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BERKLEY CENTER FOR RELIGION, PEACE & WORLD AFFAIRS AT GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY
About the 2011-2012 Junior Year Abroad Network

61 Hoyas in 30 Countries on 5 Continents

The Berkley Center Junior Year Abroad Network (JYAN) connects Georgetown students studying abroad at universities around the world. Students share reflections on religion, culture, politics, and society in their host countries, commenting on topics ranging from religious freedom and interfaith dialogue to secularization, globalization, democracy, and economics. In the seven years since the program began, more than 350 students have participated, studying in nearly 50 countries.

Participating students write two academic blogs over the course of the semester and provide commentary on blogs from other students. Upon their return to campus, they participate in a panel discussion that explores common issues and challenges in their respective countries. JYAN is administered by Jamie Scott and Melody Fox Ahmed of the Berkley Center and is part of the Doyle Engaging Difference Program.
About the Doyle Engaging Difference Program

The Doyle Engaging Difference Program is a campus-wide collaboration between the Berkley Center and the Center for New Designs in Learning and Scholarship (CNDLS) to strengthen Georgetown University’s core commitment to tolerance and diversity and to enhance global awareness of the challenges and opportunities of an era of increasing interconnectedness. Doyle faculty fellowships support the redesign of lower-level courses to incorporate themes of cultural, religious, and other forms of difference, while Doyle Seminars facilitate in-depth explorations of similar themes in smaller, upper-level courses. In addition to curricular innovation, the Doyle Program supports the Junior Year Abroad Network, through which Hoyas blog about their encounters with diverse host societies, and Doyle student fellows, who engage intercultural and interreligious dialogue on campus. The program is made possible through the generosity of William Doyle (C’72), a member of the Georgetown University Board of Directors.

About The Berkley Center for Religion, Peace & World Affairs

The Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs at Georgetown University, created within the Office of the President in 2006, is dedicated to the interdisciplinary study of religion, ethics, and public life. Through research, teaching, and service, the center explores global challenges of democracy and human rights; economic and social development; international diplomacy; and interreligious understanding. Two premises guide the center’s work: that a deep examination of faith and values is critical to address these challenges, and that the open engagement of religious and cultural traditions with one another can promote peace.

Georgetown University Study Abroad

Georgetown University encourages students to spend a semester, year, or summer session abroad as part of their academic experience. The Office of International Programs offers approximately 160 programs in more than 35 countries. The majority of Georgetown students enroll in direct matriculation programs, where they take courses in the language of the host university alongside degree-seeking students at the institution. The GU philosophy is that by fully integrating into the host university, Georgetown students are best positioned to gain the most from their overseas experience. In addition to direct enrollment, Georgetown offers a number of programs in Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Central Europe designed to facilitate the study of language, culture and area studies.
Before studying abroad, it is nearly impossible to know what the experience will be like and what adventures and opportunities will arise. In fact, studying abroad in one country is vastly different than studying abroad in another, and no two students will glean the same insights from their time overseas. The study abroad experience is a truly personal one.

Despite the immense range of observations and reflections from the JYAN bloggers, one common thread clearly stood out: studying abroad provoked much introspection and self-discovery. The experience led to a personal growth that could only have come from the unique experiences of spending time far away from home.

**Defining Personal Experiences in a Foreign Context**

**THE OCEAN OF EDINBURGH**  
**NADIA IBRAHIM (MSB’13), SCOTLAND**

If posed with the question, “What did you take away from your time in Edinburgh, Scotland?” my response would revolve around what I have learned from the Scottish perspective on people. Over the past few months, I have been immersed into an environment that is much more laid back than the one I’m used to. The stark contrast between my life at Georgetown and my life in Edinburgh is comparable to standing in bustling Times Square versus sitting on a serene and solitary beach. I find that at Georgetown I get too wrapped up in various responsibilities and commitments and fail to appreciate the people that surround me; instead of living in the present, I feel as if I’m always looking toward the future. In Edinburgh, the pace of daily life is much slower and more people-centered. During the three months in which I called Edinburgh home, the people of this city helped me recognize the importance of living in the moment and taking the time to learn from those around you.

**CELL PHONES, YAKS, AND MONKS**  
**JAMIE MARTINES (SFS’13), CHINA**

If I have said it once, I have said it a million times: in China, it is very easy to feel very small. In the last three weeks, I have never felt smaller than when I was standing on the mountainside in Xia’he, gazing out at the expanse of mountains and fields below me while struggling to catch my breath and trying to understand the lifestyle the people of Xia’he lead. In that moment, I felt like I had been pushed to my limits—physically, spiritually, and intellectually. When I look back on this experience nearly two months later, I have to admit that I still have more questions about the current conditions in China than I do answers.

**PREPARED AND UNPREPARED: CULTURE SHOCK AND EDUCATION AT OXFORD**  
**EMILY OEHLEN (SFS’13), ENGLAND**

After living in the United Kingdom for two weeks, I can assure you Oxford is very different than Georgetown. I can list mundane examples of how the two are different. Most importantly, I can ascertain that there are underlying systemic motivators of the differences concerning conceptions of independence, the purpose of an education, and the basic components of a healthy community; classism, ageism, and interactions among minority groups; exchanges with other cultures over time; and religion and spirituality. But I cannot perfectly describe, and therefore I do not perfectly understand, these motivators simply because I have not lived here for a sufficient period of time. I am still surprised by interactions, rules, and practices. I cannot predict the typical British cultural response to most situations. In short, I am still in culture shock.
During their time abroad, many students observed particular cultural and social differences between their home and host countries, as well as the complicated relationships between social actors. In many cases, students studied in regions with clear social hierarchies, conflicts between secularism and religiosity, or deeply entrenched local traditions that were at odds with the quickening pace of globalization. Some students experienced different stereotypes about Americans, which often reflected broader social perceptions.

By fully immersing themselves and participating in the local culture, students were able to draw insightful conclusions about the many social cleavages, while also recommending tools that bridge these social disparities. Ultimately, the students discovered the difficulties and rewards of promoting and sustaining cultural, religious, and social pluralism.

**Engaging Difference at the Global Level**

**THE RISE OF REGIONALISM AND MIGRATION IN MODERN CHINA**

**HANNA GULLY (SFS'13), CHINA**

While studying in Shanghai, I have begun volunteering at a school for migrant children once a week. I teach English to a class of about fifty fourth graders. We engage the students by playing games like hangman and telephone, and get them to say simple sentences such as “I like basketball. Do you like basketball?” Though my conversations with the students have not been deep, my time at the migrant school has given me a lens through which to view the public discourse on China’s migrant phenomenon.

