

Issues

2008



A compilation of visual and written works by interns sponsored by the Center for Peace and Global Citizenship during Summer 2008. Student edited by Mica Baum-Tuccillo, Duncan Cooper, Allyn Gaestel and Meghan McAllister.

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Global Citizenship and Local Sustainability

Defining citizenship in a globalized and ever globalizing world can be difficult. Global connectedness, often positive, sometimes engenders the exploitation of global “opportunities” and invites global destruction. What if we were to define global citizenship in terms of local citizenship? Perhaps we can: a peaceful, respectful, and engaged global citizen is someone who concentrates on the prosperity, richness, and sustenance of local life, land, and people.

Reading an essay by Wendell Berry, “The Whole Horse; The Preservation of the Agrarian Mind,” during one of my last few days at D Acres of New Hampshire Organic Farm and Educational Homestead helped me to define the substance, the grain, the storyline of my time there. Berry defines agrarianism, in contrast to industrialism, as a practice dictated by respect for local land and local communities and the necessity of a deep working connection between the two. This practice of local citizenship and respect is exactly what I encountered and participated in while at D Acres, and what I have done my best to carry with me since.

D Acres helped me toward an understanding and a way of life that I did not even know I was missing. To Berry’s notion of agrarianism D Acres adds its own flavor: a welcoming community of eclectic and energetic individuals, good food, a beautiful place to let loose, and an emphasis on everyday creativity, imagination, and DIY resourcefulness as vital aspects of sustainability and communal wellbeing.

At D Acres, we spent our time doing work that contributes directly to our own collective livelihood. For just six short weeks, dedicating my day to the very garden beds that I could count on to produce my own meals, as well as to creative endeavors, yielded a satisfaction and a feeling of wholeness and integrity that I had never before felt.

It was not until I experienced the fullness, wholeness, and connectedness of my life at D Acres that I also understood the relative disjointedness and incongruity of an unsustainable lifestyle. The kind lived by most people in the United States, urban, suburban, and rural alike, leaves vast gaps between the ways we spend our time and the ways we sustain our lives. D Acres helped me to recognize these incongruities, which exist unrecognized and unquestioned between the foods in the fields, the supermarkets, and the “work” we do to be able to afford to participate in the system.

To lead a sustainable lifestyle is not only to engage in practices that sustain the health and beauty of the land that we depend on both materially and spiritually, but also to engage in work—physical, creative, imaginative— that contributes to personal and collective sustenance and reintegration. Sustainability encourages global citizenship through active and responsible local citizenship.

-Fay Strongin, HC '10



A Quiet Revolution in Nicaragua

In 1979, the Sandinistas overthrew Nicaraguan dictator Anastasio Somoza Debayle. Almost immediately after the Sandinista revolution triumphed, the United States initiated a counter-revolution. The Contra war ended in 1990 when the U.S.-backed presidential candidate Violetta Chamorro was voted into power. She forgave the U.S. of \$17 billion in reparation funds, and instead accepted a loan from the International Monetary Fund.

We were standing in the Gallery of Heroes and Martyrs in Esteli. "It is difficult to be here," Nuvia said. We had just sauntered into the museum towards the end of Spanish class. The walls were covered with photos of faces, with a name, a date, a place as the caption... except for "los desaparecidos," whose names and faces lacked any information about how or when they died.

"It is difficult to be here because we remember their faces." Nuvia seemed as if she were about to cry, and I looked away.



I wondered what had changed since the revolution. I wondered what would have changed if my country hadn't funded the counter-revolution that devastated so many real promises for change. I realized then that I couldn't look away.

"I fought on the front lines for the Sandinistas because I had to see up close what our country was doing," our American facilitator Lillian had said of her participation in the Contra War. "They destroyed all of the social programs the Sandinistas built after the revolution."

I cannot look away.

Rogér told us that the I.M.F. policies have wrecked his community. Of the three companies that have privatized Nicaragua's public utilities he said, "This is a new conquest. It's a conquest of energy... we want to call these three transnational companies the Niña, the Pinta, and the Santa Maria."

The revolution is not over. It has merely changed, transformed, modernized.

Rogér said, "I got involved with the revolutionary war because we were promised that after Somoza was out, all Nicaraguans would have their basic needs and rights. But I see that that is not what happened." The counter-revolution continues, we think, in secret. Through covert policies, pacts, back scratching, shady trades, Iran, and Contra.

