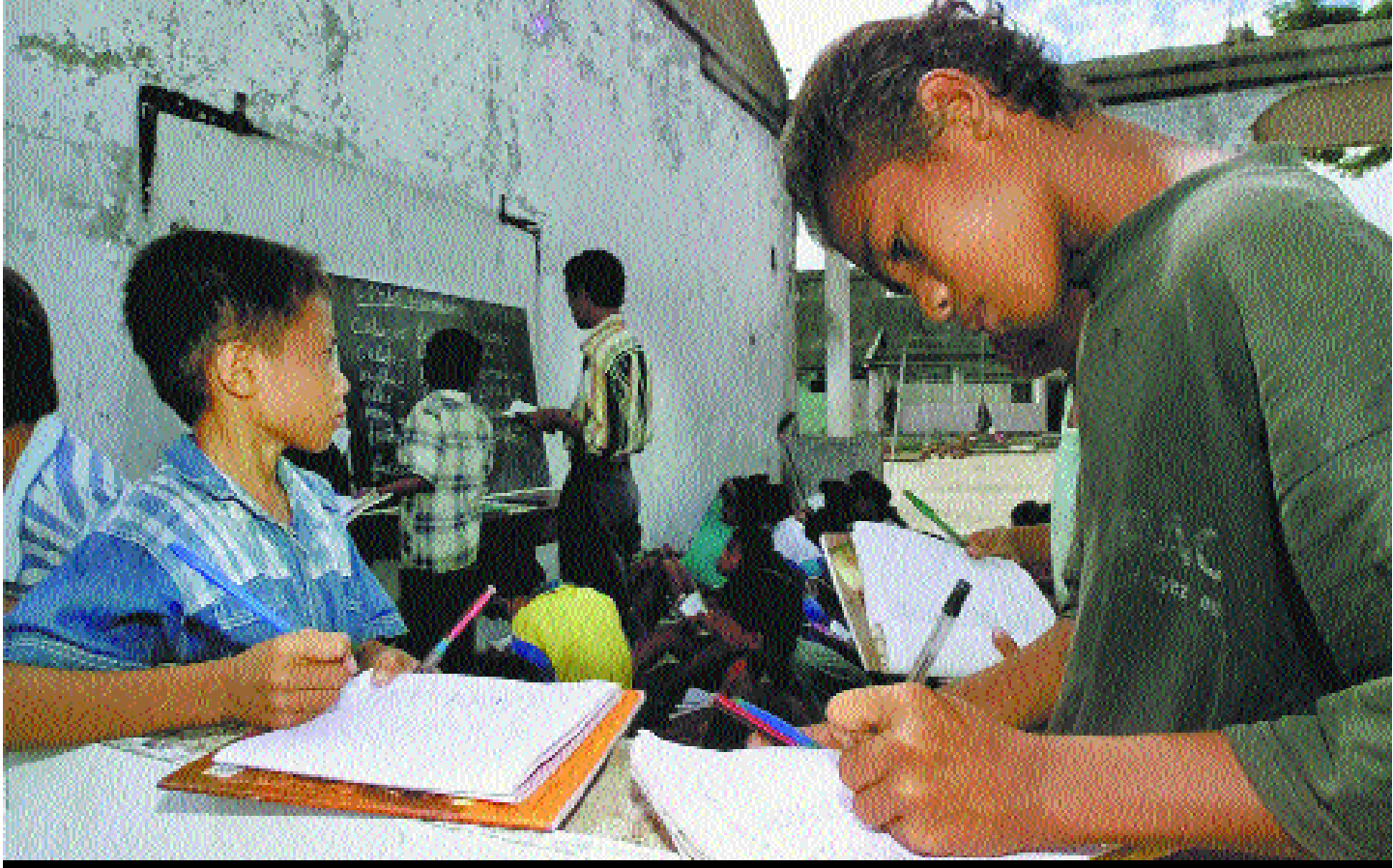
Biotechnology is the region's third big investment opportunity. In the coming year, a centre for research into the Amazon region's resources will open in Manaus. This is urgently needed because foreign laboratories are already developing thousands of drugs based on the traditional knowledge of Amazonian tribes. One of the best examples is a cure for high blood pressure, Capoten, made by scientists (at the pharmaceutical company Bristol-Meyers Squibb) from the venom of the *jararacá* snake.

A couple of years ago the government asked a group of scientists to focus their work on Amazonia. One of the group's main conclusions was that the region could support all kinds of activity, from agriculture and logging to extracting natural resources. Even the much-criticized pasture lands were said to be tolerable. According to Roberto Kishinami, head of Greenpeace-Brazil, "the best thing would be to designate commercial and ecological areas and see which ones should be protected and at what cost." Two of Brazil's Amazonian states, Rondonia and Tocantins, are moving in exactly this direction.

Early next year, when the Brazilian parliament takes up the amendments to the forestry regulations again, the country might clearly identify what kind of activities should be allowed in Amazonia. The parliamentary debates will coincide with publication of the annual deforestation figures by the National Institute for Space Research,INPE—figures that will tell whether ecologists or rural landowners have won the war of percentages.

But another problem will remain: how to make the transition from a world of symbolic victories and defeats, of laws which are not obeyed,to one where the government manages to convert symbols into reality. ■

Sources: Ministry of Development, Trade and Industry;National Institute of Amazonian Research and the Bank of Amazonia;Greenpeace.



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East Timorese children study in a roofless school destroyed by anti-independence militia in Dili.

WORLD OF LEARNING

Teaching free Timor

Money may be tight, but East Timor's school year began recently with plenty of enthusiasm. One of the people in charge discusses what lies in store

GABRIEL DVOSKIN

ARGENTINE JOURNALIST

A school year without teachers, schools or universities—just pupils. This is the challenge facing Armeido Maya, the former rector of the University of Timor who is now running the country's higher education system. "If we could manage while occupied by Indonesia, just think what we can do now that we're free," he declares.

Maya, 42, was born in East Timor under Portuguese rule. In 1975,only two weeks after gaining independence from Portugal, the country was occupied by Indonesia. "I had to give up my plans to enter the Jesuit school in Dili [the capital]," he says. "I was 18 and very keen to learn, but for two and a half years I chose to live in the jungle and the bush with my mother and two brothers as a member of the underground resistance."

When he left the *Fretilín* guerrillas and came back to Dili, he was tortured by the occupation forces. After agonizing about what to do with his life, he gave up the idea of becoming a priest though not his faith in East Timor's independence.

Today, the problems are different. "Ninety-five percent of school buildings were destroyed by the Indonesians a little over a year ago after the referendum that confirmed our wish for independence," he says. Rebuilding a poor country is tough. "The help of the Catholic church has been very important," says Maya, who spent five years at the Catholic University in Java reading history and geography. The East Timorese are 90 percent Catholic, and identify closely with a church that was on their side during the bloody 24-year Indonesian occupation, in which 300,000 people were killed. As a result, the 1996 Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to Archbishop Carlos Ximenes Belo and the political leader José Ramos Horta.

Starting from scratch: from language to history

"The education system needs first aid," says Maya. "To begin with, we want to teach computing, human rights, English and Portuguese. This is what we need for training and informal education." The language problem in East Timor is especially serious since almost everyone speaks the Bahasa of the Indonesian invaders, while the local Tetun language has a surprising number of dialects. "Bahasa is going to be replaced by Tetun and Portuguese in primary and secondary schools, and by Portuguese and English in higher education," he says.

Language classes, however, are jeopardized by some very basic flaws. "We could only begin the school year when classrooms had roofs and enough books and other materials," says Maya, who also points to a lack of good teachers. "Half of

those who say they can teach primary and secondary courses would fail professional tests."

Things are not much better in the university. "We have 5,000 people wanting to take courses in agronomy, education,economics or political science, which are our four faculties, but we only have 1,000 places because 3,000 are already reserved for those whose studies were interrupted last year. Furthermore, we only have 90 teachers for the four faculties."

The curriculum has also caused a number of headaches. "We have to teach children the history of our country, but we need to do it with a book that is impartial and based on democratic values," he observes. "We're working on a textbook with help from foreign teachers, which will have to be ready within a year." Then it will be read under tin roofs, in classrooms with dirt floors, in buildings nobody ever thought would become places of learning. The Jesuit Jacob Filomeno, who runs the refugee office, simply notes that "every day we have 2,000 children gathered outside wanting to take classes."

"We have to teach children the history of our country, but we need to do it with a book that is impartial"

UNICEF sent $490,000 worth of school supplies to East Timor, mainly in the form of $300 kits designed by UNESCO "that were a success in Somalia and Rwanda" according to Pilar Aguilar, the UNICEF representative in East Timor. "Each kit contains enough materials for 80 pupils and a teacher in a class that can be held outdoors."

Coping with a desperate situation does not faze Maya, whose only complaint is that he does not have time to play chess and to read. Outside his office, the alleys and streets are full of pigs, chickens and oxen while helicopters skim through the sky to anxious glances from people below.

"Between 1993 and 1997, after returning from further studies in sociology and economics in New Zealand,I was in charge of the University of Dili again and the situation was worse," recalls Maya. "I don't mean in terms of poverty, but in terms of freedom. The tyres of my car were slashed several times, I got death threats by phone. I had to go into exile in the United States, to Minnesota. There I was, a man from the tropics, used to temperatures of more than 30° C, passing the time in some place where I remember being frightened by snow!" Maya had to go into exile several times due to political fluctuations in East Timor, but his firm intention was always to return.

But going home after the fall of former Indonesian dictator Suharto was no easy matter. "After the independence referendum on August 30th of last year, we had to hide in the mountains again," he says. "I didn't even have time to enjoy my honeymoon. But now I'm back,and this time for good." Maya hopes many other students and ex-students share his desire to return. "Most who went to New Zealand and Australia to study will come back. I'm sure of that. We need them to build the country. Their skills are vital for our people and the thousands of children who have to go to school."

For the moment, life is still confused and unstable. Witness the jumbled state of East Timor's small society: in marketplaces, several languages are mirrored by three currencies—the U.S. dollar, which has been adopted as the official currency, the Indonesian rupiah and the Australian dollar, both local currencies from neighbouring states. "Over the next year, we'll have elections and a local Timorese government will take over from the country's Brazilian administrator, Sergio Vieira de Mello," says Maya.

The present administration is a coalition that includes members of the National Council of Timorese Resistance (CNRT), such as Maya, who also works in the education ministry, and officials from the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET). "We're working against the clock," says Maya. "As well as the help from UNICEF, we've also had $13 million from the World Bank that we've used for the most urgent repair work and to provide some training for teachers and pay their wages."

"Wages," it should be said, is something of a euphemism. Maya is ready to tackle all the problems that come his way, including hunger. He prefers not to talk about it, but UNICEF is also taking care of the most urgent food needs of pupils and teachers, some of whom are going to school on empty stomachs and are so tired that they cannot concentrate for long. "But at least we're free now," says Maya with a smile. ■

Key dates

1520:
Portuguese invasion of East Timor.

April 25, 1974:
Triumph of Portugal's Revolution of the Carnations opens the way to decolonization.

1975:
Civil war concludes with the declaration of independence by Fretilin (the Revolutionary Front for the Independence of East Timor).

July 17, 1976:
Indonesian President Suharto orders the annexation of East Timor, which becomes an Indonesian province. Nicolau Lobato leads resistance to the occupying forces.

December 1978:
Lobato dies in combat. Xanana Gusmao succeeds him.

November 12, 1991:
Indonesian troops kill 271 people in the Santa Cruz cemetery, Dili, during the funeral of an independence activist. The West condemns the massacre.

November 20, 1992:
Gusmao is arrested in Dili. His initial sentence of life imprisonment is commuted to 20 years.

October 1996:
Dili Archbishop Carlos Ximenes Belo and José Ramos Horta, international spokesman for the resistance, are awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. The campaign for independence restarts.

May 1998:
Suharto resigns, and is succeeded by Yusuf Habibie. The East Timorese guerrillas intensify their activities, and are met with a brutal crackdown by Indonesian troops.

January 27, 1999:
Indonesia announces an about-face in its policy towards East Timor. The province will be offered autonomy; if rejected, the path to full independence will be open.

August 30, 1999:
The East Timorese vote in the landmark referendum organized by the UN, with 78.5 percent rejecting plans for provincial autonomy. The army and pro-Indonesian militias reacted by attacking civilians and destroying local infrastructure.

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Contents

Two trillion dollars or one-twentieth of global gross domestic product: this is what the world spends on education according to the most measured assessments. The private sector, which accounts for roughly a fifth of the amount, is determined to capture a larger share of this giant market (p.18). Riding on a neo-liberal wave, vaunting greater efficiency, innovation and knowledge of the job market, the corporate world is gaining unprecedented influence in running education and shaping its goals (pp. 19-22). In the United States, there is a groundswell of support for privatization and companies are starting to run public schools (pp.28-30). In Brazil,the Objetivo chain attracts close to 500,000 students, mostly from privileged backgrounds, while in India, private schools are winning marks for catering to the poor (pp. 23-26). Higher education is at the vanguard of the commercial drive, with online learning spurring multiple alliances to attract students able to pay for a prestigious offshore degree (pp. 26-27,31-32). But there are already lessons to be learnt from excessive trust in market principles. The less advantaged are seldom the winners, as New Zealand's bold experiment goes to show (pp. 33-34),quality is often dangerously compromised while national identities run the risk of erosion (pp.35-36). Today's supreme economic focus needs to be urgently balanced by a more holistic approach, and in this, the state's role is pivotal (pp. 17 and 37).

Dossier concept and coordination by Cynthia Guttman, UNESCO Courier journalist

ATION:
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OPINION

GUARDING
THE COMMON INTEREST

JACQUES HALLAK

UNESCO ASSISTANT DIRECTOR-GENERAL FOR EDUCATION

The process of globalization is moving ahead so fast that it has reached heretofore public sector areas, such as education.

True, the relationship between schools and the private sector goes back a long way. Learning institutions have adapted some of the private sector's operating methods, and the public service has delegated teaching missions to private companies, but a further step has been taken. The explosion of new technologies, which speeds up the production and spread of "educational goods" and the globalization of markets, spurs on their commercialization worldwide and eventually, irresistibly attracts entrepreneurs, always on the lookout for new markets. Today education is a sector weighing two trillion dollars and companies are continually expanding their choice of "educational merchandise." At the same time, the real or supposed shortcomings of public education are turning parents and students away from it,and fuelling their growing demand for quality services, which they are ready to seek elsewhere.

Everyone who believes that education is a basic right thinks that commercialization carries acute risks. They argue that education must not only train workers, but also citizens and responsible individuals. Therefore they question not only the effects liberalization will have, which would lead to discrimination against the most disadvantaged countries, groups and individuals, but also the impact a commercial approach will have on the spread of "common values" or respect for the indispensable diversity of learning content and methods, which take into account the language, culture and teaching traditions of the people for whom they are intended.

Proponents of liberalization criticize the public school system's ability to offer equal access to education for all. They stress that it's time to increase and diversify offer in order to meet demand that the traditional systems can no longer meet, all the less so because of budget cuts. They emphasize the necessity to introduce ideas of productivity and responsibility, the lack of which, they argue, is the public sector's main shortcoming.

It is the opinion of UNESCO, and of its member states, that neither a wholly public nor an entirely commercial education system can overcome the education crisis, which is tangible. The organization is convinced that public and private education sectors each have something valuable to contribute, and that by combining their efforts and forging partnerships, they can boost the educational system's overall effectiveness—under one condition: primary responsibility for teaching must remain in the hands of public authorities, because they alone are the guardians of the common interest. Above all, education must be a means to train responsible citizens. It goes without saying that the deregulation of educational institutions cannot be accompanied by the decline of the basic rules which underpin the educational mission, and by a lack of serious monitoring to ensure that those rules are observed.

This is just as valid on a worldwide scale. The commercialization of education requires regional or international co-operation, especially to ensure that the acquisition of universal values remains the primary objective of any educational system. The World Trade Organization has started taking an interest in this issue. But we would be straying from our mission by envisaging the impact of globalization only from a business perspective, and therefore ignoring its effects on—and potential for—human freedom and self-fulfillment through education, science and culture. ■

1. CORPORATE AMBITIONS

Education Inc.?

Buoyed by mounting criticism of public education, the business world is investing in this new field with a managerial mindset and enterprising spirit

CYNTHIA GUTTMAN

UNESCO COURIER JOURNALIST

After bread, education is the primary need of the people.

Georges Jacques Danton, French revolutionary leader (1759-94)

As the winds of liberalization blow onwards, a new vocabulary is running through education plucked straight from the corporate universe. Principals step into the shoes of managers, parents become choosey customers while schools compete and innovate, striving to offer an efficient,quality service, which at the end of the day yields a profit and turns out graduates fit for the job market.

Tacitly supported by governments, the movement is gaining legitimacy worldwide, fuelled by the grassroots and corporate interests, both of which have taken aim at public education's tarnished report card. In the mid-1990s, the European Round Table of Industrialists, which gathers prominent CEOs, pointed its finger at "an ever-widening gap between the education that people need for today's complex world and the education they receive." The Merrill Lynch brokerage firm laments that "twelfth-graders in the U.S. in the most recent international comparisons finished dead last and next to last in math and science respectively." Participants at the World Education Forum in Dakar in April 2000 deemed it "unacceptable that more than 113 million children have no access to primary education … and that the quality of learning and the acquisition of human values and skills fall far short of the … needs of societies."

