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International Connections is published twice a year, and highlights the work, research, and travels of individuals involved with the Center for International and Comparative Studies (CICS). The Center supports work related to the themes of human rights, international development, and international security and cooperation. An online version of the publication is available at http://www.umich.edu/i/cics

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Contributors are generally affiliated in some capacity with CICS, although articles submitted by professionals or scholars working on CICS themes will be considered for publication. Articles should be 1,000–2,000 words in length, double–spaced, and should adhere to stylistic guidelines in *The Chicago Manual of Style*. Articles should be emailed to InternationalConnections@umich.edu
The Center for International & Comparative Studies (CICS) is focused primarily on programming and activities tangibly involved in the themes of international development, security, and human rights. Our programs have drawn faculty, students, and practitioners from a variety of disciplines together around these themes, representing numerous perspectives, and forging new, interdisciplinary approaches to global issues. This fall CICS is launching a new International Studies concentration, adding another important dimension to the growing International Studies program at Michigan.

The first article in this issue, by CICS Director Ken Kollman, traces the intellectual underpinnings of the International Studies concentration, and illuminates what the new major offers to students beyond the traditional liberal arts programs previously available for students interested in pursuing international studies. He details the diverse course offerings in the curriculum, and the skills students who graduate with this degree will possess when they enter the workforce or graduate school.

The next article, by CICS International Security and Development Fellow, Evelyn Alsultany (Professor of American Culture at Michigan), identifies a range of strategies employed by writers of television dramas depicting Arab-Americans and Arabs in the post-9/11 era. Producers and writers made efforts after 9/11 to avoid stereotypic depictions of Middle Eastern characters seen historically on American television, to provide more complicated and nuanced portraits of individuals. Alsultany assesses the results of these efforts, and discusses ways in which these efforts succeeded and failed to varying degrees.

Ian Stewart, former foreign news correspondent and former AP West Africa Bureau Chief, who worked for 15 years as a reporter in more than 40 countries (and six war zones), discusses the time he spent in Sierra Leone interviewing former child soldiers from the war in the 1990s. The article includes excerpts from interviews with three former child soldiers who were freed from the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) which often kidnapped children from villages and used them as combat soldiers or indentured servants. These former child soldiers recount their experiences during the war and discuss adjusting to civilian life as young adults after the war ended.

Profiles of Michigan students who were awarded CICS International Internship grants to work overseas are featured in the following section. The three students worked in Kenya, Tanzania, and Geneva, Switzerland (WHO headquarters), and gained valuable skills in business development, documentary filmmaking, and biomedical engineering, respectively. Through these internships, CICS provides students with hands-on experience with teams of professionals already working in the fields the students are pursuing. Many CICS interns report that these overseas experiences have helped them solidify or narrow the focus on their future career paths.

Finally, photographs from the film series Global Lens can be seen in the Gallery section on page 17. CICS is presenting the film series through December 2009, which features independent films from around the world. The series is distributed by the Global Film Initiative, which was created to promote cross-cultural understanding through the medium of cinema. Although American film continues to thrive in the global marketplace, developing world filmmaking has suffered from declining economic conditions in film financing and distribution. As a result, audiences in the United States have been denied the rich cultural lessons these films have to offer. CICS is presenting films from Iran, Morocco, Mozambique, China, Macedonia, Brazil, Argentina, Kazakhstan, Ecuador, and Indonesia, at the International Institute. For a full schedule of films visit our web site at http://ii.umich.edu/cics.
CICS is pleased to announce the launch of a new undergraduate concentration in International Studies this fall, the first of its kind at Michigan. Building on the foundation of our popular International Studies minor degree, the international studies concentration is a rigorous academic program that offers students the opportunity to take a set of courses across departments to bring multiple methods and concepts together to address global problems.

The traditional university liberal arts curriculum has been oriented around the nation-state. Courses either focused on specific nation-states (Japanese history or politics), or compared nation-states (Labor Economics in Developed Societies). In response to social, political, cultural, and economic trends, many departments and programs have recognized the need to broaden their purview to study global and regional trends and units of analysis such as transnational and international entities and sub-state nations.

Suppose a student at U-M wished to study global trade patterns and how they affect farmers in the developing world. Prior to this concentration, this student could concentrate in economics and learn about national and international markets or concentrate in political science and learn about the domestic and international politics of trade. This student could gravitate toward the study of natural resources and learn about sustainable agriculture or concentrate in anthropology and learn about farming communities and identity and power relationships in Africa/Asia/Latin America.

The international studies concentration permits students to take courses from all four of these units, courses that focus on the economics and politics of trade, on agricultural production, on the cultural politics of Third World agricultural communities, and on the global economy. In addition, students are required to take several courses that provide frameworks for integrating multiple methods and approaches to their study. Students are exposed to exemplary pieces of
Our target students share the following:

- interest in learning from comparisons across countries, cultures, regions, and continents
- deep interest in the world beyond the United States
- a rigorous language requirement
- a multidisciplinary approach to addressing global problems
- exposure to multiple methodologies, with in-depth knowledge (if not mastery) of at least one and perhaps two
- study abroad experience

Many Big Ten, Ivy League, West Coast, and top private universities in the Southeast offer majors in international or global studies. Michigan’s distinct, new concentration forges original theoretical ground, and offers rigorous methods and scholarship that tackle pressing issues using interdisciplinary approaches and multiple methods of analysis.