I cannot look away.

When I do I fail to see what I have gained from covert policies, pacts, back scratching, shady trades, Iran, Contra, I.M.F. When I look away I don't see Nuvia's tears.

I cannot look away.

-Dina Rubey, BMC '09

Buen Provecho

More regular than interviews or visits to historical sites, the one thing that happened every day without fail at the office of the Comité de Madres was lunch. I can't say to what extent lunch is a big deal in their everyday life; that is, I don't know if it is central to them all the time, or if it was one more way of them showing their extreme hospitality to us. What I do know is that one morning I got halfway through knitting a hat while waiting for people to show up, only to find that they had arrived at the office just in time to make lunch. I finished the hat that same morning.

Lunch, after our rounds of "buen provecho" and after we'd all had a chance to tuck into the inescapably fantastic food for a while, often turned into a lively conversation. One of the women worked for many years at the Maternity Hospital, and one day told us a number of stories from her time there. Here is one of them,

There was once a prostitute who had really small breasts. Well, in her line of work she wanted bigger breasts so that she could make more money, so she got some hormones to make them grow bigger. She was really anxious to have bigger breasts very quickly, so she actually took double the recommended dosage of the hormones.

Little did she know, she was also a short ways into a pregnancy when she began taking the hormones. Because of the combined effect of the pregnancy and the hormones she was taking, her breasts grew a lot. They grew so much that she couldn't support them; she had to put her breasts on a little cart and wheel them around in front of her as she walked.

The hormones she had taken also affected the baby she eventually had. Her baby was a boy, but he wasn't born like a normal baby boy. He was born with a full head of hair, a mustache, and a man's penis! The penis, so big on such a little baby, hung down to his knees! It's unknown what happened to the little boy, but the poor prostitute had to have her breasts taken off because they were so big.

-Inez Steigerwald '09



In Jerusalem

When you visit Jerusalem, people will encourage you to visit Yad Vashem. On that day in June, the main exhibit at the Israeli Holocaust Museum was closing early for the Sabbath, so we visited the Children's Memorial instead. Candlelight flickered in a dark and mirrored room, illuminating eerily projected photographs of children and infants killed in the Holocaust. One had the sense of being surrounded by points of light extending out eternally in all directions. Each dot of light was meant to represent one life cut tragically short. As we slowly took in this sorrowful place, a monotone voice echoing from the blackness listed the names and ages of the victims one by one. Stepping across the threshold into the bright Levantine afternoon was like crossing back over from death to life.

As I blinked and took in the ancient vista, I overheard a tour guide explaining the significance of the site in an impeccable American accent. A retired couple, moved as I was by the place, held each other as they listened.

"You see, the state of Israel isn't about left wing politics or right wing politics," the young man explained gravely. "It's about ensuring that no Jewish child is ever killed again." The couple remained silent. What could they have said? What frail words could hope to contain such unspeakable tragedy? Shaken, I hardly noticed our tour guide leading me to an overlook where the view stretched across a valley which had perhaps once dazzled the patriarchs as it dazzled me then. The flawless cobalt blue sky illuminated the rough terrain, revealing a rugged beauty which had enticed generations of residents, settlers, and conquerors throughout the millennia.

"There," he said, pointing to a clump of trees 1,400 meters across the valley to the north. "There, was the Deir Yassin massacre." I shuddered. There are few places in the world that so encompass the complexities, paradoxes, and cruel ironies of history.

Our guide Said had introduced himself the day before as a Palestinian with Jerusalem residency papers. This meant that he and his family enjoyed some of the benefits of a partial Israeli citizenship. We frequently held our collective breath as heavily armed soldiers demanded to know his reason for being in such

and such a place.

Despite the suspicion Said's complexion earned him, the papers he produced allowed us relatively free access across the Occupied Territories. Where other cars were turned back because of insufficient documentation, or rapidly changing security protocols, or the vicissitudes of a nineteen-year-old's mood, our tour bus practically hummed through layers of security.