The building appeared newly constructed and was well-kept. All the students had their own supplies—books, bags, pens, and pencils. The classrooms, too, were stocked with equipment. The teachers seemed dedicated, organized, and earnest. But as I began to teach, I noticed a difference between the students. There was a huge gap in the ability level of the students—some children were excellent at English while others struggled tremendously. This gap was not a reflection of the students’ ability. Instead, it was a product of their families’ transient lifestyle. The students entered the school at all different times and with varying levels of English experience. Those who entered a step or many steps behind had little hope of catching up in large classrooms where there was little time for one-on-one attention.

**CULTURAL ENTANGLEMENT: THE COSTS OF GLOBALIZATION IN CHINA**

**CHARLY JAFFE (SFS'13), CHINA**

I talked to some friends and Chinese students about this, and no one seemed surprised. They informed me that by Chinese standards, large eyes, light skin, and a pronounced bridge of the nose were considered beautiful. Chinese culture is generally a much bigger fan of itself than it is of the West, yet it defines beauty by Western physical characteristics. However, for those that weren’t born with these features, the economic growth in China has provided many with the means to purchase it. There are a variety of explanations for this situation: cultural imperialism, the negative effects of the media, links to consumerism and higher quality Western products. In all honesty, I cannot begin to explain the roots beneath this idealization of Western beauty standards in a society.
so confident in the quality and authority of its own culture. What I can say is that it further illustrates the all-encompassing nature of globalization: it cannot be segmented and governments cannot pick and choose where and how globalization will affect their societies.

**FAITH AND MODERNITY HAVE MUDDLED SENEGALÉSÉ VIEWS ON SEXUALITY**

**SARAH MAC DOUGALL (SFS’13), SENEGAL**

In Senegal, despite such a strong presence of Islam, the veil is not prevalingly common. Women wear both traditionally styled long wrap skirts, but also jeans. You may absolutely never wear shorts or skirts/dresses above the knee, but the tiniest, tightest tank top imaginable is more than appropriate. This makes it very unclear if the pants regulations are for purposes of modesty, or are just another manifestation of Senegalese attitudes toward women. The same applies to sexuality overall in Senegal, particularly among the youth: is the blatant sexuality expressed in modern youth culture just modeling America’s, without fully understanding the sexual overtones? Or is it a rejection of earlier societal attitudes about sexuality?

**GLOBAL MARKETS CHANGE THAI CULTURE AND CREATE NEW DEPENDENCIES**

**LAUREN BOAS HAYES (SFS’13), THAILAND**

Pressure to develop the country has led to sweeping changes in the composition of Thailand’s workforce and economy, and these changes are affecting those binding forces that define Thai culture. Most notably there has been widespread movement of adults to Bangkok and other urban centers to find work while their children are left in villages to be raised by their grandparents. As Thais leave the farm for the city, the population is becoming increasingly dependent on foreign markets for their food supply. This has radically changed Thai culture. It is not an exaggeration to say that it would be hard to drive five minutes without coming across a 7-11, where many Thais shop multiple times per day.
I AM HERE TO LEARN: NAVIGATING THE STEREOTYPES OF AMERICANS IN GHANA
MARY GRACE REICH (SFS’13), GHANA

The struggle to shape my position as a visitor to Ghana has been an ongoing challenge. In many situations, I have been presented with an unsettling hierarchical relationship between foreigners and Ghanaians. Ghanaians have a reputation for welcoming foreigners, and people frequently start up friendly conversations with me as I stroll down the street or through the market. They are curious as to why I am in Ghana and how I feel about Ghana. Often they guess at my occupation in Ghana: a volunteer, and presume how I feel: hot.

While volunteering is an honorable pursuit, I am eager to upset the stereotype and proudly respond that I am a student at the university. Perhaps my water flows more regularly and my lights rarely go out; but that does not mean that I am in the position to teach Ghana how to develop. Rather, I am here to be taught. The need to empower populations of developing countries in their ability to develop independently has been proposed as a key to sustainable development. It is important for a mutual exchange.

Engaging Difference at the Local Level

THE IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL CLASS IN ECUADOR
KERA WRIGHT (MSB’13), ECUADOR

Since colonial times when the Spanish ruled, a social pyramid with the whites at the top and indigenous and blacks at the bottom has prevailed in Ecuadorian society. For this reason, many people are surprised when they hear my English accent. How could a black girl be a gringa? How could she be a part of the perceived elite? I usually get replies such as, “I thought you were from Esmeraldas,” a coastal region of Ecuador with a largely black (and poor) population. These realities of the social structure of Ecuador greatly parallel those of the United States. In both countries, status symbols definitely exist, elites rarely want anything to do with the lower class, and the European standard of beauty dominates. I guess what disturbs me about Ecuador is the rate of change. The same prejudices from centuries ago still exist.

LONDON SHOWS SIGNS OF HOPE FOR ENGAGING DIFFERENCE
GINA ELLIOTT (SFS’13), ENGLAND

My class discussions have largely lambasted “multiculturalism” as political rhetoric that has little real impact—we are told that we must accept difference, so we say we accept difference. But do we put any effort into learning about and understanding other cultures that are melding with ours? There is a sense that, as a concept, “multiculturalism” over-simplifies very complicated issues. On the other hand, I see a lot of reason for optimism in Britain. I think these discussions about considering difference are in themselves useful, and, in my experience, largely absent from American discourse. The School of Oriental and Africa Studies is one of the most diverse environments I have ever experienced, and I find the fact that people from all over the world, and from very different British backgrounds, can discuss these issues frankly extremely heartening.
Hinduism Shapes India’s Caste System and Interfaith Relationship
Proshanti Banerjee (SFS’13), India

There are a lot of Muslim students studying at Fergusson College from many countries in the Middle East, and they live in harmony with the Hindu students. Additionally, when we visited a slum called Dharavi in Mumbai, there was a huge Muslim population that was openly on the streets praying in huge number, and no one was disturbing them or staring at them or questioning why they were there. They simply just went on with their business. I think it is great that Hindus and Muslims are able to live in harmony like this as opposed to the killing and the rioting that took place before, during, and after partition. However, I think it will be a long time before interfaith marriages or relationships beyond just friendship and acquaintances will be accepted in Indian society.

Women of Northeast Thailand: Privilege and Obligation
Mary Lim (SFS’13), Thailand

Northeastern rural Thai women live in one of the few matrilineal and matrilocal societies that provide for more roles and participation within society. Property rights passed down to the daughter ensure that she has the resources to support her parents and her children to fulfill bunkhun. But, with the greater pressure on the daughter than the son, daughters must find the balance between the need for productive work and reproductive work. While women traditionally have received the advantage of property rights in a matrilineal culture, the advantage is offset by the unequal amount of filial burdens they bear. With modern development leading to decreasing resource availability, increased desire for education, and shifting economic relationships, women in Thailand must constantly negotiate their social and cultural relationships to adapt.