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As Motoyo Kamiya from the OECD's Centre for Education Research and Innovation notes, education, which typically represents 25 to 30 percent of public spending, "is becoming more politicized and controversial both at the national level and locally, because of decentralization." Accounting for roughly 20 percent of total education spending, the private sector has always provided services, textbooks or schooling via missions, NGOs or other channels. But now, following the dismantling of state monopolies, the whole public sector is deemed ripe for liberalization. For advocates of this process, healthcare, along with education—a market worth two trillion dollars—are the last bastions to be overrun.

Critics attack public education's inefficiency and bureaucratic, often overly-centralized, outmoded structures. Pointing to the principles that have made many a business prosper, they argue that schools need market incentives and competitive pressures to improve and innovate, and that these can be created through various forms of privatization. As the European Round Table of Industrialists puts it, "the whole situation could be turned around if school education underwent the same transformation as the workplace."

Struck by funding cuts, higher education is at the vanguard of more commercial reforms, from weaving closer ties with industry to tapping the online learning market. But despite the latter's bullish forecasts, the burgeoning of the private sector cannot be pinned to technology alone. As Kamiya notes, a broad public sector reform movement is underway, in which market-oriented approaches are the backdrop. In the U.K. and the U.S., the publication of league tables, test scores and rankings, accompanied by hefty media publicity, is "putting schools under pressure to attract students and hence funding." In many countries, rules are being loosened up over the right to set up schools, while the running of public schools is being entrusted to private outfits.

Answering the pressure from below

Taking this process one step further, schools are becoming business enterprises in their own right. In western Africa, retired teachers are opening their own, while elsewhere in the developing world full-fledged private school chains are attracting growing numbers. Under pressure to cut spending, governments are loosening regulations and providing incentives to the private sector. In Côte d'Ivoire, 60 percent of secondary schools are now in private hands.

The trend seems set to stay. "What's really pushing the for-profit sector is parental demand for better and different education," says the World Bank's Harry Patrinos. "Now, in relatively poor countries, people are demanding English, technology. They know it's out there and that some countries are benefiting greatly from it. They see that the private sector is able to gear its product to those demands." ■

Honing job skills: Parisian school pupils perfect their enamel work in the early twentieth century.

1. CORPORATE AMBITIONS

Echoes of corporate influence

Although business leaders in the United States influenced school policy in the past, today their clout is largely unrivalled

DOROTHY SHIPPS

Assistantprofessor of education at Teachers College, Columbia University (U.S.). She is co-editor, with Larry Cuban, of Reconstructing the Common Good in Education (Stanford University Press, 2000)

Looking to business is nothing new in education. A century ago, schools adopted reforms based on their reputed economic benefits to individuals and the newly industrializing urban society. The current era has at its core a resurrected and strengthened version of this notion. In both eras, reformers have agreed that whatever public schools do to improve individual students' job opportunities has direct economic consequences for the nation as a whole, and for cities in particular.

The difference today is that corporate reformers have gained the upper hand, tilting a tension-filled compromise that had prevailed over the past 100 years. Corporate leaders have assumed the unrivalled moral authority to define the purposes and methods of public schooling in response to the new technology-driven global economy. Hailed as victorious generals in the battle between capitalism and socialism, many espouse a millennial vision that links education to global free markets. Schooling, they tell us, hedges our national bets in the global competition for market share and predicts which students become good employees. But history also cautions us that the long-term consequences of today's experiments are probably less well understood than their advocates imagine.

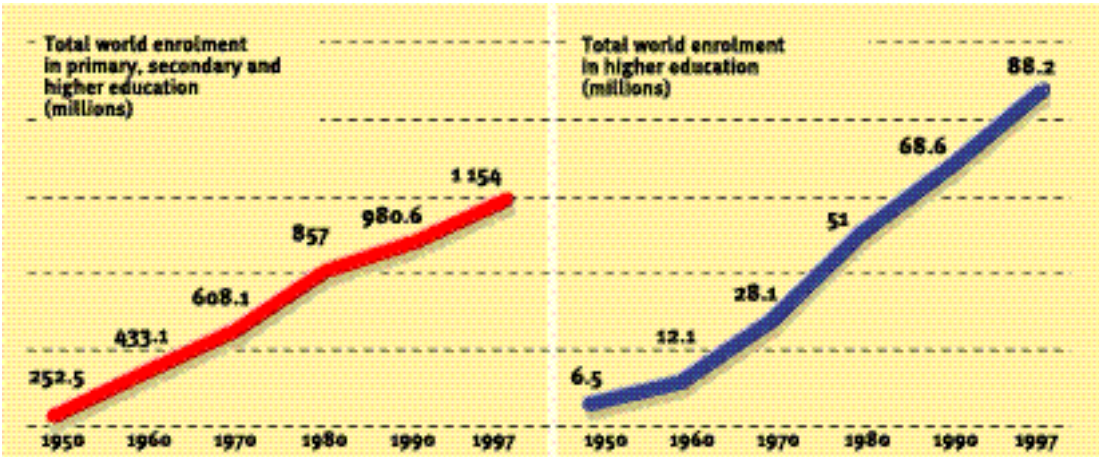
The transfer of management methods from business to schools began with a critique of school failure. Between 1880 and 1920, different proponents had their own economic justifications for reform. Corporate leaders criticized urban schools for failing to respond to a newly industrialized, centralized, and increasingly integrated world economy. They sought

Facts and figures

Public expenditure on education has remained stable despite the steady rise in enrolment. The private sector, which has long been involved in education, has reinforced its position in the market and staked new territory in software and computer tools for learning.

Rising tide of students

During the past 50 years, total enrolment (at all levels) has grown twice as fast as the world population.The most dramatic increase has been in developing countries: primary and secondary enrolment has risen eight-fold, while the number of higher education students has increased by a factor of 14.



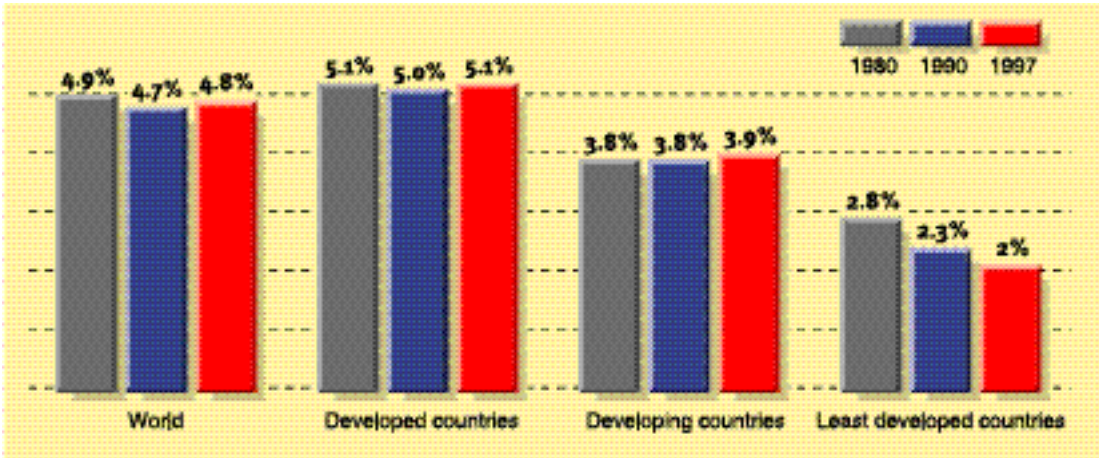
Source: UNESCO World Education Report 2000

Public expenditure remains the same despite growing demand

In general terms, the poorer the region,the smaller the budget for public education.At all levels, public expenditure per student has generally remained the same in relation to the gross national product.

Yet it is widely believed that greater investment is required to educate all students properly, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Trends in public expenditure on education as a proportion of GNP



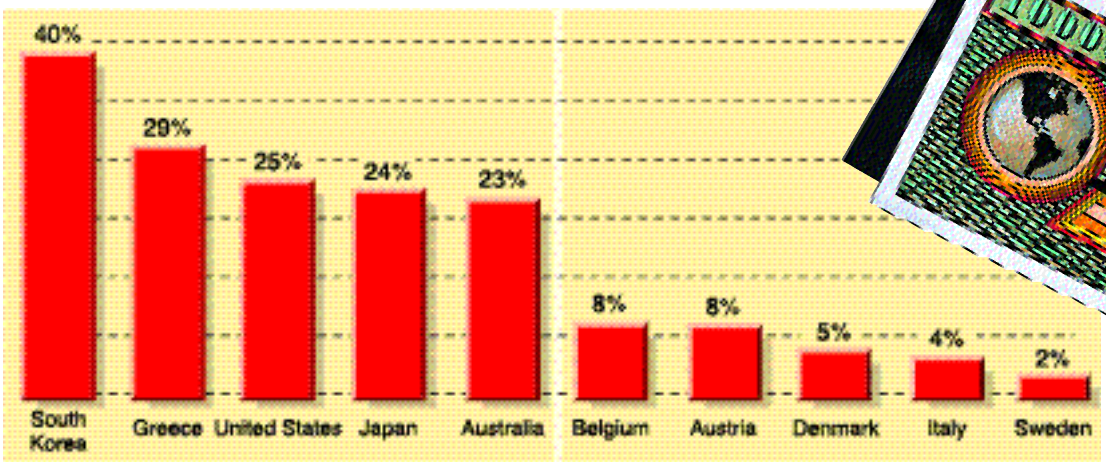
Source: UNESCO World Education Report 2000

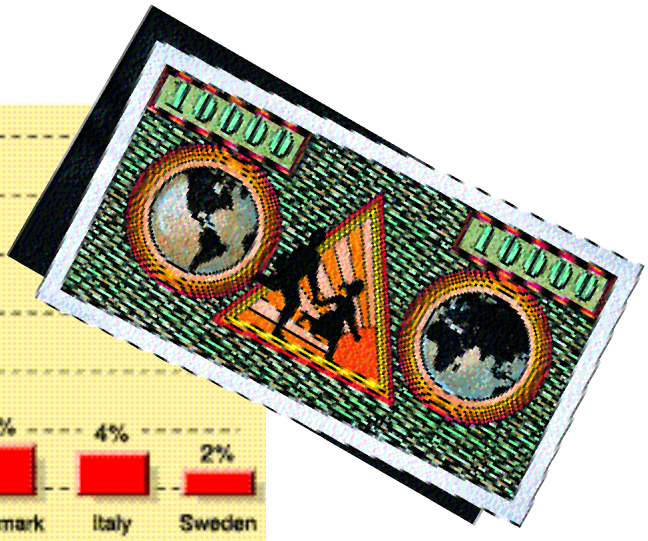
PRIVATE EDUCATION GAINS NEW GROUND

Data concerning private education is generally sparse, incomplete and not always coherent. It is estimated that the private sector accounts for about 20% of total spending on education and is generally on the rise.

This proportion, however, can vary widely between countries and often within a single country depending upon the level of education.

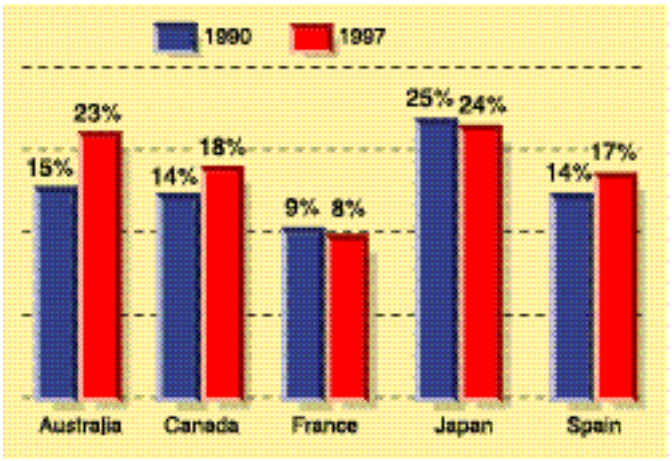
Private education expenditure as a percentage of total spending on education in selected OECD countries (1997)





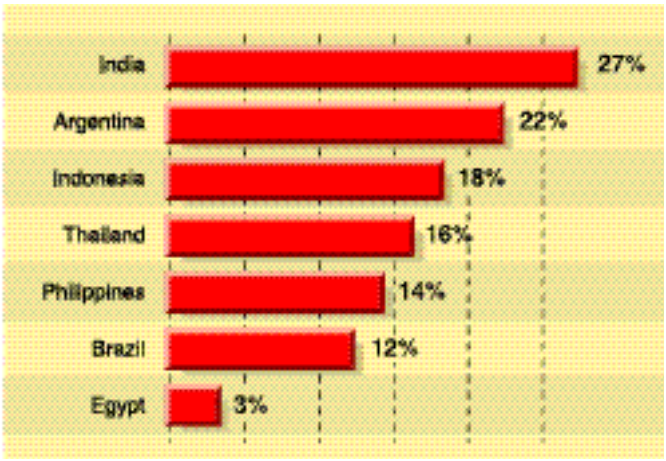
Source: Education at a Glance 2000, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

Changes in private education spending as a percentage of total education expenditure in selected OECD countries



Source: Education at a Glance 2000, OECD.

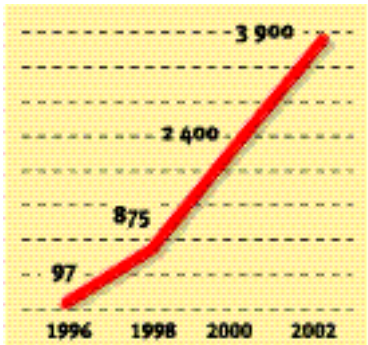
Percentage of private school enrolment (primary and secondary) in selected countries (1997)



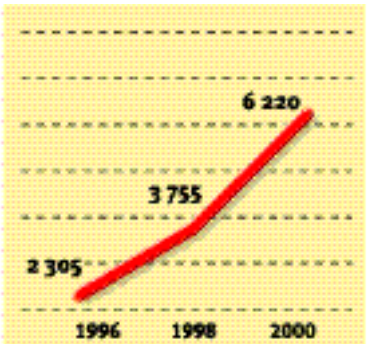
Source: OECD Education Database

THE EXPLOSION IN THE NEW TECHNOLOGIES MARKET FOR EDUCATION

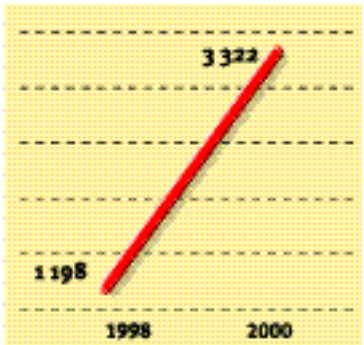
Global higher education online market [1](US$ millions)

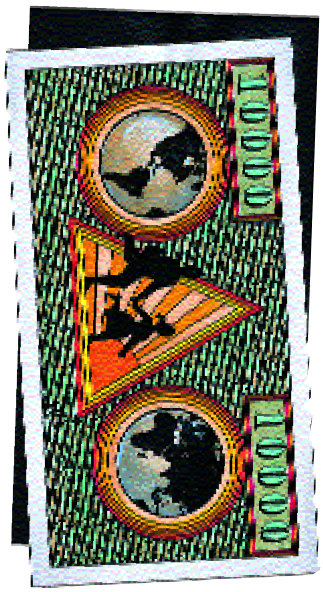


Educational software market for schools and private consumers[2] (US$ millions)



The number of academic CD-ROMs available worldwide [3]





1-Source: Jupiter Communicatons; Moe, Michael T., Market Overview and Trends, World Bank/EdInvest, 2000.
2-Source: IDC Financial Times; Heyneman, Stephen P., Educational Qualifications: The Economic and Trade Issues, 2000.
3-Source: Waterlow New Media Information

centralization and efficiency, frequently invoking the powerful metaphor of scientific management or "Taylorism," using the stopwatch and management to discover the "one best way." These principles had been instrumental, industrialists of the time believed, in creating the American industrial revolution and the wealth of powerful international companies. The quest for efficiency of those decades led to the problems we must now repair, notably the rigid and bureaucratic structure of our school systems.

Today, public schools continue to adapt new business efficiency techniques in what seems to be a constant recycling process. Scientific management, it turns out, was only the precursor to a host of ever newer management theories aimed at encouraging greater worker productivity, and hence greater national wealth.

All education springs from some image of the future. If the image of the future held by a society is grossly inaccurate, its education system will betray its youth.

Alvin Toffler,
American futurologist (1928-)

When schools become levers to attract business investment

These trends have echoes in the management reforms prescribed for and adopted by schools. Some seek increased efficiency through decentralized school governance while others imagine that outsourcing (or contracting) the management and operation of schools will lift educators' performance because incentives are lacking in secure government jobs.

All this is happening against the backdrop of economic globalization, which inevitably creates political tensions by pitting governments against one another in competition for transnational corporate jobs and global capital. Our current era mimics the turn of the century to the extent that international capital flows and transnational production processes influence both corporations and governments. Today, technologically induced speed, growth among investors, concentration of wealth, and interconnectedness have increased the effects of this global speculation and decreased the capacity of governments to regulate business and markets. Not surprisingly, this global market ideology has been broadly recognized as a force in national education policy.

