Welcome

Welcome to the 2016 issue of Oxford Development Matters, the magazine of the Oxford Department of International Development at Queen Elizabeth House. We hope it gives you an interesting glimpse of life at – and after – ODID.

We were delighted to take part last May in the Social Sciences’ very successful LiveFriday event at the Ashmolean, which put research from across the division on display in a way that encouraged active participation and involvement by the public – DPhil Shannon Philip was among the visitors (pp10–11). We were also privileged to host novelist Amitav Ghosh, who delivered the 2015 Olof Palme Lecture, asking whether a failure of creative imagination may be contributing to climate change – you can read some audience reactions on p9.

The 2015 Tour de France offered an opportunity for Junior Research Fellow Georgia Cole to draw on her research to reflect on cycling culture in Eritrea (p5), after two cyclists from the small East African nation participated for the first time. Other research highlighted in this issue includes a study by Young Lives exploring the link between corporal punishment and test scores in low- and middle-income countries (p8), and DPhil Daniel Agbiboa, who is researching corruption for his doctoral work, taking a fresh look at the issue via a children’s book by new International Migration Institute researcher Robtel Neajai Pailey that is contributing to a national conversation about corruption in Liberia (pp6–7).

We are looking forward to hosting the Development Studies Association conference in September this year, and you can read about that as well as more news from the department on pp14–15. On a more personal note, we were very sorry to say goodbye to Denise Watt, who retired in 2015 after 30 years at ODID, serving as personal assistant to the last five Heads of Department (centre, above).

Turning to life after ODID – we are very pleased to be able to feature some of the interesting work being carried out by our alumni in this edition of ODM. Heidi Williams was the winner of a MacArthur Foundation ‘genius grant’ in 2015 for her work on healthcare innovation – you can find out more about how it felt on p4. And on p3 you can read how Tayeb Noorbhai is putting healthcare innovation into practice, with a new initiative to use text messaging to combat high maternal and infant mortality rates in Tanzania.

Finally, Faraz Shibli, who now lives and works in Mongolia, describes a spectacular visit to the country’s Kazakh eagle hunters on p12–13.

We hope you enjoy reading the magazine – and do please continue to send us your stories and keep in touch.

Nandini Gooptu
Head of Department
Getting the Message Across

A new healthcare initiative run by a former ODID MPhil is using SMS messaging as part of a package of measures to help address high maternal and child mortality rates in Tanzania. 

By Jo Boyce.

‘Sudden swollen hands/face, headaches, excessive vomiting/nausea, stomach pain may be eclampsia. Go to the doctor since this is a risk for you and the baby’ … ‘Delivery is approaching. Have a birth plan ready, where to deliver, transport, who is joining you as well as sanitary pads, clothes and diapers for the baby.’

These are just a couple of the text messages expectant and new parents can sign up to receive as part of Totohealth, an SMS-based healthcare initiative being rolled out in Tanzania under the leadership of ODID alumnus Tayeb Noorbhai and colleagues in a bid to reduce deaths and complications among pregnant mothers and children under the age of five.

Every year in Tanzania, 7,900 women die of pregnancy-related complications and 98,000 children under five lose their lives. Part of the problem is that only 50% of mothers in the country deliver in healthcare facilities with the assistance of a skilled birth attendant, due to the distances involved and the unplanned out-of-pocket costs often encountered upon reaching the facility, as well as widespread distrust of the healthcare system. Poor general health awareness and misconceptions about healthy behaviour also contribute to the problem.

This is where Totohealth comes in. It provides parents with twice-weekly text messages tailored to the mother’s pregnancy stage or the age of her new baby, offering professional advice on everything from how to ensure a healthy pregnancy and mental health issues, to vaccinations, feeding and development milestones to watch out for once the child is born.

The texts, which are personalised with the baby’s name and written so as to fit into one message of 160 characters when translated into Swahili, take into account regional and district variations, for example in dietary habits or cultural beliefs and practices. Parents can also send individual questions directly to Totohealth’s experts via an SMS helpline, and there will be a voice messaging option for subscribers who cannot read.

As well as reducing mortality, the service – which is free to users – aims to ensure early detection of developmental delays or disabilities in babies, conditions such as club foot, autism, epilepsy, or hearing and visual impairments. Some of the texts require a ‘yes/no’ response from parents regarding the baby’s progress that can trigger a suggestion to seek further help, depending on the answer.

The system is useful not just for those who have difficulty accessing existing healthcare facilities, but also because it provides an alternative, more relaxed way of interacting with health experts.

‘Culturally, people treat healthcare providers with great respect and this barrier often does not give clients the freedom to feel comfortable and restricts questions during the brief time they have together,’ Tayeb explains. ‘In small communities it is also difficult to ask sensitive questions in fear of being judged by healthcare providers who typically live in and are an important part of the community.’

As well as permitting parents to ask questions privately and anonymously, the service enables them to refer back to messages multiple times, rather than relying on advice delivered orally during sometimes rushed clinic visits, and provides a source of information that is different from that traditionally passed down by elders in their communities. It also allows for greater involvement of fathers, who are generally excluded from maternal health discourses, both at home and at health facilities – fathers are free to sign up for the Totohealth text messages too.