Perhaps my water flows more regularly and my lights rarely go out; but that does not mean that I am in the position to teach Ghana how to develop. Rather, I am here to be taught.

-Mary Grace Reich

Homogenous Danish Culture Makes Room for Outsiders
Zoe Weiner (C’13), Denmark

When I think of Denmark, I think of beautiful tall, blonde, blue-eyed men and women. The nation is known for its homogeneity, a fact of which the Danish people are extraordinarily proud. This feeling of sameness colors much of Danish culture. In such a small nation, there is a sense of necessity for sticking together. It is not uncommon to see small groups of men and women huddled together speaking in the native language, one that very few outsiders are able to understand. While this creates an atmosphere of comfort for those on the “inside,” it is a rather difficult adjustment for someone like me: a short, brunette Jewish girl. Despite the closeness of these communities, I have found the Danish people extremely welcoming. After only a month, I was easily integrated into one of the small groups I used to shy away from. And although I may look different from my blonde haired, blue-eyed friends, I finally feel at home.

Reconciling the Social and Religious Being in France
Colleen Quinn (SFS’13), France

The French laws governing secularity aim to completely strip the public sphere of any religious influence, expressly prohibiting the “ostensible” display of one’s religion. With such a privatization of religion in France, the reconciliation of the individual as believer and as citizen remains confusing and difficult. Rather than questioning the role of religion in their daily lives, the French people instead appear to compartmentalize it, separating the moral teachings, which are relevant to their existence as social being, from the actual practice of worship and praise. A large discrepancy exists between those who report being Catholic and those who regularly practice their faith. Churches remain empty, and the sense of community and of the people as the Body of Christ, that has constituted such a fundamental part of my Catholic upbringing, is difficult to find.
WITCHCRAFT AND CHRISTIANITY INTERSECT IN GHANA  
JENNY BROWN (C'13), GHANA

On the surface, witchcraft and Christianity could appear as mutually exclusive belief systems and they have certainly been interpreted as such historically. Part of this collision may have its roots in the clashing political and cultural systems that came to be represented by the respective belief systems, but today the power struggles and social dynamics behind Christian reactions to witchcraft are not as clear. Indeed, the Pentecostal church in Ghana has made the fight against witchcraft a major theme in their doctrine. They perform ceremonies to help cleanse former witches and draw strong parallels between witchcraft and the Christian devil. On the other hand, there are Christian aid groups in Northern Ghana working for the rights and well being of those in witch camps. In short, witchcraft, much like luck or individualism, is not a simple remnant of an old religion but an adaptive component of modern culture.

ETHNIC DIVERSITY CREATES RELIGIOUS PLURALISM IN BRUSSELS  
ANNA DRABEK (C'13), BELGIUM

One of the most surprising things I have found out so far is that Belgians are actually a minority population in Brussels. This fact is put into light quite clearly by my real life example; of all the people I have interacted with during my month-long duration in Brussels, I have actually only met a single Belgian who is not a professor or my landlady. As opposed to Paris, where immigrants (usually Arab) live on the outskirts of the city, in Brussels the immigrant neighborhoods are integrated right into city center. Because of this, it is not hard to find mosques and churches of other Christian denominations, and there is a large synagogue near city center as well. The path I take to get to my evening Dutch class requires me to walk past a string of halal restaurants and grocery stores, and most window panes vividly promote travel offers for the Hajj.

NAVIGATING THE RELIGIOUS SECULAR DIVIDE ON AN ISRAELI BUS  
ALEXA RYAN WEST (SFS'13), ISRAEL

Israel is a country without a constitution, and today’s main domestic issue is figuring out whether or not the nation is truly a Jewish State. Sure, the bus wasn’t a religious bus—but was it a purely secular bus? Lately, the news has been covering the sensitive issue of women sitting in the back of the bus per request of religious men. There is no “back of the bus” Rosa-Parks-esque connotation here, yet many still find it disrespectful to have the women and men separated in such a way. The rapidly growing religious population (in both numbers and influence) is creating a major religious-secular divide in all aspects of Israeli life: education, army service, legislature, and even day-to-day bus rides. Israel is a very dynamic country, but reconciling its dynamism politically has become a real problem.
What defines a nation, or national identity? Is it the language most people speak, the religion they practice, the sports they watch, or the mannerisms they share? In many countries it is a combination of all these local characteristics, and a plethora of other intangible and abstract nuances that render a people and place unique.

During their time abroad, students paid particular attention to cultural comportment and interactions; historical legacies and their influence in the modern context; and the intersection between traditional and modern medical technologies. Their reflections provide insight into what it really means to ascribe to one national identity, and whether this shared identity truly exists.

Observations about National Identities: Culture, Food, Personalities, and Language

EDINBURGH, THE CITY OF LITERATURE
SASHA PANARAM (C’13), SCOTLAND

In 2004, Edinburgh was named the first UNESCO City of Literature. Recognized for its strong literary culture and support of the arts, Edinburgh is said to compel authors to write. The city itself has been the subject of many stories including Sir Walter Scott’s Waverley collection, Robert Burns’ ballads, and Robert Louis Stevenson’s, Kidnapped. More recently, internationally acclaimed author, J.K. Rowling, based Hogwarts on several gothic buildings scattered throughout Edinburgh. Similarly, best selling author Ian Rankin—the James Patterson of Scotland—uses Edinburgh for the setting of many of his books of the Inspector Rebus series. The statement, “The stories are in the stones,” rings true in this part of the United Kingdom. A quick stroll down the Royal Mile—a succession of streets from Edinburgh Castle to Holyrood Palace—provides people with opportunities to connect with Edinburgh’s rich literary history and witness the enduring legacy it gave to the world.

MORALITY EXISTS BENEATH CHINA’S HARDENED EXTERIOR
ALEX D’SINO (SFS’13), CHINA

This is the hallmark of economic ambition, and though the façade is beautiful, there increasingly appears to be something rotting underneath. In China, money is now the indisputable marker of success, however there are few Chinese people who do not regard the accumulation of money and power with some suspicions. Perhaps this society has become obsessed with a kind of capitalism in which wealth and power accrue only to the bold, innovative and somewhat selfish. Although some believe that the selfish and self-involved tendencies stem from realities of Chinese culture, citing ancient proverbs to suggest that people have always looked out for themselves, I don’t believe that the Chinese culture is ingrained with a lack of compassion or an innate self-involved drive. Day to day, most Chinese people put aside the gaping societal problem of moral ambiguity in order to perform the everyday acts of kindness and decency that make a society function. Like any society and any city, there are gaping holes, but there are also reasons to believe that compassion exists.
ECOLOGY AND DEVELOPMENT CLASH IN ECUADOR
CHLOE CHEN (SFS’13), ECUADOR

I told my professor I couldn’t understand how the people of a country so rich in invaluable natural resources and beauty could be apathetic to environmental issues. I also commented that my classes about ecology and environmental sciences only had one or two Ecuadorian students. He agreed that there is indeed a lack of awareness among Ecuadorians, but that their lifestyle couldn’t be compared with those of Americans because even though they may live a less “green” life, consumption per capita is still much lower. Reflecting later on what he told me, I realized that the Ecuadorian point of view isn’t one of apathy, not really, but one first and foremost, from the developing world. How can I expect the man selling tamarind candies for 25 cents on the bus to care more about the protection of the environment than making enough money to make it through the day?