Reforming local schools becomes one of the ways that cities engage in the global competition to provide production resources to corporations. When formal schooling is seen as a key element of productive capacity, a view reinforced by the decline of manufacturing and the rise of information-based technologies in the U.S., the quality of the local public school system takes on renewed importance for business leaders and local politicians alike. Today's corporate leaders have uncommon access to elected political officials and government agency heads, the wealth of large corporations to draw upon, and the ability to affect local and regional economies simply by making business decisions.

Schools are treated as engines of economic development to lure businesses to a particular city or state, so corporate and local political leaders cooperate in their governance and redesign. In short, school policy becomes labour policy.

This powerful combination of corporate, national and state executives is happening at the expense of education professionals. In contrast to the turn of the century, when educators played a pivotal role in debates by emphasizing the role of schools in developing citizenship, today they have been largely discredited. Selecting school leaders from outside the field has become both symptom and spur to this decrease in the educator's status. A small but influential group of school districts is choosing leaders from among the ranks of businessmen, politicians and the military, rather than educators.

All this is taking place with little evidence that recent management solutions will turn around poor schools, nor that improvements in school performance protect against declines in productivity or the business cycle. Yet there are more troubling problems with reform strategies that pit the market against government in education. One is that education is reduced to its narrowest economic purposes. According to a 1992 survey, corporate executives most want schools to emphasize "a basic understanding of math and science" and "sound work habits such as self-discipline, timeliness and dedication to work." These are laudable goals, but reflect a narrow set of traits that employers predict their workers will need in an information economy.

The corporate model of reform pays little heed to other expectations of public schools: building just and tolerant communities, reducing distrust of one another and our shared institutions, safeguarding democratic ethics and introducing children to the cultural wisdom of the world. We are also witnessing the abandonment of many kinds of equality. Neither markets nor business ethics routinely put equality or fairness above profits. Whole groups of people will not fit the prevailing model of what it takes to be competitive in an educational marketplace in which competition is the guiding principle of improvement. Another disturbing trend is the anaemic citizenship that economic justifications for schooling envision. Increasing the emphasis on individualism is likely to exacerbate a pattern of civic disengagement many already find disturbing in its scale and scope.

A balancing act to reach a healthy equilibrium

We need a contemporary counter-movement to restore a healthy equilibrium of goals for our public schools. This movement would be grounded in a very different educational critique that rejects the metaphor of market (or management) failure, and instead tackles the problems in our schools as symptoms of a widespread civic breakdown. The solutions to school failure would then hinge on common concerns, rather than rigorous individual competition and accountability. In addition to academic criteria, parents and reformers would craft student performance measures that reward active citizenship, tolerant and respectful behaviour, and cultural knowledge in the arts, history and languages. This reform movement, seeking equity and tolerance, would revitalize democratic institutions, and not merely aim for more efficient production. ■

2. CATERING TO DEMAND

© Objetivo, Brazil

Children explore the possibilities of paint in one of Objetivo's schools.

Objetivo: brand-name schooling

A Brazilian chain of for-profit schools prides itself on a national network, a pioneering use of technology and a high pass rate

LUCIANA ZENTI

JOURNALIST FOR NOVA ESCOLA, A BRAZILIAN EDUCATION MAGAZINE

Thirty-five years after it was founded, Objetivo has grown into one of the most thriving educational enterprises in Brazil, with over 400 schools located all around the country and a university. What's the secret? Objetivo's aim is to see that students get through, and in this the company succeeds. Fewer than one percent of pupils at the primary and secondary level repeat a year, far below the national average, which stands at 21.3 percent in primary school and 40.1 percent at the secondary level, according to Education Ministry figures.

While the share of students in the private sector is declining (10.5 percent in 1996 to 8.2 percent in 2000), Objetivo reaches close to 500,000 pupils from kindergarten to university level. Besides its own schools (13 in São Paulo alone, where its headquarters are located), the company has franchises in places as far apart as Brasilia, Goiania, Manaus, Campinas and Bauru.

Objetivo's pedagogical coordinator, Alfredo Fernandes, attributes the company's success to the sound reputation it has built over the years. "There's a positive atmosphere in our schools, we're always open to a dialogue with students and society at large," he says.

What has become a national network began in 1965 as a preparatory course for the entrance exam required by Brazilian universities. This notched up a pass rate of almost 90 percent and its fame quickly grew. In 1970, spurred by the good state of its finances, Objetivo founded a regular school, since university entrance coaching was not part of the national education system. "We wanted to offer quality education so we came up with our own activities and methods," says Fernandes.

Objetivo grew rapidly. In 1972, its first faculties were inaugurated, and sixteen years later, it was officially recognized as a full-fledged university (UNIP), which today counts 53,000 students. In 1975 Objetivo set up its first kindergarten and primary schools.

The schools accept both good pupils and those with learning difficulties. "After much discussion, we decided to go for an open school with no streaming, where everyone had a chance to express themselves," says Fernandes. "This openness is the main difference between us and other private schools."

Ironically, Objetivo is criticized because it has no entrance exam. "Because we made it easy for children to get into our schools and stay there, we

2. CATERING TO DEMAND

were accused of having purely commercial intentions," he says. In a country with widespread poverty, Objetivo's fees (between $215 and $355 a month depending on the level) are certainly a sizeable obstacle for many parents.

The high cost of tuition and the fact that the project was started by people from outside the education world made many experts suspicious of the schools. "I'm very much against commercializing education," says Dermeval Saviani, professor of philosophy and education history at the State University of Campinas. "Education is a social need that is by nature incompatible with the private sector."

Objetivo is a good example of this, he argues. "With the profits it makes from higher education, it has the money to provide low-cost schooling. But this is not happening. Because maintaining all its infrastructure calls for major investment, Objetivo ignores the poorest people." He says this is a common failing of all profit-making private schools, which are only accessible to middle and upper-class children.

With an annual turnover of approximately $400 million,the company has a long tradition of investing in technology. It had the first school in Brazil to use interactive video for teaching, and was the first to introduce computers in the classroom. Nearly all its schools have computer rooms, libraries and sports fields, and offer extra-curricular activities such as judo, music and visual arts.

"This means we can escape from the routine and learn more," says 14-year-old Bianca Sgai Franco. As well as having it own teaching materials—textbooks, computer software and CD-Roms—some schools are carrying out pioneer projects. Two of them are linked to the environment: the Sea School at Angra dos Reis, near Rio de Janeiro, was founded in 1988 and offers courses in marine life to pupils and teachers, while the Nature School, deep in the Amazonian jungle, is run on similar lines.

Another attraction is the Talent Encouragement Programme for children with exceptional skills. A parent or teacher can ask for a gifted child to be tested in order to take special classes in both the social and natural sciences. "I enrolled my 11-year-old daughter in an Objetivo school because of this programme," says Maria Cecilia Novaes Augusto. "Now she's doing robotics, technology and art.It's a very good programme."

Tereza Cristina Matteis pays about 1,200 reales ($650) a month for the schooling of her three sons. "It's a forward-looking educational system that keeps very close contact with the children's families," she says. Silvana Da Costa, who attended an Objetivo school and now has three of her children there, says "it's very open to the parents." Given that her husband's job has meant living in eight of Brazil's states, Objetivo's nationwide network has proved an invaluable asset.

Fernandes, the chain's pedagogical coordinator, says the key difference between the schools and the state system is the level of teacher training. "It's a very serious problem in Brazil," he says. Which is why Objetivo offers all its teachers regular refresher courses. "Each year we organize at least five regional meetings with teachers from other states," says Deborah Cristina Catarinacho, who has taught Portuguese for the past 12 years. Quality control is also strict, with teachers around the country required to use the course materials in exactly the same way.

"Objetivo draws you in," says Adriana Venturi, a preschool teacher. "We're a family where everyone encourages each other to go forward." ■

KEY FIGURES, BRAZIL

Total population (millions, 1999):	168
Adult literacy rate (1998):	84.5%
Gross enrolment ratio* (1997):	
- Primary education:	125%
- Secondary education:	62%
- Tertiary education:	15%
Students enrolled in private primary and secondary schools (1997):	12.2%

* Enrolment as a percentage of the population of official school age for each level

Sources: World Bank, UNDP, OECD.

Private education: the poor's best chance?

Across the developing world, private schools and education companies are not only flourishing, but reaching the poor. India is a case in point

JAMES TOOLEY

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A common assumption about the private sector in education is that it caters only to the élite, and that its promotion only serves to exacerbate inequality. On the contrary, recent research points in the opposite direction.If we want to help some of the most disadvantaged groups in society, then encouraging deeper private sector involvement is likely to be the best way forward.

Several developments are underway in India, all of which involve the private education sector meeting the needs of the poor in distinct ways. But India is not unique in this respect—similar phenomena are happening all over the developing world.

As a point of departure, how do government schools serve the poor? Usefully, the government-sponsored Public Report on Basic Education in India (PROBE) from 1999 paints a very bleak picture of the "malfunctioning" of government schools for the poor. When researchers called unannounced on their random sample of schools, only 53 percent had any "teaching activity" going on. In 33 percent, the headteacher was absent. Alarmingly, the team noted that the deterioration of teaching standards was not to do with disempowered teachers, but instead could be ascribed to "plain negligence." They

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noted "several cases of irresponsible teachers keeping a school closed ... for months at a time," many cases of drunk teachers, and headteachers who asked children to do domestic chores. Significantly, the low level of teaching activity occurred even in those schools with relatively good infrastructure, teaching aids and pupil-teacher ratios.

But is there any alternative to these schools? Surely no-one else can do better than government given the resources available? As it happens, the PROBE report pointed to private schools that were serving the poor and conceded—rather reluctantly—that such problems were not found in these schools. In the great majority of private schools—again visited unannounced and at random—there "was feverish classroom activity."Most parents would prefer to send their children to private schools if they could afford them. Private schools, they said, were successful because they were more accountable: "the teachers are accountable to the manager (who can fire them), and, through him or her, to the parents (who can withdraw their children)." Such accountability was not present in the government schools, and "this contrast is perceived with crystal clarity by the vast majority of parents."

The way forward: loosen regulations and set up voucher schemes

To many readers, the existence of these private schools for the poor will come as a surprise. It was to me too, until I had the privilege of conducting fieldwork for the International Finance Corporation (the private finance arm of the World Bank) on a group of such schools operating under the banner of the Federation of Private Schools' Management based in Hyderabad. The federation has 500 private schools (from kindergarten to grade ten) serving poor communities in slums and villages. I was impressed by both the entrepreneurial spirit within these schools —they were run on commercial principles, not dependent on hand-outs from state or philanthropy— but also by the spirit of dedication within the schools for the poor communities served: not for nothing were the leaders of the schools known as "social workers." But these schools suffer under restrictive and inappropriate regulations. One example will suffice: to be recognized, a school must deposit up to 50,000 rupees(about $1,200) in a stipulated bank account, of which neither the capital nor the interest can be touched.Given that the fees charged in these schools ranged from 25 (60 cents) to Rs 150 per month (about $3.50), with most of the schools grouped near the lower end of the range, such sums are completely prohibitive.

Fees of around $10 per year are not affordable by everyone, but they are to a large number of poor families. Furthermore, the great majority of the schools offer a significant number of free places — up to 20 percent— for the poorest students, allocated on the basis of claims of need checked informally in the community.

All of this suggests that if one is interested in serving the needs of the poor in India, then trying to reform the totally inadequate, cumbersome and unaccountable government system is unlikely to be the best way. Instead, reform the regulatory environment to make it suitable for the flourishing of private schools for the poor, help build private financing schemes using overseas and indigenous philanthropy, and encourage public voucher schemes, so that parents can use their allowance of funding where they see the schools are performing well, rather than wasting them in unresponsive state schools.

Private education in developing countries isn't just about the poor, of course, and there are many exciting examples of big education businesses. But these too have implications for the ways in which the private sector can reach the least advantaged. One Indian company which embodies much of the excitement and innovation in the education industry is the National Institute for Information Technology (NIIT). With its competitor, Aptech, it shares just over 70 percent of the information technology education and training market in India, estimated at roughly Rs. 1.1 billion ($24 million). NIIT has 40 wholly owned centres in the metropolitan areas, and about 1,000 franchised centres across India. It also has a global reach, with centres in the U.S.,Asia-Pacific, Europe, Japan, Central Asia and Africa. A key aspect of NIIT's educational philosophy is that there is a need to harness research to improve the efficiency of learning and to raise educational standards.

Because of its success in developing innovative and cost-effective IT education and training, NIIT has

In large states public education will always be mediocre, for the same reason that in large kitchens the cooking is usually bad.

Friedrich Nietzsche, German philosopher (1844-1900)

attracted the attention of several state governments. First off the mark was Tamil Nadu, which wanted to bring a computer curriculum to all of its high schools. Significantly, although allocating about $22 million over five years to this endeavour, it didn't hand the funds over to government schools, perhaps in light of the PROBE report's lessons. Instead, it developed a model to contract out the service to private companies, which provide the software and hardware, while the government supplies electricity and the classroom. For the first round of the Tamil Nadu process, 43 contracts were awarded for 666 schools, with NIIT allotted 371 schools. Many of the classrooms have become NIIT centres, open to school children and teachers in daytime, then used by the franchise holder in the evenings. The contracting out of curriculum areas such as this represents an important step forward in relationships between the public and private sectors, and provides an interesting model worth watching and emulating.

Most recently, NIIT has focused on reaching largely illiterate and unschooled children through the Internet. Within weeks of having set up an "Internet kiosk" in a slum area, the institute's researchers found that without any instruction, children could achieve a remarkable level of computer literacy. NIIT is exploring ways to roll out the idea commercially, harnessing the power of the private sector to reach the poorest through modern technology.

These initiatives all find echoes in other developing countries. In each case, the private, not the public sector, is most responsive to the needs of the poor, and is bringing innovation, efficiency and educational quality to the lives of the most disadvantaged. The private sector has the potential to promote greater equity and to influence education policy, provided it is encouraged and viewed as a partner, not a threat to governments, whether in the developing or the developed world. ■

TO KNOW MORE

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South Africa: the race for portable qualifications

The government is trying to put some order into the burgeoning private higher education sector and clamp down on dodgy foreign outfits

KAREN MACGREGOR

South African journalist and correspondent for The Times Higher Education Supplement

Lebo Sekoto is an upwardly mobile young woman, a 28-year-old senior human resources consultant at a large mining corporation in Pretoria. She is now internationally mobile too, she says, thanks to the arrival of Britain's De Montfort University. It is one of hundreds of further and higher education institutions—local and foreign—that have set up shop in South Africa.

Now nearing the end of a part-time MBA, Lebo offers good reasons for choosing De Montfort. "I want to expand my horizons and work for a multinational corporation and gain experience in the United Kingdom. So I thought it fitting to obtain a globally portable U.K. qualification." In fact Lebo, born in the sprawling black township of Soweto, has been studying most of her life.

After leaving school she obtained a business diploma at a polytechnic. Then came a part-time degree in industrial psychology and business management through the distance University of South Africa, and now the MBA, which combines part-time and on-line study. "Companies see you as a young black female first," she says, "irrespective of your qualifications. If I want to move up the ladder to become a chief executive, I have to be three times more qualified and experienced than male colleagues."

De Montfort (450 students in South Africa of whom 65 percent are black) is one of several foreign institutions now operating in South Africa's private sector. It is unusual in being non-profit and aiming to build management skills in this developing country: most others, local and foreign, are straight businesses. It was also the first private institution to be registered in South Africa under new laws aimed at regulating the growth and quality of private higher education, which is burgeoning here as it is in many other countries—to the point of threatening the viability of many public institutions.

"Our public sector is immature, so we are implementing new policies to develop it," says Professor Nasima Badsha, the government's deputy director-general in charge of higher education. "Much of the private sector is for-profit and market-driven, and does not share our commitment to access, equity, quality and human resource development. Such concerns are shared by a number of countries in the south." Fees for private institutions tend to be 30 to 50 percent higher than those for state institutions.

The teacher is to students what the rain is to the field.

Zaira Alexandra Rodriguez Guijamo, Mexican pupil (1985-)

After the dismantling of apartheid, the foreign influx begins

It is not known exactly how many private tertiary institutions are currently operating. In higher education, 100 of more than 200 institutions that applied for accreditation have been or are well on the way to being registered. The private higher education institutions have more than 20,000 full-time students in South Africa, which last year had 564,000 students in the public sector. Hundreds of thousands are enrolled in private part-time higher education courses and a vast number of further education courses ranging

from literacy to art, computing and business.

The influx of foreign institutions began after the nation's first democratic elections in 1994. With the dismantling of apartheid, black students shifted away from poorly resourced "black" institutions to well-endowed formerly "white" ones, while many mostly middle-class white students moved to private institutions, due to perceptions—hotly denied—of declining quality, disruption and lack of safety in the state sector.

With an unemployment rate near 30 percent and the formal economy absorbing only 56 percent of students from top universities—and 25 percent from less respected ones—students seek "marketable" qualifications that vocationally oriented polytechnics and private institutions are seen to offer. Many people see foreign degrees as more prestigious and portable than local ones, while others view them as an emigration ticket to a richer country.