This new concentration is an opportunity for students to create a curriculum that combines disciplinary depth and integrative interdisciplinary research. Our goal is to give students skills in moving among different units of analysis and different disciplinary approaches in order to understand, analyze, and ultimately help solve contemporary global problems.

Students will study topics such as terrorism, global health trends, human rights and refugees, environmental and energy crises, transnational religious movements, and the spread of technology. The concentration draws on methods developed in specific disciplines such as economics, sociology, psychology, comparative literature, political science, anthropology, and history, and some methods emerging from cross-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary environments (e.g., gender studies, environmental studies, media studies, organizational studies).

Students can take one of four sub-plans as part of the concentration:

- International Security, Norms, and Cooperation
- Political Economy and Development
- Comparative Culture and Identity
- Global Environment and Health

Our goal is to give students skills in moving among different units of analysis and different disciplinary approaches in order to understand, analyze, and ultimately help solve contemporary global problems.

Ken Kollman is Director of CICS and Professor of Political Science at U-M. He will serve as Acting Vice Provost for International Affairs and Acting Director of the International Institute effective January 1, 2010 through December 31, 2010.
Representing the War on Terror in TV Dramas

By Evelyn Alsultany

After September 11, 2001, a slew of TV dramas were created with the War on Terror as their central theme. Dramas such as 24, Threat Matrix, The Grid, Sleeper Cell, and The Wanted depict U.S. government agencies and officials heroically working to make the nation safe by battling terrorism. A prominent feature of these television shows are inclusion of Arab and Muslim characters, most of whom are portrayed as grave threats to U.S. national security. However, in response to increased popular awareness of ethnic stereotyping, and the active monitoring of Arab and Muslim watchdog groups, television writers have had to adjust their storylines to avoid blatant, crude stereotyping.

This article surveys the strategies writers and producers of TV dramas have used when representing Arab and Muslim characters. Some of these representational strategies have their roots before September 11, when a few films contained noticeably more complex portrayals of Arabs and Muslims; for example, giving the terrorist character a backstory, or including a “good” Arab in the storyline (such as in The Siege, 1998, and Three Kings, 1999). These late 1990s films marked a shift in a history of stereotypic representations of Arabs and Muslims as belly dancers, oppressed veiled women, oil sheiks, and terrorists, but it was only after 9/11 that more diverse representations proliferated and became standardized. These new representational strategies seek to make the point that not all Arabs are terrorists, and not all terrorists are Arabs. But they remain wedded to a script that represents Arabs and Muslims only in the context of terrorism.

Strategy 1: Inserting Patriotic Arab or Muslim Americans

Writers of television and film have increasingly inserted positive Arab and Muslim characters to show that they are sensitive to negative stereotyping. This character often takes the form of a patriotic Arab or Muslim American who assists the U.S. government in their fight against Arab/Muslim terrorism, either as a government agent or civilian. For example, on Threat Matrix, Mohammad “Mo” Hassain is an Arab-American Muslim character who is part of the USA Homeland Security Force; and on season 6 of 24, Nadia Yassir is part of the Counter Terrorist Unit. In Sleeper Cell, the “good” Muslim is the lead African-American character, Darwyn Al-Sayeed, who is an undercover FBI agent and makes statements to his colleagues that the terrorists have nothing to do with his faith and not to confuse the two. This strategy demonstrates that not all Muslims advocate terrorism.

Strategy 2: Sympathizing with the Plight of Arab Americans Post–9/11

Some post–9/11 TV dramas have included a story about Arab-Americans as unjust victims of post–9/11 hate crimes. The audience is positioned to sympathize with their plight. Often the victimized Arab-American exerts characteristics of the “good” patriotic character, as delineated in strategy 1. In an episode of 24 during season 4, two Arab-American brothers express that they are tired of being unjustly blamed for the terrorist attacks and insist on helping fight terrorism alongside Jack Bauer, the lead character who singlehandedly saves the U.S. from danger each season. In an episode of The
Practice, “Inter Arma Silent Leges,” the government detains an innocent Arab-American without due process or explanation. The Arab-American detainee insists that he does not want a lawyer and wants to remain in custody to help in any way he can. This strategy demonstrates sensitivity and concern for Arab-Americans.

Strategy 3: Challenging the Arab/Muslim Conflation
Sleeper Cell has been unique from other TV dramas that deal with the topic of terrorism by including a diverse cast of Muslim terrorists, thereby challenging the common conflation between Arab and Muslim identities. While the ringleader of the sleeper cell, Faris al-Farik is an Arab, the other members of this Los Angeles sleeper cell are not. They are Bosnian, French, white American, Western European, Latino, and a gay Iraqi-Brit. The cell members challenge the Arab/Muslim conflation by demonstrating that all Arabs are not Muslim and all Muslims are not Arab. Furthermore, “good” Arabs and Muslims are represented as a contrast to the terrorist-Muslims. However, the notion that Muslims have a monopoly on terrorism is not challenged in the series.