The texts are just part of a package of measures that Totohealth offers. In addition, it supplies clinics with Clean Delivery Kits (CDK), which provide clinicians with supplies to use during labour to ensure a safe and hygienic delivery and a ‘Totokitbox’ of essentials for the mother and baby after delivery. The CDK and Totokitbox are available only via healthcare facilities – during delivery or at the postnatal care visits – so act as a ‘pull factor’ to encourage parents to opt for a clinic-based delivery and attend the four recommended check-ups after the birth.

Totohealth was originally established in Kenya in 2014 by entrepreneur Felix Kimaru, where some 18,000 parents are currently signed up. The service has already produced remarkable results there, with infant mortality falling from 31 per 1,000 live births to 18 over the course of a year in one of its first counties, Machakos, just south of Nairobi. In addition, of a sub-sample of Totohealth users, 87.5% reported delivering in a health facility with a skilled birth attendant, compared to a national rate of 62% in 2014.

Tanzania is the first country into which the service has expanded, and Tayeb, who completed his MPhil at ODID in 2009, became involved via his relationship with the Unreasonable Institute East Africa, which provides support and mentorship to early-stage companies working on solving social and environmental challenges.

‘As a Tanzanian, I’m passionate about finding innovative solutions that allow systemic shifts in the ways things are being done in the development sector, and work to grow and scale existing and proven methods to improve development outcomes and impact,’ Tayeb says.

Now his aim is to bring Totohealth Tanzania to 100,000 subscribers by 2019.

Jo Boyce is ODID’s Information Officer.

Find out more at www.facebook.com/totohealthtanzania
A Humbling Vote of Confidence

Former ODID student Heidi Williams was recently awarded a MacArthur Foundation Fellowship, a $625,000 no-strings-attached award for individuals the foundation believes have demonstrated exceptional originality and self-direction. Caroline Butler reports.

Hearing you’ve won a new grant is a cause for celebration for any academic. But for Heidi Williams, being told out of the blue she had been awarded hundreds of thousands of dollars to pursue her research in any way she saw fit, the effect was stunning.

‘To say that I was speechless and overwhelmed is an understatement,’ Heidi says. ‘I am a young assistant professor, very early in my career, and to have the foundation give that kind of vote of confidence in my work at this stage is very humbling’.

The MacArthur Foundation Fellowships, sometimes known as ‘genius grants’, are awarded to individuals in a wide range of fields, and Heidi’s fellow winners included painters, choreographers, poets and community activists as well as academics.

Heidi, who completed the MSc in Economics for Development at ODID in 2004, is an economist and currently the Class of 1957 Career Development Assistant Professor in the Department of Economics at MIT. Her particular focus is on healthcare innovation, where she is bringing rigorous scientific analysis to a field she says is often dominated by ideology and theory.

‘We have very little direct evidence on even the most basic questions about what drives technological change in healthcare markets, and whether private incentives are designed to encourage the development of the “right” technologies that we would want from a social perspective,’ she says. ‘These are the topics my research aims to address, attempting to inform the design of health and innovation policies that can improve health and social welfare.’

Heidi is particularly interested in the potential magnitude of invisible losses as a result of the way in which innovation policies, particularly the intellectual property rights structure, are designed.

‘If a company wants to know whether a candidate pharmaceutical drug improves health outcomes, it does a randomized controlled trial, and it can “see” whether the drug benefits patients. In that sense, the costs and benefits of new drugs can be measured very concretely,’ she says. ‘The costs and benefits of innovation policies are harder to measure. The costs of poorly designed innovation policies are that there are “missing” innovations – technologies that could have been developed (in the sense of being scientifically feasible) but which never reached patients due to misaligned economic incentives.’

For example, one recent study, with Eric Budish of the University of Chicago and Benjamin Roin of MIT, found that private companies were discouraged from investing in early-stage or preventative cancer treatments, partly because of the way patents work: clinical trials for early-stage cancer treatments take longer to run than those for late-stage cancers (because of longer patient survival times, and a requirement that treatments show evidence of improving survival outcomes), which means that early-stage cancer treatments take longer to reach the market. Companies typically file for patent protection before undertaking trials, with the result that their effective patent period is reduced.

Another project examined differences in subsequent innovation activity surrounding genes sequenced by the publicly funded Human Genome Project compared with those sequenced by private company Celera – whose intellectual property rights restricted how researchers at other institutions could use the data. Her research found that Celera’s restrictions reduced subsequent scientific research and product development on the Celera genes by around 30%.

Heidi herself has described her work as being at the intersection of science, medicine, economics and law, and one aspect of her time in Oxford that she remembers with particular pleasure is the opportunity it offered for mixing with those studying other subjects – as well as the strong academic support it provided.

‘I had a wonderful supervisor – Marcel Fafchamps – for my MSc research project who was extremely helpful, and from whom I learned a lot,’ she says. ‘Also, the college system at Oxford gave me the opportunity to interact with students outside of my field in a way that was very rewarding.’