In 1947, the Arab village of Deir Yassin overlooked the strategically-important road between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. On November 29 of that year, a U.N. Mandate partitioned the land of Palestine, dividing it between Jewish and Arab populations. The British Mandatory government was scheduled to depart on May 15, 1948. Almost immediately following the announcement, long simmering tensions between these communities flickered into violent conflict, as both sides sought to dictate the terms of the hand-off of power. Clashes escalating in their intensity and violence took place between militias and unarmed civilians. Attacks provoked further reprisals, establishing a cycle of violence that intermittently continues to this day.

A month before what would come to be known as the Israeli War of Independence – or the nakba– was officially declared, Israeli paramilitary groups began clearing the vital road linking Jerusalem with the coast. On April 9, the Jewish militia known as the Irgun assaulted the town, losing five of its number in the fighting. The details of what happened next remain murky. They continue to be bitterly contested by two factions claiming legitimacy for their interpretation of the struggle. What historians do agree on is that by the end of the day, over one hundred Palestinians lay dead. Many were unarmed civilians.

The news of this event spurred the movement of Palestinian refugees fleeing the violence and the fear. Rumors of "another Deir Yassin" drove families from their homes. Most carried only the bare essentials, in the belief that soon the fighting would end and they would be allowed to return. Eventually this exodus would total 700,000 displaced people. Most were prevented from returning to their land once the war ended. Today, there are over 4.5 million Palestinian refugees. Many families still have the keys to their abandoned, often demolished houses. They are passed from generation to generation along with a narrative of displacement and often the conviction that one day a return could be possible. >>

I stood there in the ancient beauty of a Levantine landscape, slowly processing the significance of what I saw around me. To my left was a place memorializing one of the most chillingly tragic episodes in human history. To my right was the site of another tragedy. They differed in circumstance and in scope, but both have had pervasive impacts on the consciousness of their victims. Before their induction into the military, Israeli high school students visit Auschwitz and pledge “never again.” To Palestinians, the mundane humiliations of occupation are a daily reminder of the displacement of 1948.

Both narratives are true. Both inspire people to continue the struggle, to continue the fight. On our delegation, we met with people on both sides of the conflict who realize that denial of the other’s tragedy will ultimately result in a simmering impasse which will always cyclically erupt into violence. In such a time there can be no true and lasting peace. Baruch Spinoza wrote that “Peace is not an absence of war; it is a virtue, a state of mind, a disposition for benevolence, confidence, justice.” The conflict, oppression, and fear will continue until both sides realize the value and the necessity of such a virtue.

-Eric Lundblade

It Takes a Village

It takes a village... In my experience, it took the dedicated and compassionate minds and hearts of Bram and Sari, the founders and leaders of the NGO, Subur Gemini Nastiti. Dedicated to encouraging organic and sustainable farming, their NGO reached out to the community in the village of Ngawi in East Central Java, Indonesia. Many of the mini-projects I worked on with Subur Gemini Nastiti were microcosms of their larger intent to improve community relations within the village of Sekaralas and promote organic farming. As a way to reach out to the wider community, many of the projects involved the kids of Sekaralas. The projects encouraged creativity, self-reliance, commitment, responsibility and a strong work ethic. The children were also instilled with a

sense of accomplishment and independence: here were things they could create on their own and could be proud of.

One particular project involved the Belinjo nuts that kids had been meticulously collecting and storing before I even arrived. In large baskets, the nuts were sorted and we all sat on the floor removing the outer seed coat with knives. Then, a few of the older boys took the inner nuts and fried them over a fire in a pan. The second seed coat was then cracked open by the younger boys using large rocks and pieces of wood. The inner nut, a soft white ball, was then smashed again with a rock and then arranged in a second woven basket to be left out in the sun to dry and later fried again to make the final product, Krupuk, a cracker-like snack for the kids to eat.

While Sari was present to supervise and participate in the Belinjo to Krupuk process, most of the work could be executed through the children’s efforts alone. It was something special to watch the kids work together and divide up the labor amongst themselves and an even greater treat to witness their proud smiles of accomplishment when we laid out our first batch of flattened Belinjo nuts.

The proverb claims that it takes a village to raise a child, but more importantly, it takes a village to do most things. Bram and Sari and their organic farming initiative are attempting to tap into the already existing village support system and sense of communal obligation and direct it towards social and economic change. It’s from the villages, the grassroots organizations, the communities who want to help each other and improve their lives and the lives of people around them, that change will come to the world.