Strategy 4: Flipping the Enemy
While Sleeper Cell fails to challenge the popular assumption that Muslims have a monopoly on terrorism, other TV dramas represent multiple terrorist identities. “Flipping the enemy” involves leading the viewer to believe that Muslim terrorists are obviously plotting to destroy the U.S. and later revealing that the Muslim terrorists are a pawn or front for Euro-American or European terrorists. The identity of the enemy is flipped: either viewers discover that the terrorist is not Arab or Muslim or that the Arab or Muslim terrorist is part of a larger network of international terrorists. During season 2 of 24, Bauer spends the first half of the season tracking down a Middle Eastern terrorist cell, ultimately subverting a nuclear attack. The second half of the season exposes that European and American businessmen are behind the attack, plotting to benefit from the increase in oil prices resulting from the United States declaring a war on the Middle East. Furthermore, writers and producers make efforts not to glorify the U.S. in order to avoid the impression that the U.S. is perfect and the rest of the world flawed. Therefore this strategy also includes portraying some FBI or CIA agents as incompetent or conspiring with the terrorists.

Strategy 5: Humanizing Terrorist Characters
Most representations of Arabs and Muslim terrorists before 9/11 were of stock terrorist villains, one-dimensional bad guys who were presumably bad because of their ethnic background or religious beliefs. In contrast, post-9/11 terrorist characters are humanized by representing them in relation to their families, or by narrating a backstory or motive. In season 4 of 24, audiences are introduced to the first Middle Eastern family on U.S. network television (in a recurring role for the whole season as opposed to a one time appearance). At first, they seem like an ordinary family preparing breakfast—mother, father, and a teenage son. It is soon revealed, however, that they are a sleeper cell family and each family member’s relationship to terrorism is explored. The father is willing to kill his wife and son in order to complete his mission; the mother will reconsider her involvement with terrorism only to protect her son; and the teenage son, raised in the U.S., cares about humanity, preventing him from being a terrorist. This strategy—humanizing the terrorists by focusing on their interpersonal relationships, motives, and/or backstory—is also central to Sleeper Cell. Each sleeper cell member has their own motivation for joining the cell: from rebelling against a leftist liberal parent to seeking revenge on the U.S. for the death of family members.

Strategy 6: Projecting a Multicultural U.S. Society
Projecting a multicultural U.S. society is another strategy to circumvent accusations of racism while representing Arabs and Muslims as terrorists. In Sleeper Cell, the sleeper cell members are of diverse ethnic backgrounds and Darwyn, the African-American FBI agent, is in an interracial relationship with Gail, a white woman. For several seasons of 24, the U.S. president was African-American, his press secretary Asian-American, and Latinos work at the Counter Terrorist Unit. The projected society is one in which people of different racial backgrounds work together and racism is socially unacceptable. TV dramas construct an internal logic of racial sensitivity and diversity that forecloses considering its own participation in logics that legitimize racism. Racism becomes covert and difficult to detect.

Strategy 7: Fictionalizing the Middle Eastern or Muslim Country
It has become increasingly common for the country of the terrorist characters in the storyline to go unnamed. This strategy rests on the assumption that leaving the nationality of the villain nameless eliminates potential offensiveness; if no particular country or ethnicity is named, then there is less reason for any particular group to be offended by the portrayal. In season 4 of 24, the terrorist family is from an unnamed Middle Eastern country. They are possibly from Turkey, but where they are from is never stated; it is intentionally left ambiguous. In The West Wing, the fictional country, “Qumar” is represented, and in season 8 of 24, it is “Kamistan.”
These seven representational modes are not exhaustive. They collectively outline some of the ways in which writers and producers of television (and film) have sought to improve representations of Arabs (and other racial and ethnic groups). They also reflect that stereotypical representations that were formerly socially acceptable, no longer are. However, more diverse representations do not in themselves solve the problem of stereotyping. As Ella Shohat, Robert Stam, Herman Gray, and other Media Studies scholars have shown, focusing on whether or not a particular image is good or bad does not necessarily solve the problem of a negative representation. Rather, it is important to examine the ideological work performed by images and storylines. I do not intend to negate the efforts of writers and producers who sought to create alternatives to stereotypical representations. My intention here is to highlight these multiple strategies and to ask: what ideological work do these representational strategies perform?

Under the guise of complexity, these representational strategies construct a binary between “good” and “bad” Arabs and Muslims, reinforcing a narrow conception of what constitutes a “good” Arab or Muslim. As Mahmood Mamdani has written in Good Muslim, Bad Muslim (New York: Pantheon, 2004), the public debate post–9/11 has involved a discourse about “good” and “bad” Muslims, and all Muslims are assumed to be bad until they perform and prove their allegiance to the U.S. In TV dramas, we see this framework playing out through defining “bad” Arabs or Muslims as the terrorists and “good” Arabs or Muslims as those helping the U.S. government fight terrorism. Despite the shift towards less stereotypical representations, Arab and Muslim identities are still understood and evaluated only in relation to terrorism. This context overpowers the strategies. Representations of Arab and Muslim identities in contexts that have nothing to do with terrorism remain strikingly unusual in the U.S. commercial media.

Inserting a patriotic Arab-American or fictionalizing Middle Eastern countries are gratuitous devices if Arabs and Arab-Americans continue to be portrayed through a narrow lens of good or bad in the fight against terrorism. Casting multicultural actors to give the impression of a “post-race” society propagates the comforting notion of an enlightened society that has resolved all of its racial problems. While these representational strategies that challenge the stereotyping of Arabs and Muslims were being broadcast, circulated, and consumed, real Arabs and Muslims were being detained, deported, held without due process, and tortured. Certainly not all Arabs and Muslims were subject to post-9/11 harassment or profiling, but I am arguing that these representational strategies contribute to a “post-race” illusion that has the potential to minimize the persistence of institutionalized racism. These TV dramas produce reassurance that racial sensitivity is the norm in U.S. society while perpetuating the dominant perception of Arabs and Muslims as terrorists.