AUTHENTICITY AND PORTION CONTROL DEFINE ITALIAN CULINARY CUISINE
ALEXANDRA MORAN (SFS’13), ITALY

Many Italian cities pride themselves on their one or two distinctive products. In 1963, Italy instituted a certificate of supervised origin, known as the Denominazione di origine controllata (DOC), to protect authentic Italian food. Only foodstuffs genuinely from that region are allowed to label themselves as such, narrowing competition in existing markets and creating so called “ethical food markets,” where producers are able to demand a higher price for their foods. In the 1980s, the Italian government introduced the more stringent Denominazione di origine controllata e garantita (DOCG) to crack down on cheap imitators. These laws protect many types of wines, olive oils, balsamic vinegars, cheeses, fresh produce, meat, and seafood.

NOT FOR THE TIMID: PORTEÑOS LIVE WITH ZEAL AND PASSION FOR EVERYTHING
COLIN O’BRIEN (C’13), ARGENTINA

Argentina has an incredibly expressive culture, for better or for worse. This spectrum ranges from little things like greeting almost anyone with a hug and kiss every time you see them to the polar opposite, when the not so flow-ery emotions are also evident; remarks and insults someone would normally keep private or say in a hushed tone are always pronounced in a proud voice. A few times this has resulted in a fight on the subway, but within minutes cooler heads prevail and the instigators could be confused for best friends. It’s this zeal for life that makes every day interesting here. It seems as if nothing is ever done half-heartedly. Weekly recreational soccer games can often get heated and turn ugly even with just friends playing, but after competing as if the World Cup was on the line the same group of players sit down for hours to discuss anything and everything.

LA MIRADA, OR, THE STARE: FOREIGN INFLUENCES ON ARGENTINE SOCIETY
SAM KAREFF (SFS’13), ARGENTINA

I call this phenomenon La Mirada, roughly translated as the look or the gaze. Perhaps this is limited to the porteño population of Buenos Aires, a people who are most certainly not known for their subtlety; I learned this trait very quickly when I wore flip-flops on an unusually warm winter day in July and was quickly made the subject of stares, pointing, and even a few snickers. La Mirada can be a tricky spectacle to avoid! You happen to encounter it anywhere you go, whether you are riding in some form of public transportation, walking down the street, or even just sitting casually in a bar or café. It is especially startling when administered by the elderly, who proceed to yell and ask your nationality, or young children, who instantly point these social deviants out and ask their parents why they are speaking “so funny.”

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY REIGN SUPREME IN ECUADOR
LAURA WEST (C’13), ECUADOR

In Quechua (an indigenous language of Ecuador) the name for this type of community work is minga. During times of minga the whole community comes together to work collectively on a project. All participate in order to ensure the project’s success. While the word minga originally comes from an indigenous language, I have heard it woven into Spanish as well. For example, my ecology professor has a small non-profit organization called “Minga para Mi Rio,” which organizes river cleanup and conservation projects for students. The mere fact that both of these languages include a word specifically describing work done in community speaks immensely to culture tendencies within Ecuador.
THE SAME LANGUAGE IS DIFFERENT: 
EXPERIENCE LANGUAGE AND CULTURE IN AUSTRALIA 
CHRISTINA MCBRIDE (C’13), AUSTRALIA

I have also struggled with what I would consider a considerable language barrier between the United States and Australia—a challenge I was not anticipating. One of the first days here, while at the “uni” (what the Australian’s call the university), my friends and I got invited to a “barbie” through our program. We played it off like we knew what this “barbie” was, but it was not until we arrived back home and googled this word that we deciphered the true meaning of it, a barbecue. Another similar encounter I have experienced with this Australian slang was when I received an email from a member of the international team at the university I am studying at, requesting that I “stop by this arvo,” once again causing me to scratch my head. Google came in handy this time also, indicating that this meant come stop in this afternoon.

VISUAL LANGUAGE FROM THE CLASSICAL TO THE CATHOLIC 
KELLY SKOWERA (C’13), ITALY

All of this emphasis on political and religious imagery of the ancient world has allowed me to further contemplate my own reliance on imagery in my daily life. While various pictures and symbols abound in every culture, I have found that I notice and analyze such things more in Rome. Certainly I encounter many images back home in Chicago and in Washington, but I find myself much more perceptive of other forms of communication as a result of my inability to speak Italian fluently. Even though I may not be fluent in the language of the country, I have realized that some images are universally recognizable. This power of symbols to transcend cultural borders has been most apparent for me in the Catholic Church. While every church expresses its culture in unique ways, the consistency of religious symbols and imagery that I associate with the Catholic faith help to break down the language barriers.

GAY MARRIAGE HIGHLIGHTS SPAIN’S SPLIT PERSONALITY
ELIZABETH LIPPIATT (C’13), SPAIN

Where the true paradox arises though, is at the intersection of politics and religion. The debate about gay marriage is a major point of contention among religious and political groups in the United States. Yet, in Spain, a traditionally Catholic country, it is completely legal. The fact that such a Catholic country has embraced gay marriage is telling of Spain’s split personality. Also telling is the way the issue of gay marriage is treated in Spain, which is to say, it isn’t. I never hear a word about gay marriage unless I ask about it—the topic is completely off the radar. The silence surrounding its legality indicates how completely accepted it is—the Spanish don’t feel a need to talk about it.

ON BOTHO, A BINDING SOCIAL FORCE AMONG THE BATSWANA PEOPLE
LIANA MEHRING (SFS’13), BOTSWANA

As a rapidly modernizing country I am concerned about the increasing influence of Western values upon Botswana’s traditional value system, and how botho is affected. Members of past and present generations voice a common concern that Botswana is currently experiencing the rise of individualism and the decline of botho. Ironically, globalization and the increased interconnectedness of the world appears to be undermining the interconnectedness of the Batswana people. Individualism is a western export that challenges botho by replacing the “we” with the “I.” My friend explained to me that in the past botho required that you acknowledge the humanity within everyone and greet even strangers upon the street. A friend described the past as a world in which ‘there used to be no nobodies.’
COLONIAL HISTORY CREATES RELIGIOUS SYNCRTISM IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
ALEXIS THOMAS (C’13), DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

While the country’s official religion is Catholicism, much of the campo (countryside) practices a form of religious syncretism that employs a strong belief in using certain potions in combination with rites and prayers to bring good fortune to one’s life. As my professor of Dominican Language and Culture, Carlixta Cedano, explained, “Estas creencias son importantísmas a mi gente. Aunque somos una gente mayormente católica, esta es la manera en que fuimos criados.” “These beliefs are extremely important to my people. Although most Dominicans are Catholic, this is the way that we were raised.” Reflecting on my professor’s explanation and on the religious reverence of the people in general, I see an interesting religiosity at every level of Dominican society. Not only do many Dominicans profess a strong belief in Catholicism, but they also possess a spiritualism whose origins can be traced back to Africa.