Sister, White Man

Lately, I've found myself thinking about the word "feminist," found myself obsessed with it, with what it means and does not mean, with what it says, and does not say. Misconceptions about the word run rampant, so for purposes of clarity, let's just define "feminism" as: "the doctrine advocating social, political, and all other rights of women equal to those of men" (Oxford English Dictionary). I went into my summer in Kumbo, Cameroon, working with the Women's Empowerment Institute of Cameroon (WEICAM), comfortable with this definition and comfortable in talking about my internship as a feminist project. After all, the ways in which non-white, non-Western women in the developing world have been excluded or erased from modern narratives of feminism have been written about at length, and the need for a new feminism that would open its boundaries to these women's needs seems to be the current trend in feminist thought. I considered myself a believer in that school of thought, and tried to go into my project with an open mind, acknowledging my own ignorance in matters of community need and the best way to achieve women's empowerment.

Kumbo had a complex network of women's social groups, consisting primarily of women's church groups and farming groups, and a spattering of church and farming groups for both women and men. These were the groups that received most of WEICAM's attention (recruiting for our literacy program, aid for microfinance projects, etc), as per the instructions of our director, Geraldine, a Kumbo local. It seemed that within these isolated spaces of women's social groups, women were somehow powerful, free to take on positions of leadership and speak their minds. In order to get anything done it was necessary to go through older women community leaders and to ask for the aid of the intricate network of mobile and active women to spread our announcements and opportunities. Within these spaces it seemed as if there was already a kind of organic feminist consciousness, an understanding that female solidarity was important and valuable and that there was some underlying reason why women would come together in the first place that ran deeper than convenience, that lay in what choices women had available to them.

However, there came a time when Geraldine asked me to start a new project with the wives of the local traditional ruler, the Fon. The Fon lived with some sixty wives in the palace, still the center

of regional power and traditional religious life. The wives of the Fon ranged in age from twelve to eighty, and most had been forcefully abducted from their villages as young girls. These women and girls lived in small huts around the palace, and because they were forbidden by religious law to go to marketplace and sell their goods like other women, they were exceptionally poor without any way to make a living. Furthermore, the Fon slept with all of the wives on a rotating basis, and were deprived any agency over their own bodies; STDs and unwanted pregnancies were rampant. My job was to talk to these wives, and ask them how WEICAM could help them to start engaging in an income-generating activity that they might do together. The togetherness aspect was a concern from the beginning, for we knew many of the wives had rivalries with one another and resentments over whom the Fon favored. However, it seemed to Geraldine and me that togetherness was important for success, that the more the women could work together the more their action might be sustainable, more powerful.

The three older wives greeted Roseline and me, but this younger one did not she continued to prepare the meal. Later, another young wife arrived, in traditional dress, and greeted me with a wave of her hand. Hard rain poured outside, and inside the fire crackled, while the wives moved slowly, methodically, We remained around the fire, all the women speaking in Lam Nso and gesturing in my direction. Roseline gestured to me that it was time to begin, and I did the best I could, asking these women what it was they needed, telling them I was here to help, but my words seemed so small, so misguided. The women told me that they did not want to work together, that the younger wives mock the older ones for their backward ways, and the older wives do not wish to circumvent traditional religious law just to make a little money. I came out of the meeting feeling so confused. Here is an excerpt from my journal, reflecting on the meeting:

"Yesterday, I met with the Fon's wives. I sat there, awkwardly, not knowing what to do, knowing I was in the presence of something I could not name, and could not understand. These women are revered and respected but they have nothing. These are old, hard women who know what restriction is, oppression, repression, silence. They are silent and not silent. I am overwhelmed by the darkness, the rain, the fire, the coarseness of their hands as they shake mine, how far broken their backs are, how hunched over they are, a lifetime in the fields. There is a kind of despair in their eyes I've not seen ever, anywhere before. It is a kind of finality,

an ending, as if their lives ended forty years ago when the men clapped the white bracelets around their ankles, the first time they were made to have sex with the Fon, then the tenth. Years of working their small farms.

Their eyes seem to say, the time and space where what you are saying might have been possible ended a long time ago in a place that is not here and is far away from here. I am shocked, awed, and jealous at the same time of Roseline, her easy way of sitting with the women around the fire, she herself her own kind of mystery in a brown suit and cheap hair extensions. Maybe this is all I can do: sit with the women. Sit with them and their lives and their silences and listen to that silence, quantify and describe it, bear witness to it."