Above all, what is depicted through these TV dramas, is a nation in perpetual danger. Audiences re-live the War on Terror and the Arab/Muslim threat despite a few good Arabs or Muslims appearing in the storyline. As Melani McAlister has written in Epic Encounters (Berkeley: UC Press, 2001), “the continuing sense of threat provides support for the power of the state, but it also provides the groundwork for securing ‘the nation’ as a cultural and social entity. The ‘imagined community’ of the nation finds continuing rearticulation in the rhetoric of danger.”

A moment of “crisis” is used to cast Arabs, Arab-Americans, Muslims, and Muslim-Americans as threats to the nation. Arabs and Muslims become the contemporary racialized enemy through which the nation defines its identity and legitimizes the abuse of state power. However, at this historical moment, this is accomplished not through demonizing an entire people, but rather through projecting seemingly nuanced representations of Arabs and Muslims, sympathy for the unjust treatment of Arab- and Muslim-Americans post–9/11, and a diverse and inclusive U.S. society.

Evelyn Alsultany is Assistant Professor of American Culture at U-M, and is serving as a CICS International Security and Development Fellow. Her research focuses on representations of Arabs and Muslims in the U.S. media, its relationship to changing conceptions of race, and its relationship to obstacles to international security and cooperation. She is currently completing a book on the topic.

She developed and is teaching an advanced seminar in International Studies, “Why Do They Hate Us? Perspectives on 9/11,” and will deliver a public lecture in January 2010 based on this article.
Child Soldiers in Wartime Sierra Leone

by Ian David Stewart

In 1984 Charles Taylor, a young bureaucrat in the Liberian government of Samuel K. Doe fled the country to the United States after being accused of embezzling more than $900,000. While awaiting extradition to Liberia he escaped from the Plymouth County House of Corrections in Massachusetts and returned to Africa, where he was trained in guerrilla warfare by Libya’s Muammar Qaddafi. Taylor then went on to found the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPLF), which opposed Doe, the first indigenous president in Liberia’s history. On Christmas Eve 1989, Taylor launched a full-scale revolt against Doe, quickly gaining control of much of the countryside.

Within three years of that first revolt, war spilled across the Mano River, dividing Liberia and Sierra Leone. Capitalizing on the growing discontent of Sierra Leone’s younger demographic, Taylor used his war as an opportunity to extend his reach across the border as he helped establish the Revolutionary United Front (RUF). Most accounts for the expansion of the war follow the conventional trope that Taylor was maneuvering to secure access to the alluvial diamond mines in the Kono District on the Sierra Leone side of the Mano River, although some historians argue that Sierra Leone’s protracted war was an affair of lumpen revolt in response to years of corruption, rising unemployment, and a degenerating economy, and not simply a grab by Taylor for diamonds.

Whatever the ultimate cause, war in Sierra Leone began on March 23, 1991 when a small band of rebel fighters—the vanguard of what would later coalesce into the RUF—launched its first military assault in the Kailahun District (near Kono) in an opening bid to depose the corrupt and patrimonial leadership of President Joseph Saidu Momoh and the government of the All People’s Congress or APC. At the time, few people realized that this initial attack marked the start of a protracted insurgency that would leave an estimated 50,000–75,000 people dead, hundreds of thousands more maimed by a campaign of amputations, and about 2.6 million people (roughly half the country’s population) internally displaced or living in refugee camps across the border in Guinea.

One of the most infamous features of the RUF was its wholesale use of children as combat soldiers, indentured servants, and sex slaves. Indeed, most of the minors fighting for the RUF were themselves victims—kidnapped as spoils of war after the rebel movement swept through the villages and hamlets of the country’s southeastern region.

In the 1990s I worked as a foreign correspondent for United Press International and the Associated Press; I reported from more than 40 countries and six war zones by the time I was appointed as the AP’s West Africa Bureau Chief. While reporting from Sierra Leone in 1998 I had the opportunity to meet and interview several former child soldiers after they had been freed from the RUF. The following brief excerpts from those interviews give glimpses into their wartime experience and life after the war. For the protection of the individuals included in my research, I have changed the names of the following interviewees.

One of the most infamous features of the RUF was its wholesale use of children as combat soldiers, indentured servants, and sex slaves.
Narratives of Former Child Soldiers

Rambo

“Rambo” is a 24-year-old man from a small village near Kailahun, in eastern Sierra Leone. Using his assigned nom de guerre, Rambo related the series of events that took place in 1996 when RUF fighters raided his town, killing his family and dragging him off to an undisclosed location. Since he was just 12 at the time he readily admits that many of the details are unclear and distant. “It was like an army camp ... lots of guns and rebels walking around.” After a short, unspecified period of time during which Rambo cleaned the rebel’s clothes, hauled sacks of rice, and cooked their meals, he was moved to another location where he was assembled with a gathering of other boys about his size.