Speaking to MIT, Heidi noted that throughout her career so far she has particularly benefitted from the freedom to pursue deep analyses of particular problems rather than facing pressure to publish. Now, hopefully, the exceptional freedom bestowed by the ‘genius grant’ will enable her to continue her important work.
n the summer of 2015, Eritreans appeared in the international headlines for two very different reasons. On the one hand, they made up a disproportionate share of those boarding boats in Libya and making their way across the Mediterranean to claim asylum in Europe. Story after story explored what it was about this ‘secretive’ state in the Horn of Africa that was causing so many, predominantly young people, to leave.

At the same time in France, two Eritreans were making history as the first black Africans to take part in the Tour de France. Merhawi Kudus and Daniel Teklehaimanot competed as part of the Tour’s first cycling team from Africa, MTN-Qhubeka; and Teklehaimanot claimed another first by earning the polka dot King of the Mountains jersey in Stage 6 of the Tour. The two men will undoubtedly be followed by many other incredibly talented riders from the country making the front pages.

Rumour has it that the first bicycle appeared in Eritrea in 1910, when one was sent to the Italian military garrison stationed in the country’s capital city, Asmara. By 1936, the Italian-run Eritrean Cycling Commission was holding major competitive races, albeit with an absolute colour bar that prevented non-expatriates from participating. Eritreans nonetheless organised and ran their own hugely popular races from at least 1937, and in 1951 the two populations finally assembled at the start line together, showing those with the funding the immense talent the ‘local’ population possessed.

The country’s colonisation by Ethiopia from the 1950s onwards resulted in the stagnation of cycling. All manner of restrictions were imposed on Eritreans, including a law prohibiting bicycles from operating on the city’s main thoroughfares. The rationale was that they provided the ideal ‘getaway vehicle’ for Eritrean liberation fighters after assassination attempts against Ethiopia’s Derg forces.

When the country secured its liberation in 1991, the national pastime nonetheless quickly bounced back and within 15 years the Eritrean national cycling team was ranked amongst the best in the continent. In the last five years, both the country’s female and male national cycling teams have continued to score impressive victories at the African Continental Cycling Championship, and have gained increasing recognition through professional teams and major tours across the globe.

But what lies behind these new successes? As with most successful sportspersons, immense talent combined with enviable discipline is certainly key. But even the most talented riders are unlikely to hit the podium without the right equipment, and this does not come cheaply. The meagre resources of the Eritrean National Cycling Federation do not go far. And it is here that the seemingly disparate stories of Eritreans on the move, and those in the Tour de France, intersect.

Between the tax levied on all members of Eritrea’s diaspora by the country’s ruling party, and the remittances diasporans send back through non-state channels, much of what occurs within Eritrea is made possible through finances supplied by those on the outside. Cycling appears to be no exception. At one Sunday race I attended in Asmara, an Eritrean visiting from his home in America was carrying a pump and some cycling socks under his arm. When I asked him why, he replied that he kept an eye on his favourite cyclist from America and had told him that if he continued to do well, he would bring him kit from the US next time he visited. It is thanks to family, friends and admiring fans that the capital and equipment needed to support individuals like Kudus and Teklehaimanot in reaching the Tour de France have been made available.

The irony, however, is that whilst those outside the country perform a vital service in assisting those within Eritrea – for many things, from school fees to basic subsistence costs – their movements out of the country have also inadvertently constrained future opportunities for those still within it. As Eritreans continue to claim asylum throughout Europe and North America in ever greater numbers, visa applications for those seeking to travel to these places through official channels have frequently been rejected. Eritrean cyclists have thus often found themselves unable to capitalise on opportunities to train at prestigious training academies, or to enter the world’s major tours, by virtue of their nationality.

 Whilst talent therefore undoubtedly exists within the country, it appears that the success of Eritrean cyclists in the future will depend heavily on how much more restrictive our borders – for them, as well as for their friends and families often seeking asylum – become.

After 2015 saw two Eritreans competing in the Tour de France as members of the first African team to take part in the race, Georgia Cole explores cycling culture in the small East African nation and considers what lies behind its dynamism.
Corruption has become the real stuff of public discourse and everyday practice in many African societies, implicating both citizens and subjects, both public and private life. During the course of a recent fieldwork in my native Nigeria, I was repeatedly struck by the extent to which corruption was the subject of so many rumours, stories and discursive production. The ubiquitous nature of corruption arguably makes it a ‘culture’ of some sort, and as such it is easily taken for granted in its everydayness.

Yet, as the latest African edition of the Global Corruption Barometer shows, ordinary Africans, particularly the poor, are burdened by corruption when trying to get access to key basic services in their country (22% of people who have come into contact with a public service in the past 12 months paid a bribe). Across the continent, it was found that poor people who use public services are twice as likely as rich people to have paid a bribe, and in urban areas they are even more likely to pay bribes. The consequence is that everyday corruption saps the legitimacy of the state and its institutions in the eyes of the poor and dispossessed.