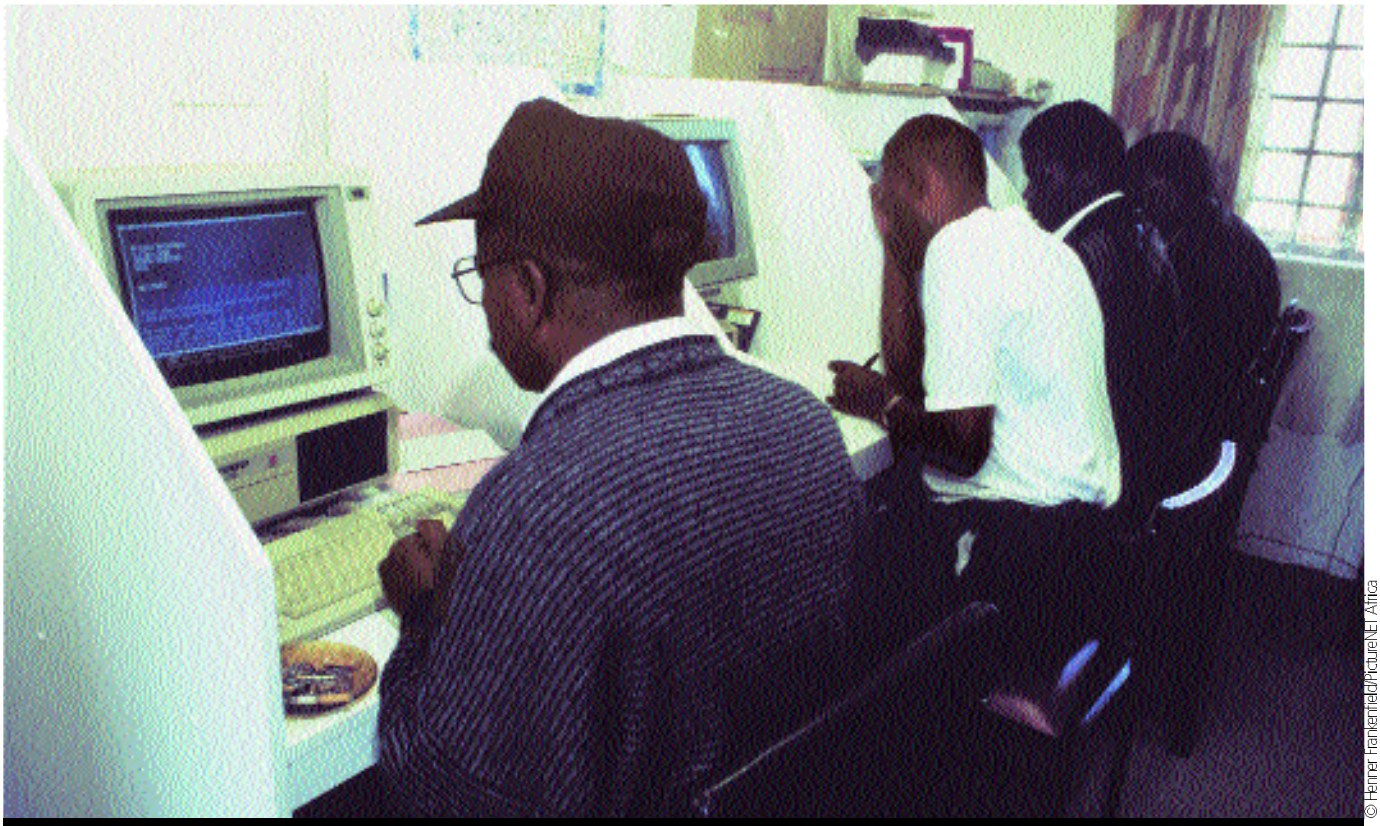
Most of the private institutions are genuine, but fly-by-night operators are a problem. The 1997 Higher Education Act is supposed to weed them out by requiring that all private institutions seek course accreditation from the South African Qualifications Authority. They must also register with the education department, which has two criteria for acceptance: financial viability and quality.

"Foreign institutions posed a particular threat to public universities," says Professor Badsha. "They mostly operate in a narrow range of areas, especially IT, business and commerce, 'cherry picking' financially lucrative courses without the obligation of offering the full range of disciplines. Public universities found themselves losing income-earning courses they use to cross-subsidize expensive disciplines such as music and art, medicine and engineering, which are critical to South Africa's cultural, social and economic development."

Foreign institutions also attract good staff from public universities by paying higher salaries, and charge fees that only the wealthy can afford, resulting in a new form of apartheid, says Badsha. "We are trying to move away from race and class to create truly South African institutions."

As a result, the government is amending the act to make it more difficult for foreign institutions to set up in South Africa. For example, before granting permits, the registrar will judge whether the applicant is useful to the public system and broadens the scope of courses offered. Even though South Africa's constitution prohibits discrimination against foreign institutions, some of them have threatened to take the issue to the World Trade Organization. Indeed many foreign institutions have already left.

Education Minister Kader Asmel strongly rejects claims that the clampdown is motivated by "narrow protectionist agendas or national chauvinism." The goal, he says, is simply to assure the accountable and efficient use of public resources. "We do not wish to turn a blind eye to supranational developments, or build new walls around ourselves. But we cannot stand by and watch the erosion of our system." ■



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A computer course for adults at the Lawaaicamp settlement in the Western Cape, South Africa.

KEY FIGURES, SOUTH AFRICA

Total population (millions, 1999):	42
Adult literacy rate (1998):	84.6%
Gross enrolment ratio (1997):	
- Primary education:	133%
- Secondary education:	95%
- Tertiary education:	17%
Students enrolled in private primary and secondary schools (1996):	3.3%

Sources: World Bank, UNDP.

When parents want out

In the U.S., parents are claiming the right to spend their tax money as they see fit and are rallying in growing numbers behind voucher plans. A critical look at the school choice controversy

PEDRO A. NOGUERA

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The industrialized world's first public education system is under siege, with fierce attacks pitched from all sides in the U.S. political arena. First the administrative leadership of large urban school districts is reeling from accusations of being inefficient, overly bureaucratic and more preoccupied with rules and regulations than with providing quality education to students. Meanwhile, teachers, students and parents, especially those from low-income areas, are the targets of blame for what has been characterized as the "rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a nation and a people."

Never before has education received such attention in a presidential campaign. The nation tuned into televised debate where Al Gore and George Bush clearly marked out the battle lines. The Democrat pledged to pump $115 billion more into a school system in need of greater accountability and innovation, while the Republican vowed to dismantle the system and replace it by privately managed schools that operate on marketplace principles

At the centre of the debate lies the highly controversial voucher plan: instead of paying taxes to support their local public school, parents can opt to use that money to send their child to a private school.In 1998 Florida became the first to adopt a statewide plan,while California and Michigan will vote on similar initiatives in November 2000.California's is notably supported by Tim Draper, a Silicon Valley venture capitalist. The proposed policy: to provide state-funded scholarships of $4,000 (compared to the $5,627 per student the state now spends) to any parents who want to send their children to private or parochial schools.

Despite their power, teacher unions have been left to the margins of the debate. Often castigated as stubborn defenders of the status quo, unions have been forced into a defensive posture, attempting to fight off the most radical reform measures while working to raise the salaries and benefits of their members, which are widely recognized as inadequate. Although the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association continue to play a major role in statewide elections, their influence in the debate over educational reform has been minimal.

Support for the privatization camp is drawn largely from certain corporations which perceive public education as hopelessly unfixable, religious conservatives who want to exercise greater control over what their children are taught, and a growing number of middle-class parents whose children already attend private schools and who resent being taxed to support a system they do not patronize. In most states, this coalition has been unable to muster the support needed to implement privatization proposals beyond a small number of isolated cases. But this appears to be changing.

Other constituencies who once were viewed as reliable supporters of public education now appear willing to back efforts to radically transform the system and replace it with new models, many of which remain undefined and untested. A recent study conducted by the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies found that 88 percent of African Americans were in favour of education choice plans, with the highest support (95 percent) coming from families earning less than $15,000 a year. For parents whose children have long constituted a "captured market" and been forced to attend the most inferior schools, the various privatization proposals hold out the promise of providing access to quality education.

The white middle class takes flight

How do we explain this groundswell of interest? The answer is far from straightforward. Though the right to education is not guaranteed by the U.S. constitution, access to education has effectively become a universal entitlement. Moreover, many significant advancements in civil rights for racial minorities, the disabled, language minorities, and more recently gays and lesbians, have first been achieved in public education before spreading to other sectors of society. Schools in the U.S. are governed locally, and throughout the country communities increasingly look to their public schools for solutions to a growing list of social problems.

Yet so many schools are in such a lamentable state that the entire system is now under attack. Severe funding cuts in the 1980s forced many school districts to eliminate academic programmes (such as art, music and athletics), increase the number of students per classroom, and reduce access to services such as counselling. Fractious labour relations, decaying buildings and an array of social problems, many of which are related to impoverishment of the children they serve, have overwhelmed school personnel.

Such conditions have compelled many middle-class families to flee urban school districts and transformed many schools into institutions of last resort. African American and Latino students are grossly over-represented in these failing schools. So it may be only natural to find their parents increasingly open to voucher proposals.

KEYFIGURES, UNITED STATES

Total population (millions, 1999):	273
Adult literacy rate (1998)	99%
Gross enrolment ratio (1997):	
- Primary education:	102%
- Secondary education:	97%
- Tertiary education:	81%
Private share of expenditure on educational institutions, all levels (1997):	25%

Sources: World Bank, UNDP, OECD.

Fear, racial prejudice toward minorities, and the arrival of new immigrants have also contributed to the flight of the white middle class. States such as California, Florida and New York have experienced substantial increases in public school enrolment due to the immigration of large numbers of Asians and Latin Americans. As the demographics of the student population has changed, registered voters, typically older and disproportionately white, have been less willing to cover the costs of public education through tax increases.

The airline model and the future of schools left behind

Despite their many weaknesses, public schools continue to offer one of the only sources of mobility and social support to poor and working-class families. Under voucher schemes, elite schools may become even more selective as an increase in the demand for admission allows them to raise the cost of tuition and moves them even further beyond the reach of low-income families. And what will happen to those schools and students left behind? Funding is based largely on enrolment, so it seems unlikely that the undesirable schools will receive the resources needed to improve. The State of California's legislative analyst projects a major cut in public school funding if the children already in private schools receive vouchers and if five percent of those in the public system use vouchers to leave.

Shifting the burden of responsibility

The essential difference between the present situation and what is likely to occur after privatization is that individuals rather than government will bear responsibility for ensuring access to quality education. Advocates point to the example of the new airlines that were established shortly after the industry's deregulation in the 1980s. Most of the new airlines no longer exist, however, and those that do are widely seen as offering inferior quality albeit at a lower price. But the advocates still argue that new schools couldn't possibly be worse than the public ones now operating in certain districts. But unlike public schools, which are required to meet legally established educational standards (mainly teaching credentials and accessibility for students), there is no guarantee that private schools will be held to similar requirements.

© Tom Uhlman/AP/Boomerang, Paris

Children and parents rally in Dayton,Ohio, for the freedom to pick their schools.

The advocates seem to be gaining the political advantage. In such a climate, defence of public education must be based upon more than its potential to improve, but on evidence that this can in fact be done. Public education is in desperate need of reform, and those who value and appreciate its role in society must be at the forefront of efforts to hasten the pace of change, otherwise America's "one best system" could very well be terminated. ■

Edison's third way

In a less than a decade, a New York-based company has established a reputation for managing troubled public schools, but the venture is still struggling to make a profit

MARK WALSH

Associate editor of Education Week (U.S.)

An investment in knowledge pays the best return.

Benjamin Franklin, American statesman and scientist (1706-1790)

Benno C. Schmidt Jr. stunned many when he quit one of the most prestigious positions in academia in 1992 to help lead a controversial educational venture that had no guarantee it would ever open its first school.

Schmidt was lured from the presidency of Yale University by media entrepreneur Christopher Whittle to bring some educational prestige to what was then known as the Edison Project, a venture launched in 1991. The goal: to try new approaches in elementary and secondary education that Whittle believed would be as revolutionary as Thomas Edison's replacement of the candle with the electric light bulb.

Nine years later, Edison Schools Inc. is viewed as the leading company in the movement towards private management of public education in the U.S. It now manages 108 public schools serving some 57,000 students, up from 25 schools in 1997-98. Many are so-called charter schools, namely public schools that are largely independent of the traditional school districts and operate free of many state bureaucratic rules. They receive funding from the state government on a per-pupil basis and parents pay no tuition. But Edison also contracts with school authorities to manage traditional public schools using its educational model.

"Most people thought of this as a kind of experiment on the edge of the possible," says Schmidt, "and a lot of people are distrustful of how a private firm would operate public schools. But we've seen a broader and broader acceptance by public educational institutions that good, high-quality private firms have a lot to offer."

In many districts, authorities have turned over some of the worst performing schools to Edison. While the company has a well-oiled marketing machine, a number of school administrators have been attracted by Edison's all-encompassing expertise and bold approach. The company offers a complete package, which cost $40 million to develop. Its curriculum is regarded as rigorous, exceeding requirements of most states. School days are longer than normal, students take Spanish in kindergarten and can study for the International Baccalaureate. The schools have at least three computers per classroom, and students can take home a personal computer to work on projects and surf the Internet as well as to link parents and teachers.

The company has a touchy relationship with the country's two teachers' unions, which have been generally critical of private management. The unions' chief concerns are that the company uses relatively inexperienced teachers, and that the teacher turnover rate is high. The American Federation of Teachers (AFT) has paid particularly close attention to test scores and argues that the achievement record is not as rosy as the company paints it. "Some of their schools have improved and some have really struggled. There's no magic in being private," says Celia Lose, an AFT spokeswoman.

Despite criticism, Edison Inc. is confident. Enrolment has increased eightfold since 1996, revenue stands at $225 million, financial losses are shrinking ($37 million) and its stock has inched upward since the company went public in November 1999. While the company's priority is to get a firmer footing in the U.S. —it has to manage several hundred schools before realizing economies of scale— it will seek to expand internationally. "Edison genuinely represents what people in the U.K., especially Tony Blair, call a third way," says Schmidt. "It's not fully private, and not fully public." He notes that to many in Europe, privatization of public services has been an "all or nothing" proposition. It has meant taking a state enterprise "and converting it completely to private management," he says. "Edison offers more of a partnership with government." ■

Edison Schools Inc.

Team work and technology: a sampling of activities in an Edison school.

© Unext, Illinois

First-class diplomas are just a mouse click away.

Wiring up the ivory towers

Prestigious universities are forging alliances to conquer a share of the e-learning market and stand up to virtual competitors

BY ROBIN MASON

DIRECTOR OF THE OPEN UNIVERSITY'S MASTERS PROGRAMME IN OPEN AND DISTANCE EDUCATION (U.K.)

Just like airline companies, universities around the world are forming partnerships and consortia in response to the pressures of globalization. The World Education Market held in Vancouver last May was a timely sign: the fair, expressly organized to foster relations between universities, training providers, software companies and representatives from nations with large education needs, attracted participants from over 60 countries.

This race to "partner up" is fuelled by a number of factors. In most industrialized countries, government funding for higher education has decreased, forcing institutions to look for new markets either to subsidize campus programmes or just to remain viable. There is a growing need for lifelong learning as "jobs for life" vanish and the information society drastically reduces the shelf-life of almost any educational qualification. Technological developments, increasingly necessary for learners in all fields to master, offer ever more innovative tools for supporting e-learning.

For business, online learning is "the" new market opportunity, with the need for re-training and professional updating predicted to create an $11.5 billion industry by 2003. Business is better able to develop and maintain the technological infrastructure necessary to run large online systems and everyone, including the universities, recognizes that it takes robust telecommunications technology to deliver education and training on the scale demanded.

A host of companies has sprung up to help universities shape and package courses for online presentation, while network providers are jockeying for position to deliver online education.

The United States is the undisputed leader in the field, prompting governments in the U.K., Canada and Australia to commission hefty studies on the danger of national universities being eroded by U.S. ventures turned global. Canada and the U.K. are

TO KNOW MORE

● Robin Mason, Globalising Education: Trends and Applications, Routledge, 1998

2. CATERING TO DEMAND

in the early stages of setting up their own virtual universities. But what has become clear is that the conservative and labyrinthine decision-making processes which characterize most university procedures are being jolted by a race to get a share of the lifelong learning market.

So far, the most common approach for universities to break into the e-learning universe has been to develop courses specifically for a corporate partner or to form alliances among themselves. Universitas 21, a company incorporated in the U.K., is a network of 18 leading universities in ten countries. Earlier this year, it formed a joint venture with Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation to provide premium higher education programmes using new information technologies and learning methods. In October 2000, Stanford, Princeton, Yale and Oxford formed "The Big Four Alliance," aimed at offering courses in the arts and sciences to 500,000 alumni.

If the government would make up its mind to require for every child a good education, it might save itself the trouble of providing one. It might leave to parents to obtain the education where and how they pleased, and content itself with helping to pay the school fees of

Very often, prestigious universities have stayed clear of going fully online, seeing a danger to their brand name. Many are limiting their offerings to continuing education programmes and/or non-degree courses, and more often than not, they are aiming at the corporate market. One company, UNext.com, has partnered with first-class institutions such as the University of Columbia (U.S.) and the London School of Economics to create online courses marketed under the name Cardean University. Their target: the Fortune 500 companies as well as individual adults. They've managed to attract Nobel laureates to design courses and the universities receive royalties for their content. Other universities have formed spin-off for-profit companies specifically to develop online programmes. This facilitates the commercialization of software and other products, and is a way to take a commercial approach to continuing and professional studies without compromising the University's academic standing.