Buddhism Survives the Khmer Rouge to Give Hope to Cambodia
BONNIE DUNCAN (C’13), CAMBODIA

Although every form of community in Cambodia suffered greatly from the devastation of the Khmer Rouge period, pagoda committees were the first kind of social institution to spontaneously re-emerge after it. Despite the vast social devastation left in the wake of the Khmer Rouge regime, a large part of Cambodia’s post-conflict development is invested in the reconstruction of Khmer Buddhism. This alone testifies to the reliance of the Cambodian people and—more specifically—expresses the importance of a religious community for rural villagers. While still very much shaped by the horrors of the past, present-day Cambodia possesses the characteristics of a resilient developing country. Seas of traditional monks in orange robes combine with the bustling motorbikes and tuk-tuks that characterize the streets.

Don Francisco describes the harmony between his traditional medicine practice and the local nature when he calls nature, “God’s pharmacy,” where all remedies can be found.

-Sarah Vasquez

HONORING A MURDERER: THE CONFUSING POLITICS SURROUNDING PINOCHET’S DICTATORSHIP IN CHILE 21 YEARS LATER
MADELINE WISEMAN (C’13), CHILE

Early on during a two-week “Contemporary Chile” course with my program, I learned that the current president Sebastián Piñera had a number of ties with Pinochet’s government, and benefitted financially from his policies. I was shocked to learn that he had been elected; obviously Chilenos had not forgotten about the dictatorship, and Piñera’s ties to Pinochet were hardly a secret. Chilenos have told me a few possible reasons why Piñera was elected, all of which probably contributed in a way, but one in particular pertains to my point about Chilean politics. Stated plainly, some Chilenos see the dictatorship as a positive period in their country’s history. I have yet to figure out whether these people simply negate the facts, or choose to adopt some twisted view of the reality, but somehow many people continue to support the ideologies and actions of Pinochet and his government officials.

STREET HISTORY IN PARIS’S BANLIEUE ROUGE AND THE COMMUNIST HERITAGE
COLE STANGLER (SFS ’13), FRANCE

If there is one event that illustrates the transition from feared political force into harmless cultural relic, it’s the annual Humanité Festival, named after the left-wing newspaper and organized by activists affiliated with Communist Party’s current electoral alliance. The festival, launched in the 1930s, now takes place in the Paris suburb of La Courneuve, and attract-
ed over 500,000 people in three days this September. At one point a serious political meeting, the event has evolved into an immensely popular three-day fest of drinking, eating, and music, coupled with a book fair and some debates. Still, it’s the only place, to the best of my knowledge, where one can flip through a copy of *State and Revolution*, eat churros, and listen to Avril Lavigne at the same time. It should be said that I remain slightly embarrassed by the latter.

**AFRICAN INFLUENCE IN BRAZIL EVIDENT THROUGH CANDOMBLÉ RELIGION**

**KATHERINE HENTERLY (C’13), BRAZIL**

By the time we left the ceremony we already had about a hundred questions to ask our tour guide. He explained to us that a priest or priestess could receive a god at any age, as they are born with this capability. If a child’s parents are able to receive a god or goddess, the child will most likely be born with the ability as well, as it is passed down through families. Each priest or priestess receives the same god during each ritual, and the god whom they receive is either known at the time of birth (in this case, it would be the same god who their parent received), or determined through a fortune telling practice called *búzios*, which is reading of shells. Attending the Candomblé ritual has been one of the most remarkable things I have experienced during my time in Brazil. While I have learned about various indigenous and African religions in my history classes, as a Catholic, I have never before witnessed these religious practices firsthand.

**JUDAISM: A TOLERANT FRANCE DESPITE A TURBULENT HISTORY?**

**OLIVIA GEORGE (C’13), FRANCE**

How does one account for the large population of Jews despite this history of hatred? Following the war, Leon Blum was elected three times the prime minister of France, making him the first Jewish head of state in an independent country for almost 2,000 years. Perhaps this demonstrated tolerance by the French people and government contributed to the influx of Jewish refugees from around Europe in the 1940s and 1950s. In addition, following the decolonization of French Northern Africa, roughly 235,000 North African Jews migrated to France because of severely anti-Semitic movements in the newly formed independent countries of Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco. Today, although there have been a number of very serious anti-Semitic attacks, France is perceived as very tolerant. This general tolerance could stem from France’s strict policy on secularism; religion is protected because it has been removed from the public sphere, rendering it a completely private matter.
**ARE FESTIVALS GOOD FOR YOUR HEALTH?**
**LISA FRANK (COL ’13), ECUADOR**

Another program is the strengthening of the Raymis, festivals that happen four times a year on the solstices and equinoxes. These festivals, especially the summer Inti Raymi, are considered necessary to the well-being and cultural identity of indigenous communities, but the pueblos often face financial difficulties and so the Ministerio de Salud is providing small amounts of funding and technical assistance to help put on the festivals. Some may question why the health agency and not the Ministerio de Cultura is involved in this effort. How can a festival solve pressing, modern health problems? One point brought up is that the information provided on health problems is all from a western perspective. We have a very limited notion of health, which tends to focus on physical illness and treating existing problems, rather than a broader conception of preventative health, mental and spiritual health, or well-being.