It is against this backdrop that a new children’s storybook Gbagba, published by One Moore Book in 2013 and authored by researcher Robtel Neajai Pailey of the International Migration Institute, is very timely. Robtel refreshing re-engages with the public discourse, rumours, gossips, and local idioms of corruption in her native Liberia in a way that strips it of its taken-for-grantedness in popular discourse, and subjects it to a much more rigorous analysis. Unlike many academic and journalistic accounts that focus tendentially on high-level corruption and its adverse effects on African political economies, Robtel’s Gbagba expands the focus of corruption to interrogate its embeddedness in social life and routine forms, with which ordinary Liberians are extremely familiar because they come into contact with it, exploit it, resist it, or become its victims on a daily basis.

Gbagba is illustrated by Liberian visual artist Chase Walker through the imaginative consciousness of twin children, Sundaygar and Sundaymah, who ‘interrogate corruption in many ways’ during the course of a journey from
their home in the Liberian port city of Buchanan to the capital Monrovia to visit their aunt and uncle. Through these characters, Robtel draws attention to the increasing role of popular imagination in fabricating social lives and lived realities in Africa. In the book, Sundaygar and Sundaymah recall ghagba as ‘trickery,’ a local Bassa word used by their parents to describe ‘lying, cheating, and stealing.’ The word ghagba captures the complexity of corruption in situ and underscores its banality in Liberian society. As Robtel herself points out, ghagba is ‘a facet of everyday interactions…it happens in every single sector of Liberia.’ Here, Robtel challenges the reduction of the meaning of corruption to a narrow and simplistic misuse of public office for private gain. The implication is that any serious discourse of corruption in Africa, or even the public sphere, must engage with the ‘blurred boundaries’ between the public and the private, the grand and the everyday, the social and the personal.

It is striking that Sundaygar and Sundaymah’s first real experience of ghagba is on the road en route to Auntie Mardie’s house, in the car with driver Opah:

‘When the traffic finally moved forward, Opah drove right to the police officer at the junction. “I’m very thirsty,” the police officer said standing between the cars. “I want some cold water today in this heat.” Opah rolled down the window slowly and held out his hand. Sundaymah and Sundaygar both noticed the clean 100 Liberian dollar bill, which the police officer put in his pocket quickly. He waved Opah’s car through the traffic in a lane that was not there before’.

The excerpt is dense in meaning. First, in many African countries, bribery is most palpable in the transport sector, particularly road transport where humour and dreams coexist with pathos and existential angst.

Second, the excerpt shows that Opah initiated the act of bribery when he ‘drove right’ to the police officer at the junction. This agency of the ordinary man (in this case, the driver) appropriating corruption to ‘find a way’ out of a difficult situation (ie out of traffic gridlock) is often muted in many accounts of corruption in Africa. Moreover, Opah’s initiation of the act of bribery reflects the ambivalent complicacy in many African societies where corruption implicates both citizens and street-level bureaucrats, and where people reproduce the very corrupt practices that they bemoan. Yet, most writings on corruption maintain a weird silence on the ‘supply side’ – that is, people who wish to influence the public official to their own advantage.

Third, the excerpt underscores the embeddedness of corruption in local idioms and interactions. In the case above, the language of bribery is coded as cold water to quench a ‘very thirsty’ traffic police officer. Such metaphors of corruption as consumption are not unique to Liberia. In my native Nigeria, corruption is often represented as a ‘national cake’ for ‘chopping’ (eating) among office holders. In Francophone countries like Niger, Senegal and Benin, corruption is familiarly registered as manger (to eat) or bouffer (to devour). It is said of the embezzler that he has mangé la caisse ou l’argent (‘eaten the till or the money’) or that he is un mangeur d’argent d’autrui (‘the devourer of other people’s money’). The Dendi expression dii ka dan me literally translates into ‘take that and put it in your mouth’ and means ‘that’s your share.’ In Congo DRC, terms like kukata milomo (‘to cut the lips’) or ya sucre, ya cayi (‘for lemonade, for tea’) are popular idioms for corruption. In Lumumbashi, the image of eating is used to designate the embezzling of funds: Il a tout bouffé (‘he has eaten it all’). Robtel’s Ghagba therefore establishes the need for Africans to unshackle themselves from what Ngugi wa Thiong’o calls a ‘linguistic prison’ when engaging with the ‘corruption complex’ in Africa.

In writing Ghagba, Robtel hopes to start a long overdue ‘national conversation about how corruption affects us negatively – politically and socially.’ To this end, she has been very effective in marketing the book, which has been featured in the New York Times, Voice of America, VoxAfrica, the BBC, NPR, ENCA Television (South Africa), Channels TV (Nigeria), and on Liberia news media such as the Bush Chicken, Liberian Observer, Power TV, UNMIL Radio, etc.

A sequel to Ghagba will be published by the original publisher – One Moore Book – in 2017. Robtel hopes to take both books to regional markets such as Nigeria, Ghana, South Africa, Rwanda, Kenya and Egypt, in the first instance. She has also commissioned a song and video adaptation of the book titled Gbagba Is Corruption, partnering with Liberian recording artist, songwriter and activist Takun J, and funded by the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA). The chorus of the song is telling: ‘Say “no” to corruption – you’ll be all right.’ Yet, it leaves me wondering whether the ordinary Liberian (child or adult), indeed African, can really be ‘all right’ when they ‘say “no” to corruption,’ especially in a post-civil war context like Liberia where the pangs of rebirth are still felt and where corruption literally fights back.