On the CPGC retreat we were all told by Marianne Chilton, a respected field anthropologist, "prepare to lose something of yourself." I felt that I certainly lost my ability to say without a doubt that I was doing a service for these women, that I understood what it is they were having to survive and that I was making that survival any easier. I think I went into this experience thinking I was working on a feminist cause, that as a woman I had some window into their experience. But I found there, that though I was welcomed so warmly into the homes of so many of the women of Kumbo and into their group meetings and lives, they didn't seem to understand our connection in the same way that I did; that is, the fact that I was a woman didn't seem to really matter or bring us into any sense of collective action. As I walked into town every morning, I was often shouted at by the local children one of two things, "kimbam!" (white man) or "sister!" (after the many white nuns that have descended upon Kumbo), and I couldn't help but think, which am I: Sister or white man?

It seemed that my race and my Americanness were one hundred times stronger indicators of the power I was trying to abdicate than was my gender an indicator of the power I lacked and that I was trying to win for them. They treated me as they would treat any other kimbam who was kind and showed them respect. It was not that I expected them to embrace me as like them simply because of my gender; or that I felt I could claim to be, but they seemed to understand my work there as a purely humanist project rather than as a feminist project, and I found I had no words to explain the difference. It may be that to be a woman in Cameroon means something so drastically different than to

be a woman in the United States, that the sheer force of gender oppression is so much more crushing in Kumbo than in New York, that to relate my experience of my own gender to theirs is wrong, presumptuous, even offensive, and that to call my aim a feminist aim does a disservice to the word "feminist." Maybe this is all I can do: sit with the women. Sit with them and their lives and their silences and listen to that silence, quantify and describe it, bear witness to it.

-Emma Eisenberg, HC '09



In Learning to Listen, Empathy is Everything

It is my first day of work at Philadelphia Legal Assistance. I have barely been there for more than four hours when I am called in by one of the attorneys in the family law unit to translate for a female Hispanic client who has suffered from domestic abuse and has an upcoming court hearing. The client only wants to get away from her abuser and is frightened by the prospect of having to see him again in court. As I translate between the attorney giving the precise details of the hearing and the client, I can palpably feel the client's fear growing. All of sudden, she breaks down and cries. What do I say? What should I do to comfort this woman? Is there anything I can do? So many questions come to mind as I watch her teardrops fall.

Reflecting back on the moment, I can link it easily to another time and place. I wasn't a senior then but a bright-eyed student who had just finished her freshman year. I had applied for my first CPGC internship to work with a U.S. medical team in Peru as a Spanish translator. My entire experience in Peru was memorable – so memorable that it has shaped much of my mentality and college experience since that time. However, one particular moment of my time there saliently stands out nearly two-and-a-half years later. While in Peru, a nurse practitioner and I entered into the home of a woman whose walls were sparse except for pictures of her children who had died. In telling us her sad situation, the woman breathed out sobs of hopelessness and despair.

On the surface, these situations may seem very different – the grief of a woman in Peru seen by a medical team juxtaposed with the fear of an abused woman seen by an attorney in Philadelphia. However, the harrowing feeling I felt while witnessing these women's emotional suffering was very much the same.

I served as a Spanish translator for both of my CPGC experiences. Translators fill a unique niche in the working world. They have to balance listening with other mental processes and have the difficult task of building bridges between cultures and languages. From my experiences, I have learned that the greatest skills of being a translator are not manifested through knowing the greatest number of Spanish words or having the perfect Spanish accent, but instead being able to listen, to really listen. In a world where efficiency dominates everything, compassionate listening is often lost in the mix of clients or patients that need to be seen, tasks that have yet to be accomplished, thoughts that are elsewhere. But in choosing efficiency over empathy, we lose sight of so much. Sometimes just serving as a compassionate listener and providing words of comfort and hope can be all that you can give but also all that someone really needs.