The most common approach for universities to break into the e-learning universe has been to develop courses specifically for a corporate partner

Then there are the freestanding for-profit virtual universities, which are arousing the ire of institutions that have prided themselves on a long history of public service. The most quoted examplar is Phoenix University, the largest private outfit in the U.S. Now owned by the Apollo Group, it operates the country's largest online programme with 12,200 students. The university tracks students' progress and contacts those who don't submit assignments on time or fail to enrol in subsequent courses. Many critics question Phoenix's blatant commercialization, but few doubt the university's impact on continuing professional development provision.

Although e-learning is in its infancy, its impact can already by gauged. New providers are coming on the market all the time and the trend is accelerating to the point of upsetting universities' virtual monopoly in educational accreditation. An Information Technology training course offered or accredited by Microsoft has undoubtedly become more valuable than a Bachelor of Science from a renowned university.

The more consumerist the approach of the education provider, the more what is taught is influenced by demand. MBAs dominate e-learning provision and IT courses are a close second. While the new consumer/learner demands flexibility, choice and just-in-time learning opportunities, suppliers will inevitably arise who are focused on meeting the demand at the expense of quality and value. And is the consumer really the best judge of what course material to choose? Education is a more complex "product" than toothpaste or washing powder. A totally consumer-driven education market is unlikely to be in society's best interests in the long term.

The commercialization of education usually goes hand-in-hand with desegregation: course design, delivery, tutoring, assessment and accreditation may be carried out by different organizations. Students might study courses or modules from different universities or providers and then put themselves forward for examination and accreditation by yet another institution. While most academics loathe marking assignments, they regard this scenario with horror, and blame commercialization for the demise of the "community of scholars" concept of a university. The death of the "course" has also been predicted, with learners—especially corporate and on-the-job learners—demanding short study modules. What then happens to the ability to get an overview of a field when learning consists of the student selecting a whole series of unconnected learning "bites"? Learners will be "zapping" between short sequences or presentations much as they do between television channels.

But while some faculty view e-learning with alarm, technology-based learning is where most of the pedagogical innovation is taking place in universities. Multimedia learning resources and interactive simulations are being developed for the web. Collaborative learning activities, new forms of online assessment and small group teaching technologies are making online courses more stimulating, interactive and attractive than many face-to-face taught courses.

Despite "doom and gloom scenarios," most moderate observers of the scene see a continued future for the campus university, especially at the undergraduate level, while e-learning will above all cater to adult, professional and independent learners. Some commercialization of education is good if it fosters innovation, concern for quality and responsiveness to consumer demands. But if some is good, more is not necessarily better! Not in education at least. ■

3. NOTES OF CAUTION

New Zealand: the price of the market model

The country with the most free-market public education system in the West is now trying to rescue schools caught in a downward spiral

EDWARD B. FISKE AND HELEN F. LADD

EDWARD B. FISKE, FORMER EDUCATION EDITOR OF THE NEW YORK TIMES, AND HELEN F. LADD, PROFESSOR OF PUBLIC POLICY STUDIESAND ECONOMICS AT DUKE UNIVERSITY (U.S.). CO-AUTHORSOF A BOOK ON NEW ZEALAND'S SCHOOL REFORMS, WHEN SCHOOLS COMPETE: A CAUTIONARY TALE (BROOKINGS, 2000).

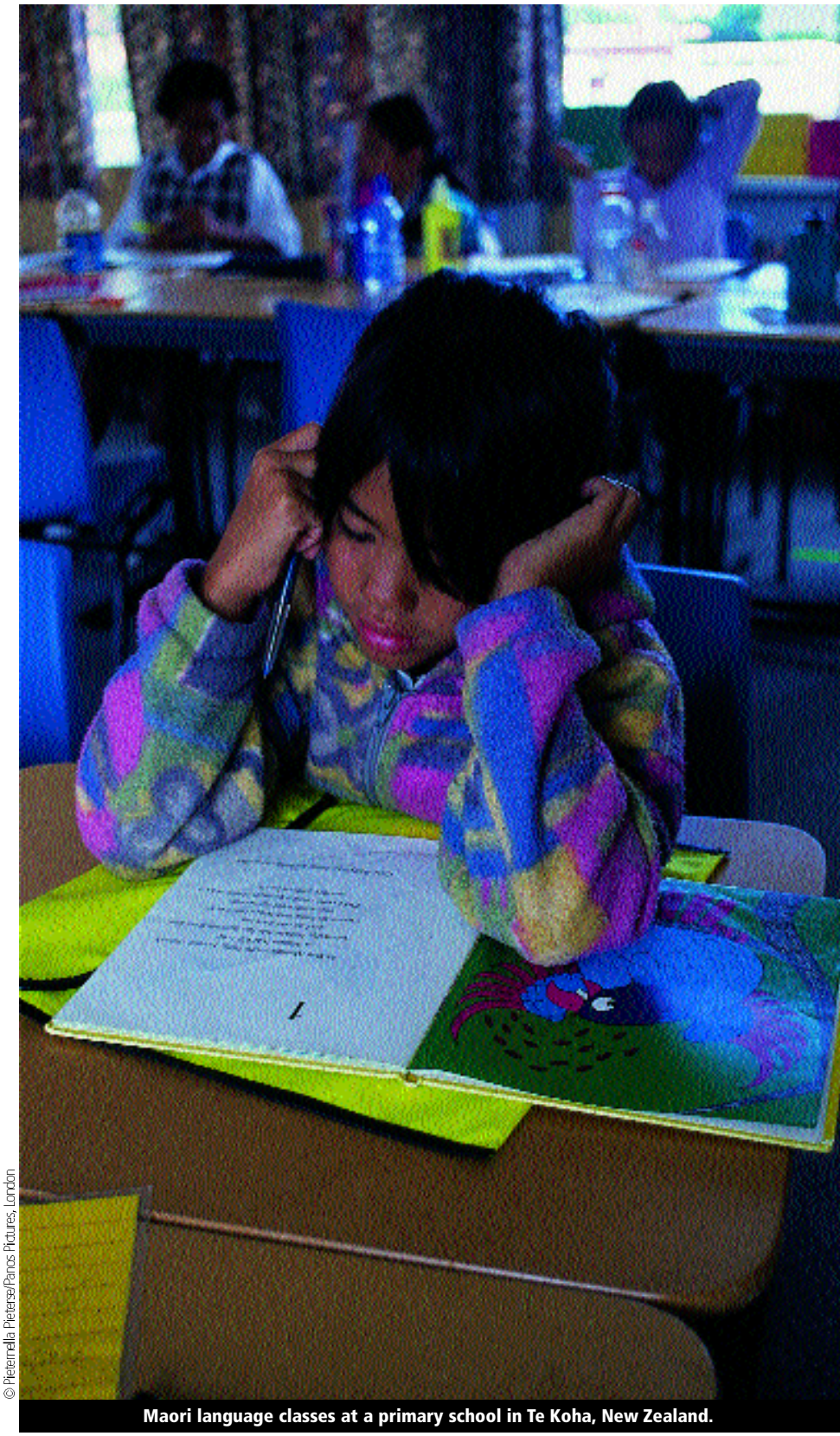
The case for bringing the ideas and values of the private sector to primary and secondary education sounds fine on paper. Give local schools operational autonomy. Then abolish geographical enrolment zones and allow parents to choose which school their child will attend so that schools have to compete to attract students. In the resulting educational "marketplace," schools will improve their teaching and student achievement records.

Such was the thinking that New Zealand applied to the running of its state education system in the 1990s under a series of legislative changes known as Tomorrow's Schools reforms. The reform plan was the boldest experiment with market-based education ever carried out by a developed country.

Overnight, the system goes local and parents take charge

What were the results? The answer is at best mixed. It was good for some schools and some students, but disastrous for other schools, many of which served disproportionate shares of disadvantaged students. As New Zealand policymakers now busily retreat from the reforms, their experience offers some warnings for other countries thinking about moving down the same road.

The application of market principles to the delivery of public education was a natural step for New Zealand. This island nation of 3.8 million people had gone through a serious economic crisis in the early 1980s that had left the country close to bankruptcy. In 1984 a new Labour government was elected that decided to break with tradition and restructure the country's economy around neo-liberal themes. By the end of the decade, the government extended the restructuring effort to the social sectors of the economy. First came the national health system, then housing and welfare. Education was next.



© Pieternella Pieterse/Panos Pictures, London

Maori language classes at a primary school in Te Koha, New Zealand.

3. NOTES OF CAUTION

In 1989, Parliament abolished the national Department of Education and turned control of primary and secondary schools over to locally elected boards of trustees, dominated by parents. Virtually overnight, one of the world's most tightly controlled public education systems became one of the most decentralized. The central government continued to fund the education system, negotiate teacher contracts and enforce accountability through an inspectorate system.

Innovation versus the downward spiral of low-performing schools

Two years later a new government controlled by the conservative National Party ratcheted the stakes up another notch. Parliament abolished neighbourhood enrolment zones and gave parents the right to choose which school their child would attend. Primary and secondary schools found themselves competing for students in an educational agora. Public relations and marketing skills became as integral to the job description of principals as knowledge of curriculum and the ability to manage a faculty.

Many schools prospered under the new arrangements, especially those serving middle and upper-middle class students. Such schools had the social capital among their parent bodies to elect boards of trustees with the governance, financial, legal and other skills needed to run an educational institution, and some principals with entrepreneurial instincts took full advantage of their new-found autonomy to offer innovative educational programmes.

The Gladstone Primary School in Auckland, for example, began offering a programme organized around the theory of "multiple intelligences" articulated by Harvard University psychologist Howard Gardner. "No one is restricting us," said Colin Dale, the principal. "The potential is now there to do whatever you want. It's all about meeting needs and performing. If you get it right, people will flock to you."

Self-governance did have its price. The workload of principals and teachers increased substantially and many schools serving large numbers of disadvantaged students found it difficult to muster boards of trustees with the requisite governance skills.

For their part, New Zealand parents enthusiastically embraced their new right to choose where their child would go to school. Substantial numbers of students began venturing outside their local neighbourhoods to attend classes. Their numbers included many Maori and Pacific Island students from low-income families who saw an opportunity to flee low-performing urban schools.

From the point of view of parents, moving up the scale in choice of school is understandable and even rational. But in New Zealand, parents judge the quality of schools by the ethnic and socioeconomic mix of their students. Schools with a preponderance of European students are seen as superior to those with large numbers of Maori and Pacific Islanders. In the new educational marketplace, schools serving predominantly white students have grown in size during the 1990s, while those serving large numbers of minority students saw their rolls decrease. They could not compete for either high quality teachers or motivated students. The cost of transportation and optional school fees have also limited minority access to the most desirable schools.

Although other countries might design a competitive system somewhat differently from New Zealand, the forces unleashed by parental choice are under any circumstances likely to push systems towards greater polarization. By definition, in any competitive environment some participants will be successful and others will fail. That's the way markets work. We observed situations in New Zealand where schools operating on a level playing field were engaged in vigorous competition for students that probably redounded to the benefit of both. The problem is that the playing field is not always level. Enrolment data show lower income and minority students are disproportionately represented among schools that are unable to compete. There has been an enhanced concentration in schools at the bottom of difficult-to-teach students—those from poverty-stricken homes, those whose English is weak, those with learning difficulties and those who are suspended from other schools for disciplinary reasons.

New Zealanders describe the loser schools as "spiralling" downward. Once they begin to fall behind in the educational marketplace, downward spiralling schools find their problems compounding and feeding on each other. Lower student rolls means fewer teachers, which means a less attractive academic programme, which means even fewer students. Schools become losers; so do the students and families served by them.

The return of the state and the need for policy safeguards

By the mid-1990s public pressure began building on the Ministry of Education, a policy-oriented successor to the abolished department, to assist these spiralling schools. The ministry began offering managerial assistance, then moved toward more direct intervention. By 1998 top ministry officials were conceding that the educational marketplace would never work for as many as a quarter of schools.

One may ask whether it is defensible, on moral, practical or other grounds, to organize the delivery of public education so that you know from the outset that a properly working system will seriously exacerbate the problems of some schools. The creation of losers might be justified if competition led to an overall improvement of the system as a whole and the losers would still be winners in absolute terms. Or it might be justified if the Ministry of Education, aware that competition leads inevitably to unsuccessful schools, stood ready with a safety net. Neither condition, however, was present in New Zealand.

The country's decade-long experience with market-based reform demonstrates there are no panaceas in school reform. The trick is to adopt reform strategies that will protect the positive values of self-governance and competition while minimizing their negative consequences through appropriate policy safeguards. ■

KEY FIGURES, NEW ZEALAND

Total population (millions, 1999):	4
Adult literacy rate (1998):	99%
Gross enrolment ratio (1997):	
- Primary education:	101%
- Secondary education :	113%
- Tertiary education:	63%
Private share of expenditure in educational institutions :	n.a.

Sources: World Bank, UNDP.

Offshore threats

The impending flood of offshore courses may do more than lure students away from the public system. It may shake a pillar of national cohesion, says Gajaraj Dhanarajan, head of the Commonwealth of Learning*

INTERVIEW BY CYNTHIA GUTTMAN

UNESCO COURIER JOURNALIST

Are online degrees offered by foreign universities eroding the position of national institutions?

The impact has not been significantly felt yet, because a large part of the population in developing countries cannot afford to pay for courses travelling via the Internet from offshore sources. Even when such courses are heavily subsidized, as is the case with the African Virtual University, the cost is prohibitive. An AVU course from Canada, the U.K. or the U.S. is said to be around $200-300 per credit. That's probably the monthly salary of an academic in one of the countries with an AVU site.

What about in the longer term?

Academic environments run the risk of being destabilized in countries where offshore courses are downloaded. Students who can afford these courses are the ones who have already enjoyed previous privileges, notably a much better secondary education. Offshore degrees provide yet another privilege: they're an attractive proposition for those wishing to get jobs abroad besides being prized by local employers. So two types of student communities might evolve: an underprivileged class that attends a local university and a privileged class that can use a brand-name "foreign" education. This is likely to create resentment. The local academic community could also become demoralized if it sees itself serving only the second best.

So there is a threat to national cohesion?

Yes. In many developing countries, higher education is seen as a key component of nation-building. I fear this is in danger of being damaged for a number of reasons including a mismatch between offshore curricula and local hopes of building national cohesion, maintaining cultural integrity and addressing local resource needs. What we are seeing with offshore courses is the dumping, at an international level, of products created for domestic consumption.

How much leverage do governments have in this context?

There is very little they can do without running into a string of criticism including accusations of erecting barriers to the free flow of information. Local legislation concerning quality and curriculum can be applied to foreign institutions in real space, but is much more difficult to do in cyberspace. Governments could tax those delivering the product, but ultimately the customer pays. Taxing the user is also difficult to justify because students could argue that they're already paying for a quality they can't get locally. Governments could take a stronger moral line, saying yes to a free market but stipulating that a significant part of the curriculum must address local human capital development needs. They have to be persuasive in presenting those arguments in global fora like the World Trade Organization.

How can local institutions improve their standing?

Local capacities have to be developed, and these include making education accessible to those who cannot study within campus walls. Online education is not the only solution. There are open universities in the developing world that do a very good job of taking knowledge to learners through a variety of methods but which are supported at the village level by mentors who can help students. These capacities ought to be developed. Universities in developing countries should become dual-mode institutions to cater to the off-campus population. If those capacities include e-learning, wonderful. But our aim should be to improve access to learning and to internationalize education. This does not mean making education a trade. The issue is too important. Commodifying education does not augur well for the cause of internationalizing education.

■

**The Commonwealth of Learning is an international organization to encourage the development and sharing of open learning and distance education knowledge, resources and technologies. For more information, see www.col.org*

Education is the art of making man ethical.

Georg Friedrich Hegel, German philosopher, (1770-1831)

© Alain Le Querrec, France

3. NOTES OF CAUTION

Money over merit?

Samik Lahiri, general secretary of the Students' Federation of India (SFI), one of the world's largest such organizations, raises the alarm over advancing commercialization

INTERVIEW BY UTPAL BORPUJAR

Journalist based in New Delhi

Key figures, India

Total population (millions, 1999):	998
Adult literacy rate (1998):	55.7%
Gross enrolment ratio (1997):	
- Primary education:	100%
- Secondary education:	49%
- Tertiary education:	7%
Students enrolled in private primary and secondary schools (1997):	26.1%

Sources: World Bank, UNDP, OECD.

When did the commercialization of education became a concern for the SFI?

SFI has been strongly protesting moves to privatize education since the early 1990s when the process of economic liberalization started in India. Since then education has come under severe threat due to the policies of successive governments bent upon following the World Bank's privatization agenda. While the share of higher education in the government's total education budget has gradually declined over the years, private investors have gained more and more access to the market.

Despite rules to monitor private institutions, there is in reality no government control over most of the private medical, engineering and other colleges mushrooming all over the country. Most of them have no infrastructure, offer poor quality education and charge very high fees that can't be afforded by even the middle class, let alone the poor.

What are the implications for students?