While on a research trip during the summer of 2008 I met and spoke with Rambo along with several other former child soldiers during frequent visits to the offices of “Children Associated with the War” or CAW—the only local support and rehabilitation center for child soldiers still operating in Sierra Leone. Tucked in behind the sprawling Central Post Office in Freetown, CAW’s offices are located in one of the few remaining colonial era homes that recall a different time for this former British colony. Inside CAW’s dank and mildewed offices Rambo was seated at a heavy wooden table with an antiquated cast-iron sewing machine bolted to its top. Lowering his head to avoid eye contact with me he distractedly spun the machine’s thread wheel while recounting how he came to be a member of the RUF: “In the bush they took us to shoot the guns . . . at monkeys or birds for food,” he said. When his captors had determined the best shot (i.e., skilled marksman) they separated them from the other boys. “The smaller boys were chased away deeper into the bush, I think one was shot. I don’t know what happened to the others.” [translated from Mende]. The smaller boys who were presumably freed were, however, first adorned with white bandanas, the symbol of allegiance with the RUF.

It was not long after Rambo had been selected from the other boys when he was awoken in the middle of the night and moved to another location where he was again merged into another group of boys, most of them noticeably stronger and carrying either machete knives or assault rifles. The boys were gathered inside an abandoned home. “Three of the large boys grabbed me and held me down . . . a man with a machete took my arm and cut.” The scars—forming the letters R-U-F—labeled and thus stigmatized Rambo as a rebel. “When I was bleeding the man took a bullet casing and rubbed a gray powder over the cuts and blew some at my face. . . . I felt dizzy and went to sleep.” (Rebels often used a narcotic concoction of either cocaine or heroin mixed with gunpowder to help initiate new recruits as well as induce a sense of invincibility and fearlessness before battle.)

When he awoke he was alone in a clearing behind the abandoned home. The other boys watched from a distance as the man with the machete approached Rambo and handed him a rifle, blew more gray powder in his face and tied a white bandana around his forehead. He looked at Rambo and said only: “Our Rambo.”

According to Johnson Koroma, a prominent CAW child rehabilitation expert, Rambo’s experience was by no means universal, but neither was it uncommon. Initiation rituals are known to vary slightly from region to region, faction to faction, and field commander to field commander. But, Rambo’s case is exemplary of how the RUF incorporated new recruits into the insurgency. Rambo was “separated” from his normal existence of childhood when his family was killed, and furthermore he was separated by virtue of being relocated to a remote location not once but twice in what appears to be a period to size up the potential recruits (first by strength with the sacks of rice, and then second by skill with a gun). With each passed “test” he was advanced toward the actual initiation or “branding,” which at once served as a ritual test of endurance and the ability to withstand an “ordeal,” thus propelling the initiate from boyhood to manhood.

Red clay streets, Sierra Leone Photo by Adam Cohn
(www.flickr.com/photos/adamcohn/328440678/in/photostream/)
Ahmed

Like Rambo, Ahmed was abducted by the rebels after his village had been attacked and his family killed. At just nine years of age, Ahmed already had the muscular arms of a teenager. Staring at his dusty feet, the shy boy would not look me in the eye as he retold his story—a story of drugs, torture, and murder. By appearance alone, I would never have known this nervous young boy was a former “child soldier” of the RUF. Unlike Rambo, I met Ahmed in 1998 just weeks after he’d been freed from rebel captivity. Already he’d killed maimed and tortured friends, neighbors, and even family members throughout the villages surrounding his hometown of Makeni. Ahmed, who spoke only in the local Pidginized English of Krio, told Father Victor Bongiovanni (his counselor and translator) that as a child he had been kidnapped by the RUF, drugged, and taught by his commanding officers (themselves teenagers) how to hack off the limbs of his victims with a machete knife in three or four blows. The campaign of amputations became a macabre calling card of the rebels. As the fighting wore on through the years, more and more amputee survivors began to appear on the streets of Freetown and in the refugee camps in Guinea.

Kamal

The short ten-kilometer (approximately six-mile) drive from Freetown to the coastal town of Lakka ought to take no more than 20 minutes, but in July—the height of the country’s rainy season—the journey along the remote Lumley Beach Highway takes more than two hours over rutted and crumbling roads. Mohammed, my driver, deftly maneuvers his battered brown Renault in and over and through the pond-sized potholes, flooded with rusty red water, reminiscent of an artist’s watercolor palette, thick with reds and browns—Sierra Leone is renowned for its red clay. Our destination on this steamy, rain-drenched day is the Lakka Center, a former Catholic orphanage that for years has been offering safe haven and rehabilitation services for hundreds of children who fought during the country’s 11-year civil war.

As our car passes through the rusting and long-neglected gates of the Lakka Center (formerly St. Michael’s orphanage) we are met by about half a dozen curious children ranging in age from five or six to their early 20s. A dozen or so children are full-time residents as the center has been unsuccessful in locating their families. Sheltering under the corrugated steel roof of a beach hut, Kamal, a 23-year-old former child soldier sat with the other residents of the center. Shouting to be heard over the constant thunder of the surf, rain, and offshore winds, Kamal recounted his time in the rebel force of the RUF. “It was in 1997 when I was in the fields with my parents when [the rebels] came,” he said, shifting back and forth on the hut’s rain-soaked cement floor. He continued;

I was in my village of Bou bou ma [Boma in the Southern Province]. I was taken and blindfolded and moved to somewhere so that I would not understand
the language. I was given drugs and a gun and was forced to steal the people’s food for the older rebels. I carried weapons and guns for the rebels […] until we attacked Freetown. I was too young to fight. After I was in Freetown I escaped to a church and the priest brought me here.