How Corporal Punishment Links to Test Scores

Kirrily Pells outlines new research that draws on longitudinal data to examine how corporal punishment of schoolchildren in low- and middle-income countries relates to poor academic performance.

In new research conducted by Young Lives using longitudinal data from Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam, we found that children who experienced corporal punishment performed worse in maths, four years later. The research was part of UNICEF’s Multi-Country Study on the Drivers of Violence Affecting Children.

The use of physical punishment, such as smacking, slapping or hitting with a hand or implement, is contrary to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which has been ratified by all states except the US. Yet only 47 countries have introduced legislation to protect children from corporal punishment in all settings, including the home and school.

Corporal punishment excites strong points of view. Proponents argue that ‘mild’ or ‘moderate’ forms of corporal punishment are an effective and non-detrimental means of instilling discipline and obedience into children.

When talking about my research on corporal punishment I often encounter the response: ‘I was hit and it never did me any harm’. Opponents stress the hypocrisy of laws that do not extend the same protection to children as is afforded to adults.

When focusing on children’s school performance, we are not losing sight of the fact that children do on occasions die or are severely injured as a result of corporal punishment. But evidence on whether more ‘everyday’ or ‘routinised’ forms of corporal punishment have lasting effects on children’s development is limited.

Studies typically rely on cross-sectional data where child development measures are collected at the same time as reports of corporal punishment. It is then difficult to separate out what comes first: children may perform less well at school because they are hit, or children may be punished because of poor performance.

While we cannot prove causality, the Young Lives data allow us to analyse the links between earlier experience of corporal punishment and how children were performing four years later in school. The longitudinal data also allow us to control for a series of other possible explanations that might affect children’s school performance.

We found that children who reported experiencing corporal punishment at age eight had on average significantly lower maths scores at age 12 in India, Peru and Vietnam. The size of the negative effect was large.

To put our results into context, it is well-established that children with more highly educated parents have better educational outcomes. The associated negative effect of corporal punishment on children’s outcomes was equivalent to the child’s primary caregiver, usually the mother, having between three and six years less education, depending on the country.

Large numbers of children are also affected despite legal prohibition of corporal punishment in schools in India, Ethiopia and Vietnam, and a statement of norms discouraging its use in schools in Peru. Among children we surveyed who were eight years old, over half of those in Peru and Vietnam, three-quarters in Ethiopia, and nearly all children in India reported witnessing a teacher administering corporal punishment in the last week.

Younger children are at greater risk, with the incidence of corporal punishment at age eight more than double the rate reported by 15-year-olds, in all four countries. Boys are significantly more likely to report experiencing corporal punishment than girls across the four countries. This adds to the growing global picture on the greater vulnerability of boys to physical punishment. But it is important to note that girls are often at greater risk of other forms of humiliating treatment and sexual violence.

We also found that children from more disadvantaged households were significantly more likely to be punished in India, Peru and Vietnam compared to children living in more advantaged households in the same community. When comparing children in the same school, disadvantaged children in India and Vietnam are significantly more likely to be punished than their more advantaged peers.

Other Young Lives research indicates a number of reasons why poor children experience more corporal punishment, including being punished for lacking school materials and frequent absence in order to undertake work for the household.

Corporal punishment not only violates children’s fundamental rights to dignity and bodily integrity, but by impacting upon their engagement with schooling it has the potential to have long-lasting implications for their life chances and can reinforce inequality.

Legislation is an important first step towards eradicating corporal punishment, but on its own it is not sufficient. Greater attention is required to understand why bans are not implemented, to support positive teaching practices and to work to address social norms which sustain the myth that physical violence promotes children’s learning and development.

This is an edited version of an article which originally appeared in The Conversation: https://thecoverseation.com/corporal-punishment-of-children-linked-to-lower-school-grades-50497

Kirrily Pells is Lecturer in Childhood at the Institute of Education at University College London. She was previously Policy Officer at Young Lives.
The Great Derangement

In 2015, novelist Amitav Ghosh delivered the Olof Palme Lecture at ODID on ‘The earth as literary critic: climate change and the limits of imagination’, suggesting that writers and artists have been ‘deaf to the rumblings of the earth’ in what he called the era of ‘Great Derangement’ that is leading to catastrophic climate change. Here, two members of the audience give their reactions.

Amitav Ghosh did not disappoint. It was a privilege to listen to him: erudite, entertaining, insightful. And he enjoys science fiction! He encouraged us to rid ourselves of the shame that this is not ‘proper’ art. Rather the opposite, literature and art have been constrained by the fetishisation of reason and have thereby facilitated the curbing of the imagination by rationality. But while deeply engaging and a pleasure to listen to, his lecture was bleak. He was arguing that literature was too human, had contributed to humankind’s separation of itself from the natural rather than challenging it.