First, private investors are setting up large educational institutions where entry is based more on the capacity to pay or donate large sums of money than on merit. In recent years we have also seen the emergence of small time fly-by-night operators. They claim to charge lower fees and set up illegal institutions that are sometimes housed in one-room structures, like a dental college we came across near Agra,in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh. Many private institutions in states like Bihar do not even have the minimum number of teaching faculty required by government rules. Whenever there is an official inspection, they simply hire extra professors who disappear afterwards.

In clear violation of a Supreme Court order passed in the mid-1990s, some private institutions allocate places beyond stipulated limits to those who have money instead of giving opportunities to meritorious students. There were reports that during the most recent admissions to a private medical college in the southern Indian city of Manipal, the highest bidder paid Rs 26 lakhs ($58,000) for a place.

Even in government institutions, fees are being hiked to such an extent that meritorious students from poorer families are finding it harder to pursue their studies. Universities are now expected to raise 25 percent of their recurring expenditure through fees and other methods. We found that due to a cash-crunch, many government-run institutes were unable to upgrade their laboratories and syllabi.

Has commercialization improved the quality of education?

No. The overall quality of private educational institutions is abysmal, though there may be a few exceptions like the Pai group of educational centres operating in southern India. Our own studies found that some promoters of private educational institutes openly violate the laws of the land, primarily through the fact that they run their institutions in the name of trusts, meaning without

Against commercial education:students protest in New Delhi earlier this year.

a profit motive. Despite making huge profits through students fees, these private institutions submit records showing that they are not making any and claim that they're re-investing the money to set up more institutions.

What kind of public response has there been?

People are upset, but they don't have a forum to protest. Apart from the left, even mainstream political parties are not bothered about this. A large section of the media has failed to take up the issue and concerned students are not allowed to raise their voice. In fact, the government did not give permission to the SFI to hold a rally on the issue in New Delhi last September, but we organized demonstrations in most state capitals. In November, we plan to mobilize 100,000 students in Delhi to protest against the commercialization of education. ■

Beyond economics

Unless policymakers take a more all-round view of education, they risk sending their countries down the wrong path

YIN CHEONG CHENG

CENTRE FOR RESEARCHAND INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION, HONG KONG INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

Over the past decade, educational change in most countries has been driven by one imperative:survival in the global economy. This process has been particularly salient in the Asia-Pacific region following the drastic shock of the 1997 economic downturn. But in the current reform process, marked by speeding commercialization and economic preoccupations, other educational missions are being ignored,and countries risk paying a high price for their shortsightedness.

There's no denying that economic considerations are critical in today's world.Students have to acquire the knowledge and skills to survive and compete in the global economy, especially one which more than ever before prizes human capital. A high-quality labour force gives nations a cutting edge in global competition.Understandably, stressing economic returns in the current educational debate attracts private resources. But education has other functions that are the indispensable corollary of more balanced, equitable development. They deserve to be briefly explained.

The first is a social function: education has a role to play in facilitating social mobility and bringing about integration in often very diverse constituencies. It is at school that children learn how to form a broader set of relationships, to live together and become aware of belonging to a community. Linked to this is education's political function: schools are there to teach us civic attitudes, to make us aware of our rights and responsibilities —in essence, to become responsible citizens. The task is fundamental in light of democracy's advance in so many countries over the past decade or so. Then there is education's cultural function.Developing creativity and aesthetic awareness, accepting other traditions and belief systems while valuing our own are all part of the path towards fulfillment. Finally, education is a goal in and of itself. Schools help children learn how to learn and play a pivotal role in transferring knowledge from one generation to the next. I believe that all these facets of learning are critical for the long-term prosperity of our societies. In our globalized, interdependent world, these functions take on a more international character. Everywhere, education has a role to play in eliminating racial and gender biases, promoting global common interests, movements for peace, and greater international understanding.

Rising above short-term pressures to strike a harmonious balance

While education is widely recognized as the spine of the learning society, the complexity lies in striking a balance between these various functions. The commercialization of education that we are witnessing the world over inevitably pushes schools, educators, parents and policymakers to pursue short-term, market-driven outcomes. Lawyers, bankers and businessmen have an increasingly high profile in educational debates. Following Southeast Asia's downturn in 1997, they were influential in changing the academic mindset. In little time, emphasis has shifted from academic achievement to developing communication skills, creativity, adaptability. In and of itself, this is not necessarily regrettable. The problem is that these skills are all perceived to be at the service of a supreme economic value.

Sounder research will be required to analyze and assess where the current trends are leading us. It is increasingly recognized, however, that unless economic growth is accompanied by good governance, a fair sharing of benefits, better social and environmental protection and attention to culture, it will, sooner or later, lead to unrest. It is through education that this broad spectrum of concerns can be nurtured. Policymakers who have taken stock of this holistic mission unfortunately represent a minority in today's educational debates and reforms. Their foremost challenge is to manage commercialization, to rise above short-term pressures and to take a more ethical stance towards education, a long-term strategic view. ■

UNESCO is being looked upon as the forum through which to promote and uphold the primary and overriding responsibility of the State, to ensure the right to quality education for all.

Koichiro Matsuura, Director-General of UNESCO (1937-)

Garlic, knives and banners: football's racist faces

The terraces of some of Europe's biggest football clubs have become stomping grounds for racist abuse, though the problem stems far beyond match day

BY TIM CRABBE

PRINCIPLE LECTURER IN SPORT SOCIOLOGY AT BRITAIN'S SHEFFIELD HALLAM UNIVERSITY

English hooligans make themselves felt in Lille, France, during the 1998 World Cup.

Three days into England's new football season and Patrick Vieira, France's World Cup and Euro 2000 winning midfield player, is dismissed while playing for Arsenal against Liverpool, earning his second red card in as many matches. The British press is quick to speculate that he will quit the English game, invoking the player's own accusations that he has been subject to "racist" intimidation from players and officials alike. According to Vieira, he is being singled out for abuse not because he is black, but because he is French—a complaint previously made by expat footballers like Eric Cantona, Frank Leboeuf and Emmanuel Petit. Only months before, a defender playing for West Ham faced disciplinary charges after allegedly calling Vieira a "French prat" and joking that "he could smell the garlic" when the midfielder spat at him. "What a load of nonsense," commented West Ham manager Harry Redknapp at the time. "There is no way he should be punished. What for? For having a joke?"

The true colours of fans dancing with a swastika flag

In England, the cradle of football hooliganism, the debate over racism in football has evolved. Overt racism among supporters and abuse directed at black players, both of which flourished in the 1970s and 1980s, have declined steeply in recent years in the face of vociferous public campaigning, though residual prejudices against foreign players have evidently been unaffected. Elsewhere, in contrast, much less trivial manifestations of racism plague the game. Throughout much of Europe, football grounds have become hosts to deplorable displays of supporters' bigotry, providing outlets through sporting rivalry to attitudes that are either dormant or concealed in society at large.

The recent conviction of Ricardo Guerra for the murder of Aitor Zabaleta, a Real Sociedad fan from Spain's Basque region, is a case in point. Zabaleta's death came in the aftermath of the stoning of an Atletico Madrid supporters' bus after a cup tie played in San Sebastian, during which Atletico's notorious Bastion group of hooligans, of which Guerra was a member, had chanted "Fuera, fuera maricones, negros, Vascos, Catalanes, fuera, fuera" (Get out, get out, queers, niggers, Basques and Catalans) to the tune of the Spanish national anthem. While the official line is that Zabaleta was killed only because he followed a different football team, the public perception of the Bastion's political sympathies was reenforced during the return game when they were captured on film bouncing up and down with a swastika flag.

Several commentators have suggested this racial hatred can be explained by the influence of neo-Nazi and neo-fascist groups inside football grounds. Along with Atletico, extreme racism has resurged among fans of Real Madrid and Espanyol in Spain, Lazio and AC Milan in

Italy, Paris Saint-Germain in France and Red Star Belgrade in Yugoslavia. In Italy, Udinese's attempts to sign the Jewish player Ronnie Rosenthal were abandoned after anti-Semitic slogans were daubed on the club's office walls, while Lazio fans unfurled a banner reading "Auschwitz is your country, crematoria your home" along with swastikas prior to a game with local rival Roma.

The labelling of particular clubs or fans as prototype fascists or racists, however, is in fact deceptive. While Germany has one of the worst reputations for far-right influence amongst its fans, many claim that this image, fostered by the German media, does not accurately reflect reality. Professor Volker Rittner of the Sports Sociology Institute in Cologne for example, argues that "Nazi symbols have a provocative role; they break down taboos. But the point is not political—it is to get noticed and mentioned in Monday's newspapers." Even where there is evidence of politically motivated racist behaviour amongst fans, it is often unstable, contradictory and secondary to football-related enmities. During the World Cup Finals held in Italy in 1990, when Napoli fans abandoned the Italian national team to support their local Argentine hero Diego Maradona, "ultras" from northern Italy demonstrated their hostility towards Maradona, Napoli and the southern region by supporting any team playing against Argentina. As a result, the "racist" elements amongst northern fans had no problem cheering in passionate support of the black African team from Cameroon when they played Argentina—the then embodiment of all that the northerners detested.

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Race as a weapon in the arsenal of ritualized abuse

In short, the racism on display in European football matches is more often than not dependent on the traditions and historic rivalries within white fans' cultures. Here the concept of an "effective insult" proves useful: fans will tend to use the abuse that is most effective and pertinent, in an effort to cause the most harm and provocation. Supporters of English clubs who have rivalries with clubs from Liverpool regularly sing "I'd rather be a Paki than a scouse (Liverpudlian)" for the same reasons Italian fans throughout the north often refer to fans and players of southern clubs such as Napoli as "blacks." In each of these cases, the effective insult is chosen on the basis of racial outcasts despised by both groups of fans, with the obvious aim of making the insult as hurtful as possible. To state a preference for the racial category "Paki" over the white identity of the "scouser" might be seen to add venom to the insult, while the association of southern Italians with "blackness" plays with internal insecurities relating to the region's proximity to Africa.

These insults only work because of the stigma that these racial groups still suffer in the minds of large swathes of white European society. As such, race often stands on the sidelines, ready to be mobilized in circumstances where it is deemed appropriate within the ritualized abuse of a football game rather than forming the political core of fans' identities. The fact that many of the Italian ultras' chants are adapted from traditional communist and fascist songs is, in itself, no more evidence of political sympathies than the extensive use of hymn tunes among British fans is evidence of ecclesiastical affiliation.

Comparisons between the insults levelled in football grounds across the world only goes to prove that racism emerges against a backdrop of shared prejudices among supporters. In Brazil, for instance, where many fans are from ethnic groups who are themselves marginalized and discriminated against, racist abuse is rare (and is substituted by sexist derision). In England, the success of black players has shifted prejudice to the kind of race-fuelled denigration mentioned above or to the xenophobic "humour" endured by Vieira. In Eastern Europe, and to some extent in Germany and Italy, a comparative lack of black players has left racist insults of these footballers as a potent weapon in supporters' armoury of abuse.

The spectre of racism in the football ground certainly is appalling, but its roots lie neither in far-right factions nor in the particular characteristics of fans. Violent footballing antagonism is the circumstance, but European society is the cause. ■

Ducking the issue

FIFA's Executive Committee responded to the incidents in Spain and Italy by declaring that it "vigorously condemns these public demonstrations of racism. This type of behaviour, whether visible on the pitch, the terraces or outside the stadium,is unacceptable." While this may be a laudable development, such statements do not disguise the lack of action against football administrators such as the president of the Turkish team Trabzonspoor, Mehmet Ali Yilmaz,who called the black English striker Kevin Campbell a "cannibal" and "discoloured," forcing him to go on strike before he was transferred to the English team Everton. ■

Trouble in Strasbourg

For the manager and directors of Strasbourg's Racing Club, the season could not have started in a worse fashion. Following a string of bad results, an estimated 50 fans of the club in France's Alsace-Lorraine region barracked manager Claude le Roy and grunted like monkeys at two of the club's African players. Days later, a wall of the club's stadium was adorned with a swastika and the words "Le Roy, dirty Jew." The Racing directors immediately filed a complaint for inciting racial hatred against the suspected culprits, sparking an investigation by local prosecutors. ■

© Bassignac-Turpin/Gamma, Paris

Victory euphoria in France at the end of the 1998 World Cup.

ETHICS

Garlic, knives and banners:

A TRICOLOUR TRIUMPH?

France's recent footballing successes have been hailed as victories over racism, but discrimination lingers on

BY TIM CRABBE

PRINCIPLE LECTURER IN SPORT SOCIOLOGY AT BRITAIN'S SHEFFIELD HALLAM UNIVERSITY

Writing in the liberal English national newspaper *The Guardian* after the French World Cup victory in 1998, Nick Fraser suggested that "no man or woman really believed in a multicultural France… French people probably merely wanted foreigners to be more like themselves."

His remark seemed to fly in the face of France's cup-winning exuberance. Just as major sporting tournaments offer some of the last spaces in which notions of identity and nation can be ritually expressed and celebrated, victory can also seem to breach, or even dissolve, racial differences within a country. And the French national team's achievements in winning the World Cup and Euro 2000 were widely credited as such a triumph over traditional, culturally homogenous nationalism.

The French national team which achieved these feats displays an incredible diversity, with many of its stars born outside of metropolitan France, including Marcel Desailly, Patrick Vieira and Lilian Thuram. Others like Youri Djorkaeff, Thierry Henry, the talismanic Zinedine Zidane and the Championship Final scorers Sylvain Wiltord and David Trezeguet, would qualify as what France's Jean Marie Le Pen, leader of the extremist National Front party, would call "Français de souche récente," meaning that such players are not "real" Frenchmen because their parents were recent migrants.

French Sports Minister Marie Georges Buffet stated in the aftermath of the Euro 2000 victory that the multi-ethnic side proved France had created a harmonious society "that could do great things together." The prominent presence of Arab and black citizens among the celebrating crowds in the capital appeared to back Buffet's point, especially given that the French had previously suburbanized urban poverty and largely confined its immigrant populations to the desolate *banlieue* ring surrounding Paris.

Notions of diversity, however, can still be seen as little more than a style of nationalism that assimilates (rather than excludes) newcomers and insists on one universal sovereign identity. What mattered in the victory party was that Arabs and black citizens were cheering for a France whose identity had already been secured in their absence. Deeper patterns of discrimination had certainly not been resolved.

Paris' racially stratified geography was once again apparent the morning after, as the same Arab and black citizens lauded as symbols of a new united France returned to their homes on the outskirts of the city. Meanwhile, the multicultural band of players who won the Euro 2000 trophy have now returned to luxury homes in Italy, England and Germany where they play their club football—managed by white coaches, paid by white directors and watched by white spectators.

The enduring stereotype of brain versus brawn

The pretext for these sporting hierarchies may well be the culture of Europe's former colonial powers, in which white settlers ruled indigenous "coloured" populations on the basis of the supposedly greater rationality of white people as against the sensuality, lack of emotional restraint or intelligence of the "native." The continuing power and resonance of such notions were reflected in the interpretation of the outcome of Euro 2000 by the left-wing French daily, *Libération*, which claimed that "France's victory, its secret, is without doubt based on the winning combination of two styles—physical and technical." Sadly, the metaphor 'physical = black, technical = white' is only thinly disguised within such analyses, which do little to move beyond the racial differences implicit within the concept of

The price of a good read

The price of books in recent years has pitted small independent bookshops against the big chains, supermarkets and the Internet. But what is in the customer's best interest?

LUCÍA IGLESIAS KUNTZ

UNESCO Courier JOURNALIST

The end-of-year holidays are nearing. Imagine you have decided to give books as presents to all your friends and relatives, who are interested in just about everything. The decision is made, but where should you buy them? The standard choice is your local bookshop. There you will probably find a professional bookseller who will be able to recommend the most interesting books for each of your friends, tell the difference between a paperback and a pocket edition, and order from the publisher or distributor any book he or she does not have in stock.

If you live in France, Spain, Germany or any of the other six European Union countries that have a single-price policy for books, it will cost you exactly the same whatever bookshop or department store you go into looking for the cheapest price. And if you are a good customer, the bookseller may give you a five percent discount, which is usually the maximum allowed under the fixed-price laws.

This system is founded on two basic principles: that the same book should cost the same wherever it is bought, whether in the centre of Berlin or the only shop in a tiny Bavarian village, and that unlike shoes and clothes, the price will stay the same all year round because seasonal discounts are not allowed. Under this arrangement, the publisher usually sets the price of the book, giving the bookseller a profit margin of about 30 percent.

But if you live in Belgium, Sweden or the United Kingdom (where book prices were deregulated in 1995), you will find big differences from shop to shop because the booksellers themselves can set the prices. Although this seems at first sight to benefit the reading customer, the book trade is divided over it. In a world of disappearing national borders, transnational authorities such as the European Union are therefore seeking a degree of standardization which, while obeying the laws of competition, is fair to everyone.

The advocates of the fixed-price system hold up Germany as an example. With its 7,000 or so bookshops and more than 1,200 publishers, it is one of the driving forces in the print word. Or France where, unlike the film industry's dependence on government aid, publishing is self-sufficient. In both countries, all those involved in the book trade—authors, publishers, distributors and booksellers—ardently defend the fixed-price system. Similar attitudes can be found in Spain, where the government has deregulated discounts on textbooks for the current school year, unleashing noisy protests from writers, publishers and booksellers.