Unable to locate his parents, who are presumed to have died after his abduction, Kamal has lived at the Lakka Center since he escaped from Freetown in 1998. “Kamal has been going to school, learning new skills, cooking, and helping teach the younger children at the center,” said Ahmed, the associate director of the center. A layman, Ahmed is the only full-time Sierra Leonean employee of the center; the director and associate director are a Jesuit priest and a nun from Ireland and Italy, respectively. Ahmed explained the process of trying to save the children during the war:

I used to go the conflict areas with money to take to the rebel commanders in Bou bou Ma [Boma], Kambia, and Freetown to exchange money for these children. From then we started to try and find these children’s families […] for those who couldn’t find their families they just stayed here. We needed to give the rebels an incentive to exchange their children and give them a way out.

During the 1990s, hundreds if not thousands of young Sierra Leonean boys passed through the transition from boyhood to manhood, from rooted civilian villager to wandering armed warrior. During the 1990s, hundreds if not thousands of young Sierra Leonean boys passed through the transition from boyhood to manhood, from rooted civilian villager to wandering armed warrior. During the war, the RUF rendered the transformation of its recruits by keeping them spatially removed from kinship networks and other grounding organizations such as schools and religious institutions. The RUF maintained a network of encampments throughout the territories it controlled, allowing it to keep recruits perpetually displaced by moving them between camps, though always within the auspices of RUF control. This spatial segregation kept them in a constant liminal state of transformation and transition. This system of displacement can be seen in the narratives of Rambo and Kamal.

RUF initiates were indeed separated from their societies, and transformed into something new (in this case fearsome “adult” rebel fighters), but they are not reincorporated into their former communities. The RUF initiation process is a disrupted cycle that not only removed the initiate from his community, but in fact locked the initiate into a seemingly permanent state of liminality or transition. Without reintegration into the old community the RUF’s rites of passage are effectively designed not to serve as a passage from childhood to adulthood, but in fact fix the initiate in a permanent state of childhood. Unable to complete the passage from liminal pupa to fully developed (and transformed) member of society, the once child soldier remains a child in the eyes of his community. The question now remains how Sierra Leone will deal with this “lost generation” of man–child former soldiers? Indeed, the legacy of the RUF’s ruptured initiation process still haunts the country and will continue to do so for the duration of this generation if not longer.

Ian David Stewart is a graduate student in the Doctoral Program in Anthropology and History at U-M where his research is focused on the impact of violence on children/childhood in the context of the protracted civil wars of Sierra Leone and Liberia. Prior to graduate school he spent 15 years as a news correspondent, including seven overseas in Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. He is an alumnus of Columbia University’s Graduate School of Journalism and a former John S. Knight Fellow at Stanford University. His articles have appeared in the New York Times, the Washington Post, the Los Angeles Times and the Toronto Globe and Mail among others. His first book, Ambushed: A War Reporter’s Life on the Line, was published in 2002 by Algonquin Books. He is participating in the Graduate Seminar on Global Transformations (GSGT), hosted by CICS.
In March 2009 I was awarded funding through the Center for International & Comparative Studies (CICS) to work as an intern with Project Africa teaching entrepreneurial skills to women in Kenya. Before leaving the U.S., I put together a curriculum for rural finance with activities that would cover different aspects of a business plan.

My volunteer experience with Project Africa started on June 20th when I arrived in Nairobi. After a two-day orientation in the capital city, I made the eight-hour bus journey to Mombasa, Kenya’s second largest city and the closest city to Lunga-Lunga, my volunteer site. I met my program coordinator, Judy, and we decided to develop a five-day business camp or “Biashara Camp” for both Lunga-Lunga and Godo (a small neighboring village). Each class was five hours long and dedicated to a specific business topic. In addition to the Biashara Camp, I also planned to hold individual coaching and mentoring sessions so I could work with the women one-on-one.

**Biashara Camp**

I was told before I left that the women in Kenya would have no problems understanding my curriculum, but when I arrived in Lunga-Lunga, I discovered that most of the women were not literate and could not speak English. Additionally, after meeting the women, I observed that teamwork and group work were unfamiliar to them. I factored these initial obstacles into my planning, adjusted the curriculum, and taught the lessons without any further problems.

The concept of goal setting was very foreign to the Lunga-Lunga women. When asked about their life goal, most of them replied, “To be successful.” Success, however, is not measurable, and is highly subjective; therefore, I encouraged them to make S.M.A.R.T. goals. A S.M.A.R.T. goal is specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound. The women were each asked to come up with one business goal and one life goal. To help them develop their group interaction, I put them into small groups to evaluate one another’s goals. This goal setting activity helped them work towards something concrete and helped them evaluate the important things in their lives.

One of the biggest business obstacles for the Kenyan women was coming up with a unique business idea. When one person came up with a profitable idea, such as tailoring, all the women wanted to start the same business. Unfortunately, this would cause the market to have too much supply and not enough demand. In order to have a unique idea, a business-woman must first understand her environment. I asked the women to get into groups and draw a map of their villages. On the map, I asked them to include major modes of transportation, important government places, meeting places (schools, churches), areas of trade, their business locations (if they already had one), and other important areas. This mapping exercise helped them understand the different factors in their environment that affect their businesses. Most of the women had never considered some of these factors, and this activity helped them plan more effectively.