It does not listen to nor does it seek to express the non-human, rather it constantly privileges the human. In this way literature has been co-opted into the forces that are destroying our earth. This line of argument reminded me of a presentation I had gone to a couple of months back, where a sociologist was describing protests against a gold mine which had as their basis ‘the mountain doesn’t want it’. Some humans can hear such voices. What would it be to live in a world where this was not extraordinary? As the Victorian English poet Francis Thompson put it:

The angels keep their ancient places –
Turn but a stone and start a wing!
‘Tis ye, ‘tis your estranged faces,
That miss the many-splendored thing.

Ghosh’s argument is that we are not just missing the many-splendored thing, we are destroying it and ourselves. Human greed has ruined the climate and those with the power to change our self-destructive course simply do not care. He applauded the efforts of activists but clearly felt the future of humanity is hopeless. This reminded me of ongoing discussions we are having at COMPAS about gender and activism, and the ways that the research and political gaze privilege activism over endurance. ‘Who will be the last person picking the last grain of rice?’ Ghosh asked. I suspect it will be a woman. We should not underestimate the human capacity to endure. This is scarcely utopian, but it can be hopeful.

Bridget Anderson, Professor of Migration and Citizenship, University of Oxford

Asked about writers as change-makers, Ghosh remarked that the role of storytellers was dying. In his talk he remarked on the ‘failure of the imaginary’ and how ‘human consciousness has become the sole protagonist of history.’ His lament to the ‘Great Derangement’ struck his audience dumb. ‘I can see something terrible is coming,’ he said. ‘If I were younger, I might be an activist.’ For a writer who has inspired a generation, these were dark broodings on the state of our current environmental and political moment. In what felt like personal recrimination, Ghosh repeated the accusation that ‘writers and artists failed because we became intoxicated with individualism. We got so caught up talking about free speech…we no longer explored our minds.’ It was not just his urgent reminder that ‘we are implicated in the weather’ that invoked in his audience an intense frisson, but the way in which he so capably opened up before us the vault of emptiness – the unthought category we are on the brink of, where the moral battle for our collective survival will play out. ‘What might be the alternative moral imaginary?’ he asked us to consider.

Nurit Applbaum, MPhil in Development Studies, ODID

The angels keep their ancient places –
Turn but a stone and start a wing!
‘Tis ye, ‘tis your estranged faces,
That miss the many-splendored thing.
That was the nonsensical start to a fascinating, disorienting evening at the Ashmolean Museum’s LiveFriday event. The evening, which was themed around ‘social animals’ and invited visitors to come and explore the things that make people and societies tick, saw the Ashmolean transform itself – by day it is a place that amazes and awes us, but by nightfall it felt truly magical.

The instruction to ‘faalide into the brenides’ was part of ‘In or out? An extraordinary queuing experience’, organised by Marieke van Houte of the International Migration Institute (IMI) at ODID. The performance was designed to replicate the impenetrable bureaucracy of immigration – to denigrate, confuse and obfuscate. As we waited in a long queue, aimless and helpless, we could see some people being pushed around, some fast-tracked, some shouted at or even victimised, and some welcomed with favouritism and warmth. It transpired that a ‘full faalide’ was required of some and a ‘half faalide’ of others – woe betide the inadequately faalided!

To add to the confusion, we were given forms which also made no sense: some questions were entirely absent; some were deliberately leading; even the ‘name’ space was divided into ‘Joe’, ‘Jane’, and ‘other (please specify)’. The categories to mark our ages overlapped; more disturbingly we were also asked for our eye colour. At one point an argument broke out at the back of the queue. Was this a visitor who did not understand the nature of the event and was getting unnecessarily agitated? The tension and confusion were so palpable that we almost felt we had to do something – but what, in the face of an oblivious and unquestionable authority?

Obviously a ten-minute event could only show, rather than reproduce, the mind-numbing boredom and disturbing arbitrariness of this process; nonetheless, this had been well thought out and elegantly executed.

As we moved between exhibits taken from almost every corner of the globe, the dialogue between the museum’s collection and our own role as objects and agents of interrogation became apparent. This was highlighted particularly by the presence of two ‘professional...
observers: dressed in khaki clothes and tin hats, and with clipped, neat moustaches, they assured us that they were, in turn, only there ‘to observe’ us as we ‘acted normally’. But acting normally means accepting assumptions and defining what is ‘normal’ for us – exactly the things we were most challenged to confront.

The play ‘Poverty on the table’, commissioned by the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI) at ODID, was also a fun and thought-provoking experience. We were at first apprehensive as to how a complex idea about the multiple dimensions of disadvantage could be dramatised to make it engaging but also entertaining. But theatre group Justice in Motion, who worked with OPHI to create the performance, managed to bring these ideas to the stage. Four actors enacted how poverty is connected not just with the ‘poor’ and the ‘developing world’ but is also closely linked to our lifestyle: the use of iPhones and binge drinking, for example. The play consisted of loosely linked scenes, some of which were symbolist: an automated voice in a lift asks the passengers questions about poverty; when the destination is reached, the remaining occupants are left with no choice but action. Other scenes were realist, and gave a sense of continuity to the piece: a pub quiz format, beginning with standard right/wrong questions about poverty, finished with the simple question ‘why?’. The participants left the pub to catch a taxi, driven by someone forced by poverty to give up an academic career in his own country to start again in a role often assumed to be humble or less valuable. Throughout, the actors moved around a rectangular table which seemed to bring the performers and their stories together. The atmosphere was punctuated by the sound of a ticking clock that became faster and slower as the play moved through different stages. The piece thus combined excellent and varied performances with a subtle and questioning anger.