The French publishers' magazine *Livres Hebdo* reports that in the United Kingdom, where both systems have operated over the past decade, five years of deregulation have seen the price of books rise 16 percent, far more than the nine percent rise in the cost-of-living. One result of this, the magazine says, has been increased book sales in bookshop chains and department stores, where the person who sells you a book one day may be switched to the cosmetics counter the next.

Under a free-pricing system, the law of supply and demand will immediately affect prices, since publishers mark up their best-sellers to compensate for losses from the discounts handed out by supermarkets. The temptation becomes strong just to publish things that will sell easily and quickly, with a resulting loss of diversity. Furthermore, for every 200 books published there is rarely more than one best-seller, and it is not unusual for these to keep on turning up in the catalogues of the same handful of publishers—namely those who can afford to pay huge advances to the most famous authors and buy the most expensive foreign rights.

"A system where there is competition over prices only works for the best-selling books: the rest are seen as 'bad quality'," says Markus Gerlach, a German expert on book prices. "This argument is quite unacceptable when it comes to a book of poetry or an essay."

Of course books are not the only products with fixed prices. In virtually every country, cigarettes, medicine and newspapers are as well. "Books are a cultural product and as such they deserve every protection we can give them, especially as they are now threatened by things such as pirating and illegal copying," says J. Ryba, who runs a bookshop in Israel.

But let's continue our book-buying expedition. If you have a credit card and an Internet connection, you can order ▶

© Henri Zerdoun, Paris

Horizons widen with a book on a Parisian rooftop.

your books from one of the many online bookshops, which will send the books to your home. You will probably have to pay the shipping charges and trust the efficiency of the postal system, but the advantages are clear: you can buy the books without leaving your home or office from businesses that are open round the clock every day of the week. And in theory, as in Jorge Luis Borges' *Library of Babel*, all the world's books are just a mouse-click away.

And what about the prices? *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, the first book in British author J.K. Rowling's series which is enchanting the young and not-so-young on every continent, costs 5.79 euros in France (roughly $4.80), 9.71 in Spain (for the Spanish edition—it costs 10.28 in Catalan) and 14.31 in Germany, according to data compiled at the end of October 2000 from various online bookshops. All these countries have a fixed-price system, which does not necessarily lead to cheap books. On the other hand, a book can cost less in Marseilles, where prices are fixed, than in Brussels, where they are not.

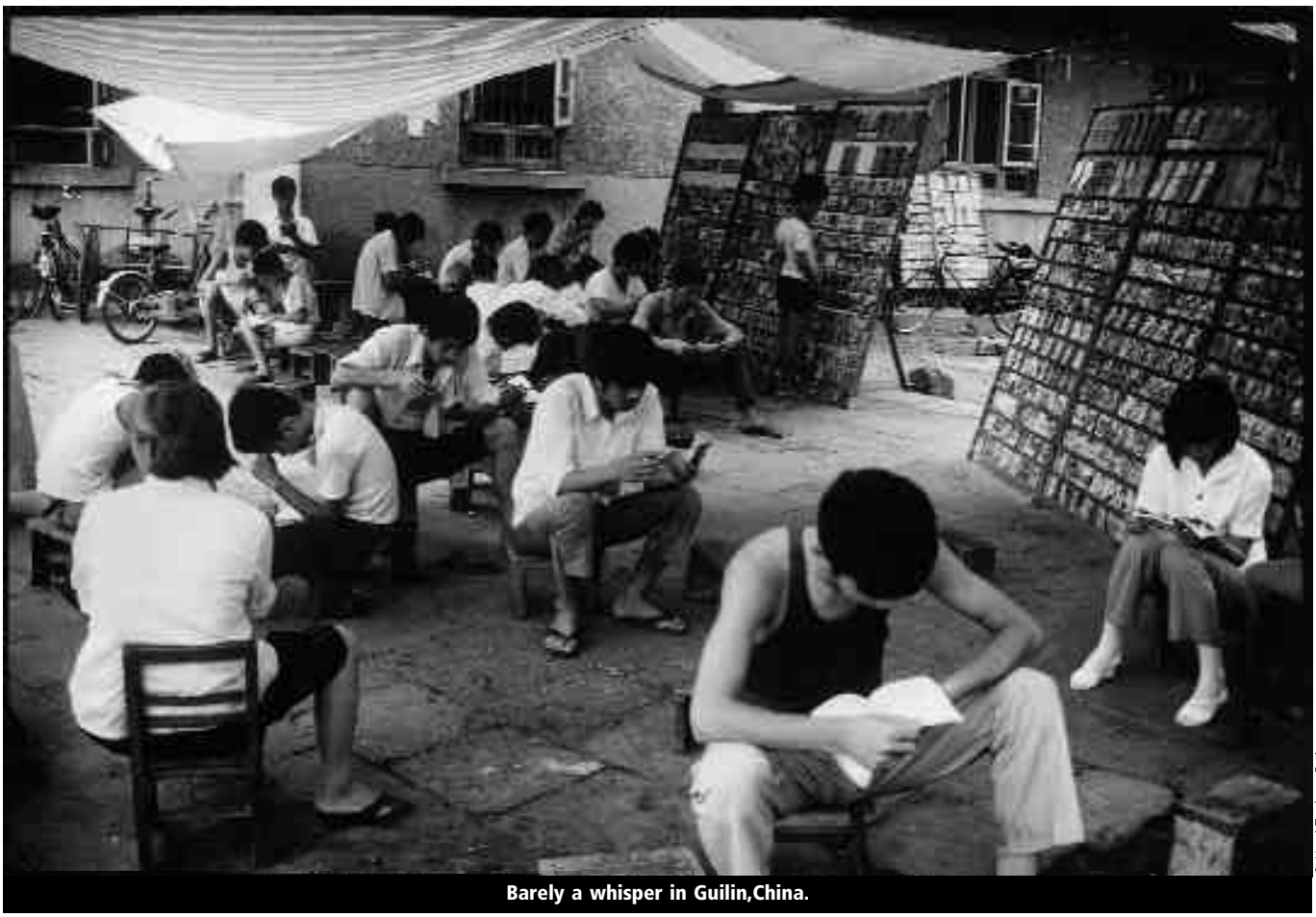
"Books are a cultural product and as such they deserve every protection we can give them"

Alongside supermarkets, actual and virtual bookshops, there is a third way to buy a book. If you belong to a book club, such as France Loisirs in France, the Círculo de Lectores in Spain or Bertelsmann Buchclub in Germany (all of which, incidentally, are owned by Bertelsmann), you can get quite cheap hardback books to give as gifts. But you will have to forget about the new Harry Potter book, the last winner of the Goncourt Prize or a new revised translation of *Don Quixote*, since such clubs have to wait at least nine months before they can offer the latest books for sale. Their catalogues are slim too, because publishers are unwilling to take the risk of releasing a book unless sales are pretty much guaranteed. Such clubs may sell carefully chosen books quite cheaply, but they can prove an annoyance after a while because you have to buy a minimum number over periods of up to two years.

Lastly, the other factor that can make your holiday purchases cheaper or dearer is tax. If you live in Sweden or Denmark, book prices may not be very expensive, but you will have to add a 25 percent sales tax, something that does not exist in the United Kingdom, Ireland and Norway.

So what is the best way to buy your books? There is no single answer. Do you want to give best-sellers, books about current affairs, reference books, original works or translations? Do you want prose or poetry? Full or abridged versions? Complete works or anthologies? Hardback or paperback?

Whatever price you pay, dear reader, the future of books is in your hands. Enjoy them. ■



Barely a whisper in Guilin, China.

© Henri Zerdoun, Paris

All eyes on the reality game

A new television genre has won huge audiences across the world. Despised by some, adored by others, reality shows play upon the paradoxes of modern society—but at what cost?

BY IVAN BRISCOE

UNESCO COURIER JOURNALIST

The Red Room in the U.S. Big Brother house, where contestants communicate via camera with the programme's producers.

N[illegible]are travelling across Spain in a[illegible].T[illegible]oles will be locked in a house in[illegible]Germans have been invited to sli[illegible]rn their lost weight in gold. A seem[illegible]mundane set of events, watched over by cameras and transformed into primetime television by the fact that everyone must work together though only one can win.

Reality may have perplexed philosophers and scientists for centuries, but in the jargon of modern-day television it has become a surefire way to entice the restless viewer. Across Eastern and Western Europe, North and South America, programmes devised on the basis that a "real" set of events involving "ordinary" people is unfolding—with cash prizes—have defied the industry's rules of thumb. Place ten unknown men and women in a locked villa in Spain under the gaze of 29 cameras, and the result is unexpected: 12 million people, a third of the nation's population, tuned in to watch.

Everywhere the small-screen formula of constant surveillance, money-driven competition and confinement has travelled, it has triumphed. In the United States, *Survivor*—featuring 16 contestants marooned on a sweltering Malaysian island and forced to eat grubs—simply overwhelmed all other summer programming, picking up 50 million viewers. A sister show in Brazil did likewise. Some 15 countries, meanwhile, have adapted the Dutch programme *Big Brother*, launched in 1999, in which ten people inhabit a house, converse, complot, and with the help of viewers' votes thin down over several months to a final winner. An estimated 300 million people have now seen the show; those veterans of the Spanish villa are already stars, contributing their particular mystique to the market of celebrity tie-ins through a video-game and auction of their favourite blankets.

"We created a new genre where we proved that ordinary people can be very interesting as characters, and where next-door people can do much more than everyone expected they could," declares John De Mol, the Dutch head of Endemol Entertainment and inventor of *Big Brother*.

For muttering critics and offended bishops, however, this new genre was a case of television sinking to a misanthropic low. While some agreed with De Mol that his show was consensual, competitive fun and excellent fodder for what American producers term the water cooler—the place in the office where staff gossip—opponents found only voyeurism and degradation. In ▶

© Frank Augstein/AP/Boomerang, Paris

Big Brother fans in Cologne, Germany, welcome their favourite contestants back to "real" life.

Germany, government ministers suggested the programme could be declared unconstitutional. Bernard Crick, biographer of the author George Orwell, despaired at a fulfilled prophecy. People "are simply depoliticized by cultural debasement, dumbed down, kept from even thinking of demanding fair shares," he wrote of Orwell's satire in *1984*, the novel that invented *Big Brother*. The show, he suggested, offered the same glitzy "prolefeed."

Intimate troubles under the glare of spotlights

So many viewers and such attacks would suggest that cameras and humans have been striking up a new relationship. "Viewers come from all social classes, even culturally very high ones," argues Ignacio Bel, a professor in information rights in Madrid. "It comes down to a morbid fascination, to an unhealthy curiosity." When the American channel Court TV briefly ran a show in which criminals confessed their murders on camera, the concerns seemed fully justified. Watch *Big Brother*, however, and privacy fears may be allayed. For a start, the participants *want* to be there: their fear is not exposure but anonymity, a kind of individual fade-out. And though much of the appeal centres on the promise of spying a saucy moment—sex is always being talked about, though rarely had—the truth is that the viewer's diet is less salacious. In the British version, contestants overslept, tended chickens, photocopied their anatomy, and decried the utter tedium of living on television without watching television. Rather than intrusive, the antics were just excruciatingly banal.

But look again, and the same lack of action can take on a different meaning. Nothing much happens, no-one emits an even remotely interesting opinion, but the tell-tale reality TV gesture, the quick eye-flick, registers the nearest camera. Each conversation, vacuous as it may be, treads a perilous line between self-expression, impressing housemates (who nominate each other for eviction), and currying favour with millions of sofa-bound viewers. The effect is akin to a public relations assault course. "It appealed to the psychologist in me," says 39-year-old Nidi Etim from Manchester, England. "Watching how they all interacted, who were the natural leaders, how they coped with the nominations."

At the heart of reality shows' popularity are exactly these interpersonal conflicts—the same force which animates traditional drama, soap-operas and talk-shows. Indeed talk-shows are among the closest relatives of reality TV, allowing "ordinary" people to thrash out their most intimate troubles under the glare of studio lights. But the new genre has a different focus. Cameras are mounted on an island or in a house, and a mini-society is invited in. Viewers pry on events, monitor reactions, assess behaviour. Instead of an individual's tale, or a daily life, the show is about the society's evolution, the disintegration of an artificial assembly via a period of co-operation towards a final prize-winner.

"The best mixture of fiction and reality that has existed until now," insists Elizabeth Lopez, producer of *Gran Hermano* for Spain's Tele5. The shows may be contrived (the producers of the U.S. *Big Brother* tried to bribe dull contestants $50,000 into making way for a "sexy" newcomer), but as Lopez says, the participants "write their own scripts." For many viewers, the struggle is all too recognizable. It is the balance between staying on the show, getting others off the show, and preserving at least a façade of solidarity. It is a "script" that the modern workplace and family are founded upon—battling to be first but staying popular. In Internet chat forums, the debate centres on who is sincere, who is "playing Miss Cool," who is the villain: in short, how each person responds to the challenge. Add cameras and excessive stage management, says social psychologist Peter Lunt (see interview opposite), and the stakes get even higher. Contestants are not just playing with each other, but with the very nature of living in a world dominated by the emotions, language and images coined by the mass media.

With it has come a new kind of celebrity. Graduates from the school of 24-hour surveillance such as Holland's Bart Spring and U.S. *Survivor* victor Richard Hatch, a gay corporate trainer, have soared into fame's dizzy heights—Spring has even launched his own logoed clothing range. Rather than offer perfect teeth, the new stars glitter with ordinariness: they are people one could know before fame won them the services of bodyguards and image consultants. Non-stop availability of many shows on the Internet, gossip sites, public voting, even the chance to e-mail participants, reinforces this democratic attraction. Reality TV appears to be under viewers' control even as it trumpets media power.

The cynical appeal of a staged life

Following its early successes, the mix of ceaseless documentary and game-show is spawning in a frenzy, confining volunteers in buses (De Mol's new show *The Bus*), locking them to possible mates (*Chains of Love*, De Mol again) or chasing them round cities (the extremely bizarre game at www.realityrun.com). "Any given success is overproduced like mad by imitators," says Todd Gitlin, a leading thinker on the media from New York University.

All harmless, say the show's producers. No blood is spilt, and no-one ends up poorer. Yet the loops connecting television and society are difficult to untangle. It may be fun to watch men and women stumble through the hardships with a fat lens over their shoulder, but is this not a case of television spreading its empire? And in so doing, is television imposing its own shorthand on the "real" world—its typologies, quick characterizations, game-show dynamics and ad breaks?

"I suspect that the greatest flavoring of life that comes from these shows is a kind of knowing cynicism," says Gitlin, "an embrace of the idea that everything is staged, that feelings are shallow, that the difference between life and simulation is insignificant." Not a voyeuristic hell then, but a televised format to daily life: that may be reality TV's main message. Or, as one man said of his *Big Brother* housemates: "we're so close … well, I feel we are." ■

All eyes on the reality game

INSIDE THE EMOTION MACHINE

Peter Lunt, a social psychologist at University College London and expert on the impact of television, pins the vogue for "reality" on changes in public emotional life

INTERVIEW BY I. B.

Do you see reality shows as a new television genre, or something that has evolved from previous programmes?
Reality television seems to have two different origins. One of them is the changing form of the talk-show, which from a very gentle format based on celebrities' public relations evolved via presenters like Phil Donahue and Oprah Winfrey in the United States into something that shifted interest from the everyday life of a celebrity to celebrating everyday lives.
Take the programma *Queen for a Day* as an example. This was a gameshow in the U.S. in the 1960s for middle-class housewives, who would file in the studios and be selected on the basis of their hardships: the people who had the most heartrending and difficult stories got to tell them to the audience, there was a vote, and the most worthy person was crowned Queen for a Day, and given all sorts of presents. It was a momentary reversal of social status, like putting the ordinary in the position of the king, which was done in medieval fairs and tournaments.
But to understand reality television, you also have to look at another genre, which is fly-on-the-wall documentary. In the 1960s, especially in Britain, this formed part of a cultural trend towards representing ordinary lives in cinema and television. And what you see there is a movement from celebration to something closer to scrutiny or surveillance.

But in contrast to fly-on-the-wall documentary, the presence of cameras in these new shows is absolutely crucial.
That is very important. Compared to previous shows, the new programmes have a much more managed feel. *Jerry Springer* [a U.S. talk-show] is a good example of this format. A first person comes on and is given lots of time to discuss an intimate problem—everything is quite calm. Then there's a gradual build-up of tension as other people are levered into the process. Then the people who come much later get much less time, leading much more intensely to an emotional eruption. The idea is that we've lost the ability to express ourselves, and that it's only in these carefully structured and managed public spaces that we can do this. You can see similar structuring elements in other reality shows. There is the inevitability of voting, an underlying push in the process that is highly ritualized.

Are you saying it is increasingly difficult to express emotions without some kind of intervention?
I'm not making radical arguments that we're completely transformed in our emotional life, though some thinkers have argued just that. The most I'd want to say is that this new mode of public expression and scrutiny of emotions is of central importance to how we think about ourselves and experience our emotions. The appeal of these programmes is very much based on that.

How do you explain the success of these shows in so many different countries?
I am inclined to link this to the globalization of culture. The new kinds of global social relations are precisely formulated through mediation, through business, through travel, and are not grounded in the traditional collective social forms. The same goes for work, which is no longer a life-long career but requires flexibility, adaptability and the construction of teamwork within organizations. What we now know is that we all live in these sorts of artificially constructed relations—which are not artificial anymore, but have become our reality.