**THE STRUGGLE BETWEEN RELIGION AND HIV/AIDS IN BOTSWANA**
**CAITLIN KOURY (NHS ’13), BOTSWANA**

While there are differences in the traditional and indigenous religions of Ghana, both groups present difficulties when treating HIV. For instance, an HIV positive woman came in to the International Health Care Center for follow up visits while her husband defaulted. When Dr. Naa asked the woman about her husband’s absence she explained that their family had taken him to their village. He had a swollen leg that they believed was caused by a spiritual power. Health and religion are uniquely connected in Ghana. When an HIV patient begins treatment, he is considered lucky if he starts to improve right away. Sometimes, the medication has negative side effects like nausea, headaches, and body pains that deter patients from continuing their antiretroviral therapy. “At some point patients say the orthodox medicine isn’t working so they disappear. They tell us they don’t believe in modern medicine and wind up dying,” says Dr. Naa.
CHURCH-STATE RELATIONS COMPLICATE REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH FOR ARGENTINES
ANI ZOTTI (SFS’13), ARGENTINA

Despite the apparent apathy of the general citizenry, the Catholic Church is intrinsically tied to certain aspects of Argentine daily life. This is primarily due to its traditionally heavy involvement in government, though its influence has waned some in recent years. For instance, the Kirchner administration’s latest programs for the provision of free oral contraceptive pills and condoms, as well as the law on mandatory sex education and same-sex marriage, have received considerable flak from the Church. Despite the 2002 law, contraception is still exceptionally difficult to obtain in many areas, and most doctors refuse to perform abortions even when they are legally permissible. According to the Argentine Penal Code, abortion is still largely illegal, at least for all of those that have not both been raped and suffer from serious and well-documented mental retardation, or for those who would die without one.

TRADITIONAL MEDICINE IN THE LOWLANDS OF BOLIVIA
SARAH VAZQUEZ (C’13), BOLIVIA

The “environment” part of the traditional medicine found here is rooted in the local plants, the hot climate, and the illnesses most affecting the area. Don Francisco makes all of his remedios caseros (remedies of the home) from plants he finds in the mountains surrounding the town or from plants he grows in his own garden. The medicine is custom to the needs of this town; the hot climate and heavy rain season make malaria and dengue common so therefore Don Francisco has made remedies for these illnesses as well. Don Francisco describes the harmony between his traditional medicine practice and the local nature when he calls nature, “God’s pharmacy,” where all remedies can be found. The industrialization and globalization of our modern world also affects Don Francisco’s practice. He can speak to the industrialization of the agriculture business in this part of the country because what used to be lush mountainsides full of medicinal plants are now flat fields that were burned to make room for soy crops.
As students of a Jesuit university, many bloggers focused on the intersection of religion and the state, as well as the polemical competition between the two for political influence. In a supposedly secularizing world, religious traditions have had to adapt in a variety of different ways. Students observed some traditions growing more orthodox as a reaction to the secularization of the outside world, and others adapting religious practices to conform to shifting social priorities.

In their reflections, students observed that, often, religious belief and religious practice were two very different things. Many blog posts attempted to explain the disparities with historical and social contexts. In other cases, students noted that religion proved to have much deeper impacts on society than they originally thought, going as far as to influence electoral outcomes, educational institutions, social reform, and cultural forgiveness.

**The Politicization of Religion**

**BRITISH MUSLIMS LOOKING FOR A MIDDLE GROUND BETWEEN BRITISH AND ISLAMIC LAW**

CAROLINE PUCKOWSKI (SFS’13), ENGLAND

Ms. Khan notes that in her experience it is the generation of Muslim British citizens currently under 40 who are especially keen on finding this middle path between English and Islamic law. “We love all our cultural baggage,” she says, but she also emphasizes that “Islam is a breathing, living faith” that is able to stretch and adapt to fully function under the umbrella of English law. Ms. Khan suggests some solutions for the future, such as the persecution of imams for non-registration. The example of sharia in the English legal context is but a microcosm of the broader discussion of assimilation, multiculturalism, the separation of church and state, and the compatibility of Islam with democracy and Western politics. The world is getting smaller, and the viewpoints of different cultures are increasingly bound to intersect. The point here, however, is that they are not necessarily bound to clash. With the right amount of creativity and respect, it is very possible that two fundamentally different systems can complement each other to create one coherent whole.

**ITALY SHOULD BE CAREFUL ABOUT TAXING THE CATHOLIC CHURCH**

LUKE DEVLIN (C’13), ITALY

I’ve tried to explain the complicated nature of the relationship between the Church and the Italian state to frame the difficult questions facing this nation today. Italians like to consider that Catholicism is the “first religion” of Italy. The Church receives many benefits from the state that other religions do not receive. The Italian people, however, seem to be siding with reason in this effort to tax businesses of the Church that quite frankly should be taxed. One Italian, when asked what he thought about the measures to tax the Church’s businesses, replied that this is action is seventy years overdue. The economist in me sees the need to tax the businesses of the Church not directly associated with religious practices; in fact, I fully support the measure. My reservation, however, is that if the taxation of the Church somehow causes the state of the churches to fall into disrepute or to commercialize them, then Italy should rethink the taxation, since the churches in Italy are truly one of their finest attractions.
CHURCH AND STATE: THE CLOUT OF SENEGAL’S MOURIDE BROTHERHOOD
ALEX VILLEC (C’13), SENEGAL

As individual vendors of sunglasses, bootlegged CDs, and miscellaneous paraphernalia, the clout possessed by Mourides in political life appears beyond belief. A generous estimate would count three and a half million Mourides, approximately thirty percent of the Senegalese population. The cohesive followers of Amadou Bamba, however, possess a knack for focused organization that renders the whole much stronger than its individual components. The Mouride Brotherhood presents a fusion of spiritual rigor and socio-political leverage that sheds light on parallels to our own political system. At its base, the Mouride Brotherhood is a powerful voting block with ample resources to swing elections. Incumbents and political hopefuls alike must invariably make concessions on their behalf, functioning much as a potent interest group here in the United States. To what extent do colossal establishments water down the voice of the individual?

“We love all our cultural baggage,” she says, but she also emphasizes that “Islam is a breathing, living faith” that is able to stretch and adapt to fully function under the umbrella of English law.

-Caroline Puckowski

TURKEY’S LONG-AWAITED MIDDLE GROUND
SAM SCHNEIDER (C’13), TURKEY

In reality, claims that Turkey is becoming an Islamist republic are based on entirely circumstantial evidence. It is also important to see traditional secularists’ vociferous opposition in the context of their deteriorating political clout and frequently expressed disdain for the uneducated and “backward” masses of Anatolia. The Justice and Development Party (AKP) represents the nuances of modern day Turkey, a country bridging East and West. Rising out of the ashes of nearly a century long battle between the uncompromising forces of puritan secularists and political Islamists, the AKP has secured a sturdy voting block at home and widespread support abroad by striking an enigmatic balance between Islamism and liberal reform.

VALUES VOTERS IN FRANCE’S PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION
MARY RYAN (C’13), FRANCE

My host parents, who are both practicing Catholics, confirmed that their religious beliefs did, in fact, have a certain influence in their political leanings, but it was not as expansive a role as I initially thought, given their heavy involvement in their parish. They felt that some of Francois Hollande’s proposed legislative changes did conflict with their beliefs, but, as they told me, their economic concerns trumped social or faith-based ones. For my host mother, ultimately, it was the economy and not religion that would drive her vote, although in the present case, as she added pointedly, both went the same way. Their voting preferences, it turns out, are hardly unusual among French Catholics. According to polls released immediately following the announcement of the election results, approximately 79 percent of practicing Catholics voted for Nicolas Sarkozy. Similar religious voting blocs exist for other groups, including practicing Muslims, who, in addition to constituting the largest religious group in the electorate following Catholics, voted largely for Hollande.