Meanwhile, in the basement, researchers from the Young Lives team, who have been following the lives of 12,000 children in four countries for more than a decade now, were busy asking questions about poverty and time spent researching. The Young Lives team, who have been following the lives of 12,000 children in four countries for more than a decade now, were busy asking visitors to think about ‘What the world ate today’. Families in particular queued up to place kidney beans in jars to represent which food groups they had consumed within the last 24 hours (not surprisingly, lots of carbs and sugars!). They then compared their own daily intake and weekly food expenditure with those of children and their families in Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam, a project that led on to discussions with the Young Lives team about the impact of dietary diversity on children’s development. The researchers, used to knocking down to reams of data in quiet rooms, seemed thrilled to see how fascinating the general public found their work!

A very different kind of performance was offered by a group of Senegalese drummers introduced and commented on by Hélène Neveu Kringelbach of the School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography. The performance was splendid: a big, bold, rhythmically compelling racket. It prompted reflections on performance and its function – were the musicians playing and dancing for us, or for themselves? In fact, both the music and Hélène’s commentary made the symbiotic relationship between African and European music apparent: she did not shy away from the term ‘ballet’ – indeed she made it plain that this was a highly professionalised musical culture, in which music could be traced through generations of families. She introduced us in particular to the ‘Ballets Africains’ of Fodéba Keita. This had lent Guinea a particular artistic and musical clout, leading to musical performances at home and abroad, in ‘old’ and ‘new’ contexts, leading to a ‘neo-traditional’ synthesis of musical practice.

The ethnographic film ‘Lifelines,’ by Jane Dyson of the School of Geography, was another highlight of the evening. Watching the camera pan across the grand snowcapped Himalayas, on a giant screen in the middle of the Ancient Egyptian and Nubian section, was truly remarkable. The film is based on Jane’s long-term ethnographic work in the region. It beautifully told the story of Makar Singh as he juggles responsibilities and aspirations while life keeps changing. After the screening, Jane answered questions and interacted with the audience to talk about the interesting camera work and time spent researching.

An evening that began in confusion ended up as a poignant but refreshing reminder of the social world we inhabit. The evening was almost as good as an interesting book: it made us laugh, think, wonder, dance and reflect. We left the Ashmolean that evening confidently embracing our social animal selves.
From the saddle of his tiny horse, Sailau scanned the steppe below. Enveloped in a long, fur-lined coat, his flat cap pulled down low over his brow, he sat motionless as the wind whipped the hilltop around us. Then, reaching towards the powerful bird perched on his gloved right hand, he removed the hood that masked its face: in the distance, he had spotted a fox.

Nomads have hunted in these hills for generations. Having fled the communist regime in Kazakhstan almost a century ago, many settled here in Bayan-Ulgii, northwestern Mongolia – the remotest province of the world’s most sparsely populated country. Displaced from their homeland, they maintained many Kazakh traditions, including hunting foxes and wolves with golden eagles to protect their livestock and obtain pelts for winter clothing. Back home under Soviet rule, this pursuit and many other elements of Kazakh identity and culture were suppressed, almost to the point of extinction. But they lived on in Bayan-Ulgii.

Landing at Chinggis Khaan (Genghis Khan) International Airport in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia’s capital city, I rode the bus northwest – a 40-hour drive over potholed tarmac, dirt roads and frozen rivers. It is not unknown for temperatures here to approach -50°C on midwinter nights. Thankfully I arrived near the beginning of the hunting season in late October, when foxes are easier to spot in the snow.

Bordering Russia to the north and China to the south, Bayan-Ulgii is located just 25 miles from the easternmost tip of Kazakhstan. It is the only Muslim-majority province in an otherwise Buddhist country heavily influenced by shamanism, animism and ancestor worship. Most of its inhabitants practise a particularly

In Mongolia’s Wild West

Former ODID student Faraz Shibli describes a visit to a remote corner of Mongolia, where Kazakhs maintain an ancient tradition of hunting with golden eagles.
informal, permissive form of Islam, and 90% of its population is of Kazakh descent, speaking Mongolian as a second language, if at all. The provincial capital, Ulgii, is a city of 30,000 nestled in the Altai Mountains – a hodgepodge of brightly coloured, cubic buildings with a smattering of mosques.

My friend Agii, a local teacher and tour operator, organised a gathering at his house in the city to mark the start of the season. The hunters and their wives arrived two-by-two before we gorged ourselves on half a sheep, including its boiled intestines, leftover horse and potatoes – all washed down with a bowl of fatty juices, countless shots of vodka and kumis (fermented mare’s milk).

Leaving for the countryside the next day, I joined 63-year-old veteran hunter Sailau. He and his family lived in a solitary cluster of mud huts with a ramshackle outhouse and wooden stables. Inside, the huts were cozy, the furniture minimal and simple. Family photographs and rugs of symmetrical Kazakh designs adorned most of the walls, alongside dozens of medals Sailau had won at hunting competitions. Something of a local celebrity, he had even appeared in the BBC’s Human Planet television series a few years ago.