How do you interpret the connection between these programmes and new technologies, many of which seem to undermine people's privacy?
There's been a lot of vague talk recently around issues of privacy. In the case of e-commerce, for instance, everyone knows that companies have a lot more information about them. So there's something being worked through here about this extraordinary explosion of information about individuals, and what this implies for how they can live and be private, expressive individuals. The programmes stand I think as a metaphor for that—and no more. The shows work because they push these buttons, though they definitely don't provide any interesting analysis of the question. ■

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In Germany, Jana and Juergen go to their bedroom for the first time in the Big Brother house.

"When you write, you give your version of reality."

Maryse Condé: grand dame of Caribbean literature

The celebrated author speaks openly of her new book, passion and politics with Elizabeth Nunez, a leading literary light from Trinidad

EN:I was very moved by a talk you gave two years ago about growing up in Guadeloupe and thinking of yourself as no different from a French person. Could you talk about why it was important for you to go to Africa?

MC: Elizabeth, I remember when I took you to a restaurant in Guadeloupe how surprised and shocked you were to see that all the cooks and waiters were white, French people. So imagine what it was like growing up in Guadeloupe some years back. The teachers in the schools were French. The priests, when we went to Mass with our families, were white. We lived in a completely white, French environment. It seemed normal to me. I did not ask any questions. Of course, when I looked at my face in the mirror I could see that it was black, but for me, colour was totally unimportant. I felt I was exactly like the people around me, that is to say, French and white. Then when I went to France I discovered that the colour of my skin meant something. It was not an accident that I was black. There was a deep difference between me and the people whose skin was white. I had to go to Africa to discover the meaning and importance of that difference.

EN:And what did you discover?

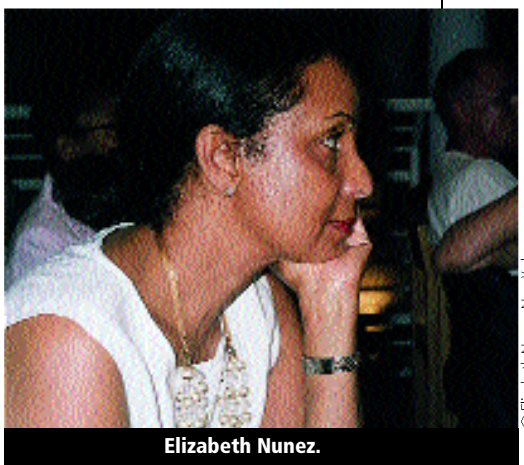
MC: At the beginning I thought the difference was that black people had a common culture that was different from the culture of French people. I believed that all black people were united by a common origin, a common history. We were basically one people divided by the evils of slavery. I, who was born in Guadeloupe, was separated from the people in Guinea, where I was in Africa,simply because of the slave trade.

EN:Do you think differently now?

MC: I made an important discovery in Africa: I did not share the same language as the people in Guinea. We did not eat the same food—this may seem trivial to you, but it is important. We did not dress the same way, we did not enjoy the same type of music, we did not share the same religion. In a few months, I found myself terribly isolated. I could not even communicate with my Guinean husband. So I made a second discovery:race, in fact, is not the essential factor. What is important is culture. As I did not share the culture of the Guinean people, of the African people, I left Africa,and, as a result, my marriage ended.

EN: Then would it be fair to say that culturally there are now more similarities between you and your husband, Richard Philcox, though he is white and British, than there were between you and your first husband, though he was black and African?

MC: When I met Richard twenty years ago, I was in my period of political activism and I could not see myself with a white man.My children,also, were very nationalistic and so they were shocked and disturbed that I would be involved with a white man. But eventually I came to understand that the colour of one's skin does not matter. I found that a white man was closer to me than my first hus-



Elizabeth Nunez.

Maryse Condé: grand dame of Caribbean literature

band, even closer to me than the majority of the people I knew. It is a matter of understanding: in a word, love. Marriage should not be viewed as part of a political agenda. It concerns the feelings and personal choices of two people.

EN: To return to the time when you left Africa, did you go back to Guadeloupe or to France?
MC: One has to make a living, so I went to France, though it was difficult there for me to find a job. But in France I immersed myself in the Guadeloupean and Martiniquan society living as a person in exile. Five years later, I went back to Guadeloupe.

EN: So what are your thoughts now about Africa? Do you sometimes feel ashamed of Africa when you hear stories of the corruption there? I often think that a cruel joke is being played on us today. Just as we are beginning to restore our pride in our rich African heritage, we are being bombarded with media reports about the corruption that seems to be rampant in Africa.
MC: I lived for twelve years in Africa. I must confess they were the most difficult years of my life. I was in Guinea and Ghana. One cannot deny the corruption of the régimes there. The people in those regions are suffering from the evils of their rulers. They are dying of hunger and disease. We have to face the fact that there is a lot of evil and hardship in Africa. But it should not lead us to conclude that Africa is inferior. It took years for European countries to arrive at democracy. Even now many of them have not achieved it. France, for example, is constantly being ripped apart by strikes and riots. So why should we be ashamed of the problems of Africa? They are aggravated by neocolonialism, by the lack of education for the people. This situation is the consequence of many years of colonialism, of independence that happened under the worst possible conditions. So I am not ashamed at all. Africa is trying hard to find solutions. I believe that one day it will.

EN: In your novel The Last of the African Kings you seem to satirize those middle-class African Americans who speak only in glowing terms about the African people and are critical of those who focus on the corruption that exists there. You wrote about a fictitious "prestigious black college in Atlanta where duty towards one's race was taught as devoutly as science and literature."

Leaving the church in Sainte-Luce, Martinique. Taken at the start of 20th century.

MC: Those African Americans who think this way are simply trying to find a way to hide their deep inferiority complex. They are ashamed of Africa as it is today, and they prefer to lie about the corruption and evil there. Let's face it: Africa has been robbed of its grandeur, of its power, of its magnificence. If we keep having the kind of discourse that conceals these painful facts, we will have an incomplete view of Africa. It is time we realize that we have a duty towards the suffering of our people. I am not interested in fighting for reparation for slavery or for financial aid. I am fighting

to find a solution that I can give to the people of Africa who are in despair, who need to find a way to restore faith in themselves. To quote [Jamaican black nationalist] Marcus Garvey, "I would like to teach the black man to find beauty in himself." The problem for me is not fighting white people who are bad and evil, but fighting our own people who are bad and evil.

EN: Yet you write a lot about slavery, which I find unusual for a Caribbean writer. Caribbean people seem to sweep such stories under the rug. We seem to want to think well of the "mother country," of the Europeans. Recently, a British expatriate reviewer in Trinidad, bristling under the criticism of colonialism in my latest novel Bruised Hibiscus, implied that I had bitten the hand that had fed me. I was shocked by the silence that followed her review, even from my family. No one stood up to say the obvious—that it was I who had fed the British through slavery and colonialism. What do you hope to achieve with the stories you tell about slavery?

MC: People often ask me for whom am I writing. The answer is I am writing for myself. I write about slavery, Africa, the condition of black people throughout the world because I want to order my thoughts, to understand the world, and to be at peace with myself. I write to try to find answers to the questions I ask myself. Writing for me is a type of therapy, a way to be safe and sound.

EN: So you don't have an instructive goal in mind?

MC: No, not really. It would be too easy to say that I am writing to educate my people. For the early generation of writers, like Aimé Césaire, that was their goal—teaching, writing for their people. For myself, for my generation, we are much more modest. We are writing to make the world understandable to us first of all, and if it is understandable to us, perhaps others will understand the world better.

EN: Is this why you do not write your books in Creole? According to some intellectuals like Patrick Chamoiseau in Martinique, as Caribbean writers we should write our stories in Creole, the language of the majority of the people in the Caribbean.

MC: I refuse to accept that kind of dichotomy between French and Creole. As I like to say, Maryse Condé does not write in French or Creole. Maryse Condé writes in Maryse Condé. Each of us has to find a voice, a way of expressing the emotions, the inner impressions that we have, and to do that we should use all the languages that are at our disposal. In my last novel, *Célanire cou-coupé*, there is a glossary at the end of the book. In it you will find words in African languages, in Creole languages, in Spanish. In order to express the story I wanted to tell, in the manner I wanted, I had to use many resources. That kind of narrow choice between French and Creole is a political choice. In politics it is necessary to speak in the language that can be best understood by our people, that is closest to our people, but when we write, we should be totally free to choose the medium that is best suited ▶

NUNEZ IN FULL BLOOM

"Still waters run deep." The worn expression takes on a polished gleam with Elizabeth Nunez, who sends readers reeling with her latest book, Bruised Hibiscus, in which she reveals the pain and vengeance of two women who dare to defy the political and cultural taboos of colonial Trinidad in the 1950s. The dizzying force of the novel seems at odds with the author's privileged upbringing in Trinidad and now tenured position as English professor and director of the Black Writers' Institute at Medgar Evers College in New York. At the age of 56, Nunez appears to use her own security as a springboard–rather than refuge–to explore life's passions.

In addition to her three novels and scholarly publications, Nunez also contributes to the literary world as director of the National Black Writers' Conference, which aims to improve opportunities for authors of colour, especially those from her beloved Caribbean. ■

- When Rocks Dance (Ballantine, 1988)
- Beyond the Limbo Silence (Seal, 1998)
- Bruised Hibiscus (Seal, 2000)

Maryse Condé: grand dame of Caribbean literature

to our desires and aspirations.

EN: And for you, is that language French?
MC: *My* French, my own brand of French. It is not the language you hear in France. It is a combination of the language of a person born in Guadeloupe, who listens to the many different sounds of language, and my own personal language.

EN: So what makes someone an authentic Caribbean writer?
MC: I hate the word authentic. Here, I am, Maryse Condé, born in Guadeloupe, having lived in Africa and Paris, and now living and working in New York. Here you are, Elizabeth Nunez, born in Trinidad, working and living for most of your life in New York. We are both authentic Caribbean writers. It is a question of a personal choice, how we relate to our mother country in the Caribbean, how we see our place in the world,how we see ourselves and who we are.

EN: Yet I sometimes think that because I live outside of the Caribbean, people there think either I have lost the right to write about the Caribbean or that I have been away too long to be able to write authentically about it.Do you ever experience a similar anxiety?
MC: What does it mean to write authentically about the Caribbean? When you write, you give your version of reality. I am never anxious to justify myself to the public. If they believe that I am not a true Caribbean writer, that's fair enough, but I do believe that I have all the right to speak about Guadeloupe and that I am a total, genuine Guadeloupean writer.

EN: But do you think there is a distinctive Caribbean literature?
MC: Yes, but it is difficult to define. Edwidge Danticat [a young Haitian author living in New York] is writing an aspect of Caribbean literature. You,Elizabeth, are writing an aspect of Caribbean literature. I am writing an aspect of Caribbean literature and the people who are writing at home, who never leave home—Patrick Chamoiseau for example—they are writing an aspect of Caribbean literature. The totality of all these different voices compose a symphony which is Caribbean literature. I am not going to define it because it is too complex, too plural, too changing to have only one narrow definition.

EN: Some people label me a feminist writer because of the strong female characters in my novels. But the truth is that I don't deliberately try to create strong women.My characters are patterned after the women who have influenced my life: those who refused to see themselves as victims and took charge of their lives. There are also very strong female characters in your novels. Would you say you are a feminist writer?
MC: My answer is similar to yours. I was educated by a strong mother and a strong grandmother. My sisters are strong. All the women I knew in Guadeloupe were strong. They triumphed over the conditions that limited them. My books are a reflection of what I see in life. I don't think I am a feminist. I write about what I know.

EN:I loved your novel, Windward Heights. It was liberating to see Emily Brontë's classic work through the eyes of a black cast of characters. You effectively dismantled racist theories that would dispute our common humanity. Was this your intention or did you have more personal reasons for writing your novel?
MC: Somebody gave me Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* when I was about 15 and was still living in Guadeloupe. I was a very sombre child, a very lonely child. My mother died when I was very young and for years I tried to reconnect with her. I looked for her everywhere, in nature, everywhere. When I read *Wuthering Heights*, I felt it was written for me. I identified completely with Heathcliff's passion

to find Cathy after her death. I wrote my novel to prove that in spite of differences in time, conditions, or ideology, women could communicate with each other because we share common desires and experiences. Emily Brontë could speak to Maryse Condé more than a century later because her story was similar to my personal history. I was compelled to rewrite Brontë's story, not to show the differences between Caribbean women and English women, but, rather, to show what we had in common.

EN: I notice that you begin the book by saying you hope Emily Brontë will approve of your interpretation of her masterpiece. Did that wish for her approval limit you in any way?
MC: I must confess that I totally forgot Emily Brontë, the author, when I was writing my novel. What I concentrated on was the passion between Cathy and Heathcliff, the excessive love that fused these two characters. But I read Brontë's novel often, and I kept it on my desk open to the page where Cathy says, "I am Heathcliff." That is a beautiful line. It tells about the intensity of passion possible between two people. When I was finished writing my novel, I wondered what Brontë would think of it, but it was not a serious question I asked myself. I never tried to compete with Brontë. She posed no problem for me.

EN: Can you talk a little about your work at Columbia University? I know you created the Department of Francophone Studies there. In fact, you are the chairperson.
MC: In New York there is a lot of space devoted to the English- and Spanish-speaking Caribbean people, but there is hardly any space for French-speaking Caribbean people. It seems as if we don't exist. When I tell people I am from Guadeloupe, they are puzzled. They have never heard of Guadeloupe. When I was invited to teach Caribbean literature at Columbia University, I felt I had a duty to use my position to create a department to attract people from the French Caribbean so that they would have a space to talk about themselves and about their work and so make their presence known. I won't say I changed the face of New York—that would be arrogant—but at Columbia, at least, people now know that Aimé Césaire is not the only Francophone writer from the Caribbean.

EN: You are far too modest, Maryse. I know you are also an advocate for all Caribbean literature. Not only have you organized some major conferences on the subject but you recently established the book prize, Prix Des Amériques Insulaires et de la Guyane, for the best literary work written in any of the languages of the Caribbean.
MC: Some people criticize me for accepting money from Amédée Huyghues Despointes who funded the prize. They say he is a *béké* [a white Creole from the plantocracy], but the man loves Guadeloupe as I love Guadeloupe. He is concerned about the country's future. We are in the year 2000. We should be finished with these divisions between black and white and move towards unity.

EN: You have a new book, Célanire coucoupé.
MC: It's a departure from my other novels. My daughters have been complaining that all my novels are sad and painful, so I wrote a comical novel, a fantastic novel. It is based on a story I read in a newspaper in Guadeloupe, in 1995, about a baby girl who was found dead, her throat slashed, in a heap of rubbish.

EN: That doesn't sound like a happy novel, Maryse.
MC: Listen and tell me what you think. Everyone wanted to know why the baby was killed that way. I mean, a woman who wants to get rid of her baby doesn't usually slash the baby's throat. There is a special cruelty and malice in doing such a thing. So people in Guadeloupe began to speculate that the baby was used as a human sacrifice. In my novel, I imagined she was brought back to life by a doctor who repaired her throat. The girl then goes in search of those who murdered her.

EN: That is a very sad story.
MC: Wait. The girl begins to attack everything that we think of as sacred. For example, she goes to Africa at the beginning of colonization. When she sees that colonization is failing because there is no communication between Africans and Europeans, she decides that the way to improve the situation is to have a bordello where African women could make love to white men. Ah, you are laughing.

EN: That is funny.
MC: So, you see, I was not wrong to say the novel is comical.

EN: Farcical.
MC: Yes, that is the word.

EN: How do you manage to do all that you do, Maryse? You are a magnificent writer, you have a brilliant career as a professor, scholar, administrator, literary activist, mentor to fledging writers, and yet you have a very active family life.
MC: Honestly, I do not have an answer. I do not make an effort to be one or the other. I am everything at the same time. ■

CONDÉ AT THE HELM

Storyteller, activist, teacher and critic—but perhaps one title best applies to Maryse Condé: navigator. For the grande dame of Caribbean literature incites us to explore ever-shifting terrain, from the cruelty of the slave trade and the self-hate caused by racism to the spiral of lovers' passion. In threading through the web of relations between Africa, the Caribbean and Europe, Condé calls on her personal experience. Born in 1937 in Guadeloupe, she left her comfortable family at the age of 16 to study in Paris, where the spirit of decolonization and the Négritude movement led her to criss-cross Western Africa, first with her Guinean husband and then as a single mother of four children. Returning to Paris in 1973, she completed a doctorate in Caribbean literature from the Sorbonne while launching her literary career. Her first great success was her Segu series (1984), renowned for its historically accurate and engaging portrayal of the impact of Islam on animist West Africa and the brutality of the slave trade.

In 1985, Condé won a Fulbright scholarship to teach in the U.S. and went on to set up the Center for French and Francophone Studies at Columbia University where she continues to teach. Her 11 works of fiction (translated in several languages) have earned her numerous prizes, including the prestigious French awards, Le Grand Prix Litteraire de la Femme (1986) and the Prix Yourcenar (1999). Perhaps more importantly, Condé is one of the few "foreign" authors to be accepted by Africans as one of their own. She and her husband, Richard Philcox, divide their time between New York and Guadeloupe. ■

● Selected titles: Windward Heights (Soho Press, 1999); Desirada (Distribooks International, 1998); The Last of the African Kings (University of Nebraska, 1997); I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem (Ballantine, 1994).

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