We love all our cultural baggage,” she says, but she also emphasizes that “Islam is a breathing, living faith” that is able to stretch and adapt to fully function under the umbrella of English law.

-Caroline Puckowski
RELIGION PROVIDES EDUCATION AND WELFARE TO HONG KONG’S SECULARIZING SOCIETY
JOOHEE KIM (SFS’13), CHINA

Taoist and Buddhist organizations often collect money via charity to contribute to welfare, educational, and medical needs in Hong Kong. Confucian followers are heavily involved in the education sector, establishing multiple Confucian schools across the country. Then there are Catholics with 283 schools filled with about 220,000 pupils, most of which are aided by the Catholic Board of Education. They also support several clinics, family centers, hostels, rehabilitation centers, and the like. Despite much religious skepticism, religion of all kinds is deeply embedded in everyday life. Social welfare is something the Hong Kong government has never been too proactive about. Their cash handout in the fall was a rare gesture among their few welfare initiatives. Thus, as religious groups act as the welfare arm of Hong Kong, they become essentially impossible to ignore.

CATHOLICISM AND LIBERALISM IN SPAIN: A HAPPY COEXISTENCE AS GOD BECOMES IRRELEVANT
GRETTA DIGBEU (C’13), SPAIN

The changes that have occurred in Spain since the death of Franco are extraordinary, and the pace at which they have been adopted is astonishing. Spain was the third country in the world to legalize gay marriage and adoption nationwide, and under the universal healthcare system, the Spanish government covers up to 75 percent of abortions that meet certain criteria. Nevertheless, the mark of Catholicism in Spain is indelible. In 2011, Madrid hosted World Youth Day 2011, which, exceeding all expectations, drew more than one million people to the streets and turned out to be the largest Catholic event ever staged in Spain. Themed “Firm in the Faith,” the event sparked some protests from secularists denouncing state funding of a religiously themed event, but none of its programs were disturbed and it was overall a great success.

“TO ACCOMPANY” DEFINES THE JESUIT ROLE IN AMMAN
MATTHEW IPPEL (SFS’13), JORDAN

Recently, the Jesuit presence in Amman has become involved with Iraqi refugees. Through the establishment of the Jordan Project of the Jesuit Refugee Services, supplemental classes of English grammar, English conversation, and computer skills assist Iraqi youth who may have fallen behind in school or have not had exposure to these areas, as well as for Iraqi adults who fled Iraq and are waiting and hoping to move to the West. These refugees are living in Amman for an indefinite amount of time, and, due to their statuses, they are unable to receive proper residency documentation, which is needed to work in Jordan.

VEILING IS NOT A LACK OF AGENCY BUT A WAY OF LIFE
CAITLIN ATTAL (C’13), JORDAN

Veiling should not be confused with the lack of agency; instead, it is a clear sign of the agency Muslim women possess, and most Muslim women in Jordan agree that conservative dress does not represent oppression, restriction, or coercion. In Jordan, covering is not compulsory by law, unlike in neighboring Saudi Arabia. However, remaining modest in front of men and non-Muslims is deeply entrenched in Islamic thought. For the Jordanian women who veil, this choice represents an indispensable part of their personal and religious identity, one that should not be compromised. Young Muslim females have incorporated the religious veil into a fashion statement as tradition meets modernity. It is not uncommon to see women driving with a cell phone tucked into their hijab, while both hands are on the wheel. Tight jeans, a light blue tank top, and a white cardigan go well with a navy blue scarf. The different styles of wearing the hijab itself have become a fashion statement as well.

THE CONCEPT OF HONOR UNITES RELIGIONS IN JORDAN
MORGAN MCDANIEL (SFS’13), JORDAN

Jordan is far from the most conservative Muslim country, but Jordanians’ social patterns reflect the principle that women must be protected from contact with men who might harass them, and men must be prevented from having contact with women that might compromise their honor. For example, if a woman boards a public bus and the only open seat is next to a man, the driver will tell a man sitting by himself to move so she can sit alone. In a Muslim house, it’s very rare...
for unmarried women to have male guests, and if a brother has his male friends over, the women will stay in a different part of the house to avoid contact. Christian women don’t cover their heads and don’t dress as conservatively as Muslim women do, but it would be a mistake to assume that their worldviews are entirely different. Chastity until marriage is still important to Christian families and children live in the house with their parents until marriage.

CHRISTIANITY IN BOTSWANA: A PROMINENT AND GLOBALIZING FORCE
ERIC MOORING (C’13), BOTSWANA

The sheer extent of globalization through religion can be startling. I am living with a home-stay family and once visited a relative’s house for a birthday party. As soon as I walked into the rather small house accessible only on dirt roads I heard the strains of “My Country ’Tis of Thee.” It turned out that a DVD featuring American evangelical musicians was playing on the large flat-screen television, and while most of the performance consisted of Christian hymns, the recording also included a section of American patriotic music. In this instance, the cultural influences appear to be unidirectional; with religion as the vehicle, Batswana encounter performances of American patriotic songs, but I struggle to imagine a complementary situation in which Americans would, in association with their faith, watch a performance of the national anthem of Botswana.

IS GOD RELEVANT? EXPLORING FAITH IN HIGHER EDUCATION
SHEA HOULIHAN (SFS’13), ENGLAND

I have thoroughly enjoyed studying in this environment. Arguably, it is not that religion is discouraged—rather, religion at a personal level is rarely discussed. First of all, individuals interpret what it means to be religious or not religious differently. Labels like ‘religious’, ‘spiritual’, and ‘faith’—and their corresponding opposites—rarely capture an individual’s identity and beliefs in this matter. Secondly, there is strong sensitivity to different faith, or no faith, backgrounds. In my own anecdotal experience, I have found that students at Georgetown are far more likely to share personal testimony stories, or what some call their journeys in faith, than students that I have met here.