While covering the topic of Marketing with the women, I found a game that helped them learn the four P’s of Marketing (Product, Price, Place, Promotion) in an interactive way. To move forward in the game, the women had to answer questions on the game board correctly, and all questions were related to the four P’s. The game was easy for all the women to understand because the Project Africa coordinators helped translate. Additionally, I used as many images as possible in the game board so they could understand the rules.
The final part of the Biashara Camp focused on Finance activities. Because of the educational levels of the women, I didn’t get to cover Cash Flow Statements and Annual Budgets with them, but I was able to review costing and pricing and basic record keeping. To teach them costing and pricing, I used an example of a tea shop (something they drink constantly). Together we worked through all costs involved with producing a cup of tea and decided on a price to sell the cup. I taught them the difference between a fixed cost and variable cost and how they affect the price of their products. To help them with record-keeping, I taught them how to balance a checkbook and how that affects their family and business budgets. They learned the difference between cash-in and cash-out and why it’s important to keep records. Finally, I gave each of the women a blank bank transaction booklet to encourage them to keep records.

One-on-One Advising on Start-Ups

During the individual coaching and mentoring sessions, I helped the women write business plans for their specific ideas. In particular, three women were able to plan and start businesses while I was there. The businesses were a dairy farm, a poultry farm, and a sewing machine rental company. Before the coaching meetings the women never wrote anything down or planned the details of starting a business. As a result, they never anticipated unexpected events such as low demand or drought. In our coaching and mentoring sessions, I encouraged the women to plan for all scenarios and obstacles their businesses would encounter. I tried to stress that if they have a plan for an anticipated problem, they can preemptively circumvent problems in the future.

Mutual Motivation

My time in Kenya was the best experience of my life. In total, I worked with around 30 women between the ages of 20 and 63 during my 30 days there. I was able to help three women start businesses, help six women reduce their debts by personal financial planning, and teach 30 women basic business skills. More importantly, I befriended 30 strong women. I not only learned first-hand about another culture but also learned about the importance of working hard. One defining trait in Kenyans is their determination and diligence. These women work endlessly to improve their lives, and that motivates me to work harder to achieve my personal goals. One day, I hope to return to Kenya and work with Project Africa to help the organization further achieve its goal of empowering women and girls in Africa.

Lily Chen is a Junior in the Stephen M. Ross School of Business at U-M. She received a CICS International Internship grant to participate in an internship program with Project Africa, teaching entrepreneurial and rural finance skills to women in Kenya.
With the help of a CICS-funded international internship, I traveled to Dar es Salaam, Tanzania this summer to document avoidable blindness at the disability hospital, CCBRT (Comprehensive Community Based Rehabilitation in Tanzania). My internship was through the company, Students of the World, a non-profit organization in Austin, Texas that works closely with the Clinton Global Initiative in documenting humanitarian, health, and environmental issues in third world countries.

The internship involved producing a documentary film about blindness prevention with five other Michigan students. I spent the first part of my internship working closely with doctors and nurses learning about blindness in the city and villages. I was amazed to learn that 80% of the blindness in Tanzania is preventable and curable; and most of the prevention procedures take only 10 minutes to perform.

Filmmaking in Dar es Salaam

During a typical day in Dar es Salaam I was able to photograph and film surgeries, shadow doctors, and travel with the outreach nurses who went into the villages to find the blind and bring them back to CCBRT. My main role was photographer and producer for the documentary, and I was responsible for coordinating communication with the office in Austin and our project site in Dar, setting up accommodations, and booking flights. My skills and confidence as a photographer grew immensely, and I learned a lot about organizing a project and an overseas trip.

I spent five weeks photographing every aspect of the blind communities, from life in their villages before surgery, through the procedure, and after, when they were able to fully participate in their communities again. Students of the World focused on blindness this year because it’s a disability that can be easily fixed. When the patients are cured they’re able to help farm, cook, raise their families, and help their local economy.
As a freshman at Michigan, I was debating between studying nursing and enrolling in the art and design program. This internship helped me decide to combine both of my interests in photography and health into one joint project. In the future, I plan to focus my documentary photography work on health issues in developing countries. Our documentary was completed in September 2009, and will be shown at the Clinton Global Initiative Conference in New York this fall, where I'll follow up with our documentary's fundraising stage.

Film and Health: The Next Project

While working in Dar at the disability hospital, I became aware of another serious health problem in Tanzania: obstetric fistula. Obstetric fistula mainly affects impoverished women who do not have proper maternal care and in many instances have prolonged labors. Most Tanzanian women who have fistula lose their babies during labor, and their husbands often remarry since their wives can no longer participate in farming or raising the children due to chronic pain and constant leaking of the bladder. The communities disown these women who are in need of physical and mental support. Many local hospitals are starting to broaden maternal wards and focus on helping women suffering from fistula. Fistula takes its toll on women even if they are fortunate enough to get corrective surgery—they are still faced with returning to their communities after being dismissed and losing connections with their family and friends.

During my internship I found a new health issue to document. I’m currently applying for a Photography Fulbright to document obstetric fistula in hopes of creating awareness of the disease so women can learn that there is help available. CICS gave me the opportunity not only to acquire documentary filmmaking skills, but to learn about some pressing health issues in an African nation that are preventable and curable. Thank you for supporting my project and my passions of photography and health care, and giving me the chance to discover how I can pursue both.