-Jennifer Atlas '09



Marriage in Kinshasa

Bitoo wakes up at 5:30 to make it to church at 6. She used to do it with her husband but since he died she's struggled to attend regularly. But she's getting back into it. She heads to her boutique. She used to share it with her husband but since he died she has to manage the business herself. The kids try to help, but if she doesn't know who is taking the money and for what sometimes it disappears into someone's pocket. She stays till ten, then finally returns home where a sister or aunt and the young random white daughter she welcomed into her home is waiting to review the day over newly introduced 'Yogi teas'. She used to come home to preside as regal matriarch. Now she's hiding with me in the bedroom because she's exhausted. She's holding everything for everyone.

Her house is full of dependents. The other wife's eldest daughter is always there, watching TV, eating meals, asking for soda at the boutique. When her husband was alive the two households were separate, but they had to cry together and now are intertwined in drama. The eldest son's fiancée and daughter live there. Except that the eldest son is in Britain and has never met baby Dora. He's in jail for abuse resulting from disputes with his other wife and baby in London. All the children are getting older and can't find jobs in Kinshasa's shambled economy. Before they were going to learn diamond trading from their father, but since he died they are struggling just like all of Kinshasa's unemployed youth. Bitoo asks for Advil because she says it helps her sleep. Most nights she tosses and turns and worries instead of resting.

Marriage is a partnership in the Congo. It isn't just about romance and family ties. And the destruction of marriage is much more than the breakdown of a couple, it is the degeneration of any personal stability in a universally chaotic society.

Wives have no overt power. Custody battles favor the father, so long as he has someone to take care of the children, be it family or a new wife. A couple came to my clinic for counseling when I asked what would happen to the ex-wife, with no husband, no job, no respect, and now no child, the NGO worker acknowledged she had nothing but justified the choice, saying "yes but he's the papa."

Another NGO I interviewed was founded by a widow to support other vulnerable women because, she explained, "I suffer like all the women, but I at least have the means to do something about it now." After her husband died, criminals came and forced her out of her house without justification, because she had no legitimate social or legal protection without her husband. She told me this story in her NGO's community center, where she has been grudgingly living.

Bitoo stands on the edge of this social double-edge. She has the responsibility for the family she used to share with her husband. She has the vulnerability of sudden singledom in a family and patriarch-centered society. But she also has the love and respect of her extended family, and the power of wealth. Watching her struggle through this complicated territory, and live out the conflicting expectations of responsibility amidst social restrictions personalized for me the political and social chaos that is currently omnipresent in Congo. Letting me in and sharing her headaches, Bitoo showed me how Congolese women are carrying the daily weight of war.

-Allyn Gaestel, HC '09



The Aesthetics of Democracy?

It's the natural impulse of people who are very alive to decorate their environment, make it beautiful. The ultimate question raised by graffiti is: What would a wildly decorated city look like?

-Taking The Train, Joe Austin

"This is so much fun," a father told me, as he stood painting in the petals of a bright blue flower. We were at a block party where I was helping with a community painting project. His son had wandered off a while ago, but that man was completely excited to simply spend time expressing himself. This was one of many moments this summer that helped show me that self-expression is important for everyone; everyone has something to say and express, not just the people who visit museums or students whose schools have enough funding for art classes.

Avenues for self-expression allow people to find pride in their own voices, and giving them a public and accessible space empowers these individual voices as important for everyone to hear. From the people who come together to design a mural, to those who are involved in painting it, to those who simply walk by and comment to their friends about it, connections are built and community is strengthened. All become "true democratic citizens" of their city: they engage with and impact their environment and their society. And in a society that often devalues and disenfranchises voices, this seems especially necessary.

So, if public art fuels democracy, why not have it everywhere? Why don't we paint murals on the fronts of houses, on the walls of our classrooms, on every blank space available? It might make our cities or classroom look pretty crazy, but they would certainly be expressive—and by extension, democratic. A multiplicity of voices would be present. This is what's at stake in the question: what would a wildly decorated city look like?

By restricting art to certain spaces, we restrict individuality and voice to those spaces as well. This might not always be bad, since there are obviously practical and aesthetic concerns with city streets covered in murals and graffiti, a classroom that is distracting to students in it. But our democracy does have an aesthetic, and it seems important to recognize in what ways we empower or discourage individual voice when we tell people where they can, and can't, express themselves. There seems to be a fundamental need for expression in every single human being, and if we are truly democratic, we need to support and uphold that need for public expression wherever we can. At least, that's the kind of democracy I want to live in.

-Max Rosen-long '09