JOHN PAUL II: POLAND’S POPE
ALEX TATE (SFS’13), POLAND

Karol Wojtyla is a national hero in Poland. He was born in 1920 in Wadowice, a city just outside of Krakow in southern Poland. He features prominently in the Polish historical narrative of the late seventies and eighties as leading resistance to the communist regime. The leader of Solidarity, the famous trade union that opposed the communist party in Poland, Lech Walesa, named Karol Wojtyla as “the paramount champion of freedom.” In 2004, Wojtyla was awarded both the Nobel Peace Prize and the Presidential Medal of Freedom for his work against communism. Despite Karol Wojtyla’s superstar status in Poland, many Americans may not recognize his name, even after reading about his accomplishments. In fact, Karol Wojtyla is better known as Pope John Paul II.
THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF THE BURQINI, OR THE BURQA-BIKINI CROSSOVER
MICHAEL MADOFF (SFS’13), TURKEY

A new fashion has arrived to accompany the alcohol-soaked beach resort hedonism of Turkey’s Mediterranean coast. Alongside bare-breasted Scandinavian tourists, women sporting the latest designer burqinis splash in the waves and build sandcastles with their children. A burqini is the crossover between a burqa, the traditionally modest Islamic dress that covers a woman from head to toe, and a bikini. The innovative combination of these two seemingly irreconcilable articles of clothing represents the interwoven contradictions that comprise modern Turkey.

BRAZIL LACKS LONG TERM EFFORTS TO SOLVE DRUG TRAFFICKING
VIVIAN DIBUONO (C’13), BRAZIL

A monumental milestone has occurred during my time here in Rio that illuminates the light at the end of the tunnel. Rocinha, the largest favela in Rio, holds over 100,000 inhabitants and is strategically located in between the two wealthiest neighborhoods of the city. The head drug lord was captured one night close to my university, and a couple days later, 3,000 police were able to occupy and control Rocinha in about 90 minutes. Drug gang members were arrested or forced to flee, and now police are successfully controlling the community. Local residents hardly reacted, which really surprised me. I spoke with several people and they all gave me the same response. “It doesn’t matter, because they’ll all be back after the World Cup and Olympics.”

ARGENTINES FIND NEW FORMS OF SOCIAL REPRESENTATION
KELSEY TSAI (C’13), ARGENTINA

After a rich history of protestation, protests remain commonplace in Buenos Aires. The series of dictatorships and their repressive regimes, coupled with a crippling economy laced with hyperinflation in the mid-twentieth century, produced a fertile ground for discontent. Neoliberal reforms, and the political response to the oppressive regimes and their economic failures, seemed to only add to these problems. Widespread corruption in the government and within the political parties led to a general distrust in traditional channels of social representation. Together, these factors led to new, unconventional methods of social expression. *Piquetes*, roadblocks similar to the one I witnessed, grew in popularity, along with *cacerolazos*, pot banging assemblies, and *escarches*, political expressions in graffiti, among others. While some avenues of social and political expression were closed, others were being opened.

WORKING CLASS PARISIAN NEIGHBORHOODS FEEL THE SQUEEZE OF GENTRIFICATION
BEN SANTUCCI (SFS’13), FRANCE

“It sometimes feels like the area is being slowly swallowed by the chic 9th Arrondissement to the east and the commercial Grand Boulevards district to the south,” my neighbor lamented. It’s difficult to definitively judge the nature of gentrification, especially in a city as old as Paris. The city has changed and evolved numerous times over the course of its 2,000-year history and each transformation made the city stronger, the doomsayers were always proven wrong. What is unique about the present day situation however is the breadth of gentrification. Unlike centuries past, when the aristocracy would abandon one neighborhood for another leaving the former to be resettled by middle and lower income residents, the boundaries of upmarket Parisian enclaves have been relentlessly expanding since the 1970s.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY, TAJIKISTAN
AMANDA LANZILLO (SFS’13), TAJIKISTAN

I found the Twentieth Independence Celebrations in equal parts absurd, tragic and wistfully hopeful. Let me begin with the absurd: On September 9, 2011, in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, it was impossible to cross the main thoroughfare. This was because the government had invested in the largest flag in the word, and unveiled all 165 meters of it right down the middle of the street. Those viewing the parade were primarily old, foreign, or young
unemployed people, because all people nominally associated with the government, including public school students, Olympic athletes, and doctors, were required to march. In the evening, I watched the national laser light show on TV, which featured a giant laser portrait of Tajikistan’s President Emomolii Rahmon.

**THEATRE OFFERS SOLUTIONS TO SUBDUE POLITICAL TENSIONS IN JORDAN**

**JORDAN DENARI (SFS’13), JORDAN**

On a campus recreated using paint and props, actors staged a fight scene between Jordanian and Palestinian students, something that occasionally breaks out in between classes. The red and black scarves clearly demonstrated the line between the two groups in the argument. After the confrontation, the students stormed away, intentionally forgetting their shared history and experiences and not realizing their common goals. At the end of the play, angered by their discovery of an Israeli plot, the Jordanian and Palestinian students actively decide to overcome their minor differences and embrace their greater commonalities. The Jordanians give their red scarves to the Palestinians, and the Palestinians drape their black scarves around the necks of their new Jordanian friends. If the message of unity wasn’t implicitly clear from this grand gesture, the play’s writer made its message explicit. After thanking all those who made the play possible, he said, “The Mississippi River doesn’t divide the United States, so why should the Jordan River divide us?”

-Jordan Denari

**BRITAIN’S MIDLIFE CRISIS**

**DANIELLE LEE (C’13), ENGLAND**

It’s safe to say that while the UK has already had many a fruitful year, it still has another millennium or two left in her. However, Great Britain has already seen its zenith—a time when everything internal and external worked together as it should in its favor. As much as some may continue to hope and believe that it will “rise again” (I’ve actually heard someone say that), we know it won’t, at least not in the same sense. Not to say that Great Britain is no longer great or can no longer achieve great things, only that there will never again be a time when the phrase, ‘the empire on which the sun never sets’ applies to this nation.

**THE TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION IN SOUTH AFRICA**

**JEFF CANGIALOSI (SFS’13), SOUTH AFRICA**

So did the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) work? The answer to that question depends on whom you ask and how you define “work.” Criticisms of the TRC abound. Many complain that the TRC let many of the worst figures from the apartheid era off the hook while at the same time giving a disproportionate opportunity for white victims to speak at the public hearings rather than black victims. The commission was also severely underfunded and understaffed; hence, the TRC probably only scratched the surface of the stories of abuse under apartheid that are out there. Even with these criticisms, others, such as Archbishop Desmond Tutu, argue that the commission accomplished what it set out to do: start the reconciliation process.

**WITNESSING THE REVOLUTION IN EGYPT**

**SARAH AMOS (SFS’13), EGYPT**

The passion of these protesters is unlike any activism I’ve seen in the United States. While the number of Egyptians still actively involved in the protest movement is declining, those who still go to Tahrir every Friday are bent on eradicating feloul (remnants) of the old regime and the corrupt military rule. Their rhetoric is dramatic, but deservedly so. I’ve heard “fight til we die!” statements from seemingly reserved young women. I’ve also heard many protesters say that they hate politics; they don’t want to become involved in politics, just to protest against the status quo. It’s disheartening that some of the young people who so fervently fight for the liberation of their country are too jaded to become involved in the political process necessary for its reconstruction.