Shay Spaniola is a senior in the Department of Art & Design at U-M. She received a CICS International Internship grant to participate in an internship program with Students of the World in Tanzania, working on a documentary film about blindness prevention. She plans to continue to focus her documentary work on health issues in third world countries to create awareness through visual stories. Her film will be shown at the International Institute in winter 2010.
Health Technology and the WHO

Health technology is one of the most powerful tools in strengthening public health efforts that enhance the quality of human life. Biomedical and clinical engineering are vital fields within the health technology sector that provide innovative ideas and products for improved public health, from medical devices and diagnostic imaging machines to vaccines and drugs.

As a biomedical engineering student interested in global health issues, I was fortunate to have the opportunity to participate in a CICS-funded internship program at the WHO headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland this summer. I worked within the Diagnostic Imaging and Medical Devices (DIM) unit, which is a part of the Essential Health Technologies (EHT) department. This unit is composed of mainly biomedical and clinical engineers responsible for supporting WHO member states with health technologies-related issues.

The World Health Assembly (WHA), the main policymaking body for the WHO, is composed of ministers of health from the WHO member states. In resolution 60.29, the WHA urged the WHO to enhance its efforts in health technologies, specifically, “To provide technical guidance and support to member states where necessary in implementation policies on health technologies, in particular medical devices especially for priority diseases, according to different levels of care in developing countries.”

As a response to this resolution, EHT (with financial assistance from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation) started a three-year project entitled “Global Initiative for Health Technologies (GIHT)” in August 2008.

The Challenge of Technology Transfer

During my internship at WHO I was involved in three projects related to the GIHT. First, I was assigned to write a background paper on innovative health technologies in developing countries. It focused on the lifecycle of a medical device and constraints for its development in each step from concept to production to marketing. I learned about the difficulties of translating and transferring the production of medical devices in developing regions, and other health technology challenges that exist in the developing world, from access to clean water to rapid HIV, TB, or malaria diagnostic testing. Factors such as a shortage of trained personnel, limited financial resources, and inadequate infrastructure limit the effectiveness of technology.

There are some successful examples of technology transfer that have helped to enhance the quality of healthcare in developing countries. For instance, a partnership between a local NGO in India and a small medical device company in the U.S. helped to transfer technology related to intraocular lenses. This collaboration reduced the price of the product from $100 (USD) to almost $5 (USD), which gave more patients in rural areas access to these lenses, which prevent cataracts and blindness. A key factor in the successful partnership was the expanded market for lenses in India where high sales volume offset the low price of the product, and sustained production. Moreover, the intellectual property agreement was among the first cases in the field that enabled technology transfer from a company in the developed world to a developing country.

The Importance of Partnerships

Another project that I was involved in was a global landscape analysis on health technology. The report identified needs of the developing world in combating disease and health-related issues. It evaluated resources that have been spent in the medical devices sector in developing regions, and factors influencing industry investment in health technologies in the developing world. The importance of partnerships in health technology transfer became clear through the needs assessment.

Currently there are over 18 public–private partnerships working on product development for diseases such as HIV/AIDS,
Currently there are over 18 public–private partnerships working on product development for diseases such as HIV/AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis, and neglected diseases under supervision of the WHO.

malaria, tuberculosis, and neglected diseases under supervision of the WHO, although less than five of these partnerships work on medical devices exclusively. Medical device industries along with local NGOs and international organizations in developing regions are working to deliver more effective and appropriate products. Non-profit organizations, such as the Foundation for Innovative New Diagnostics (FIND), and the Program for Appropriate Technology in Health (PATH) are trying to bridge developed world resources to the needs and demands of the developing countries.

Assessing Health Technology Conditions Around the World

The final project that I worked on is preparing a survey on global health technology to evaluate the health technology in WHO member states. EHT is in the process of conducting this survey to identify the health technology resources of each member state of WHO and understand the strengths and difficulties of each country. The GIHT continues assessing the current health technology conditions in the world, enabling the developing world to access powerful technology to enhance the quality of health care. Even though there is still a long way to go, it was inspiring to see the efforts of those involved in the field dedicated to the betterment of human health. I left the WHO with hands-on experience in global health–related issues and a deeper understanding of the role biomedical engineering and technology can play in addressing them. Because this internship allowed me to work on a multi-level project with a diverse group of highly experienced professionals in health technology, it opened new windows onto my professional life. This experience showed me the critical role biomedical engineering can play in improving global health. I am more confident than ever that I will pursue the next level of my education in biomedical engineering with a focus on global health and development. This invaluable experience would have been unattainable without the support of the Center for International and Comparative Studies. I deeply appreciate your support and hope that I was a strong representative of the University of Michigan.

Amir Sabet Sarvestani is a first-year master’s student in Biomedical Engineering at U-M. His interest in development issues and the role of health technology in the developing world led him to receive a CICS International Internship grant to participate in a WHO internship program in Geneva, Switzerland, working with the Diagnostic Imaging and Medical Devices unit (part of the Essential Health Technologies Department (EHT)).
Gallery

Indonesian Film The Photograph

Brazilian Film Mutum

Moroccan Film What A Wonderful World

Moroccan Film What A Wonderful World

Chinese Film Getting Home

All photos above are from the Global Film Initiative’s Global Lens 2009 Series. For a full schedule of films visit our web site at http://ii.umich.edu/cics.
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