Perched on a branch nearby, amongst wandering goats and yaks, Sailau’s eagle, or berkut in Kazakh, obediently awaited its master. Sailau had trained it from a young age – hunters, or berkutchi, pluck eagles from their nests on high rock faces (there are few tall trees) before they have learnt to fly. Female eagles are preferred because they are bigger and stronger than males, their wingspans reaching up to eight feet. Nonetheless, Sailau’s seemed calm, feeding from his hand, and he regarded his eagle with affection.

Mounting our horses, we set off from the homestead with Sailau’s son Bekejan, a beaming teenager with an old rifle slung over his shoulder, towards craggy hills in the distance. Diminutive though our steeds were – Mongolian horses tend to be just 12 to 14 hands tall – their endurance was nothing short of astonishing. Crossing rivers and climbing steep hill sides of loose rocks for hours, Sailau’s horse carried not only his own weight, but also that of his eagle resting on his forearm.

Genghis Khan is believed to have said, ‘It is easy to conquer the world from the back of a horse.’ On a Mongolian horse, one can certainly see his point.

Looking down on the plains from one ridge after another, faraway mountains, sparsely dotted clumps of vegetation and dark, snaking rivers dominated our eyeline. Huts, roads and other man-made structures were notably absent, and dust devils danced across the horizon. The lack of snowfall afforded foxes camouflage against the golden-brown land, but Sailau still spotted three. Each time, his eagle swooped on his call – wings spread, legs extended – but missed, its claws cutting through the air above its prey. After six hours, we returned from the hunt, tired and empty-handed.

I later stayed with Botei, a younger hunter who lived a short motorbike ride away in a hut similarly festooned with rugs and hunting prizes. I eyed the trophies displayed on the shelves in his sitting room, noticing many of them were recent.

Riding out once more, we were joined by Botei’s brothers, Tastulek and Agalai, all three of them carrying eagles. Before long, Agalai spotted a fox nip into a hillside burrow, launching rocks from above to flush it out – but to no avail. Finally, after releasing a shot from his rifle, a long, slender fox emerged – its white, bushy tail dancing from side-to-side as it darted along the valley.

Letting out a bloodcurdling cry, Botei and Tastulek propelled their eagles skywards. The hunters’ screams followed the birds as they glided in pursuit, their wings beating the cold, dry air beneath them. One soared straight past the fox, which changed direction to evade it. But the other swooped down hard on its prey, sinking its thick, black talons into the back of its head.

Shouting praises to God, the hunters galloped down as fast as they could in clouds of dust over loose, sharp rocks. Triumphant, their eagle – its hooked beak stained with a trickle of blood – stood tall atop the fox, still pinned to the ground.
IMI Celebrates Tenth Anniversary

The International Migration Institute (IMI) at ODID celebrated its tenth anniversary with a two-day conference held in Oxford in January.

The IMI was founded at Oxford University in January 2006 by Stephen Castles and Steven Vertovec with the aim of developing a long-term and forward-looking perspective on international migration as an intrinsic part of global change. It has since developed into a leading global authority on international migration issues.

The conference, titled ‘The changing face of global mobility: celebrating 10 years of the International Migration Institute’, reviewed progress made over the last decade and explored new conceptual horizons for understanding migration processes and their impacts for origin and destination societies.

The IMI also released a report, Thinking Migration, to mark the occasion. The 56-page report features contributions from current and former IMI staff, and from research collaborators from the global North and South.

Find out more: bit.ly/251IBIS

Xiaolan Fu Appointed Advisor to New UN Mechanism for SDGs

Professor Xiaolan Fu was appointed to a group of ten high-level advisors to the United Nations’ new Technology Facilitation Mechanism (TFM) in early 2016.

The TFM was launched at the UN Summit on Sustainable Development in New York in September 2015. It seeks to promote science, technology and innovation (STI) to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and is seen as a key means of implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The mechanism comprises a UN inter-agency task team on STI; an annual multi-stakeholder forum; and an online platform as a gateway for information on existing STI initiatives, mechanisms and programmes.

Professor Fu is the only representative from the academic community in the ten-member group. Membership is approved and appointed by the Secretary General of the UN, Ban Ki-Moon.

Find out more: bit.ly/1pr90iZ

ODID to Host 2016 DSA Conference

ODID will be hosting this year’s Development Studies Association Conference, which will take place 12-14 September at the Examination Schools.

The keynote speakers are Professor James A Robinson of the University of Chicago and Professor Tania Li of the University of Toronto.

The conference will explore the theme of Politics in Development. Development is inherently political, but ‘politics’ is conceived in myriad different ways in development studies, policy and practice. Different disciplines have adopted different approaches to conceptualising politics and the methods used to analyse political factors vary enormously, from detailed case studies to formalised Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) to large-N cross-country analysis.

But the way politics is understood has critical implications for both scholarly analysis and practical intervention. It matters how politics in development is interpreted and analysed, be it in terms of regime type, governance and institutional design; or radical assertion of citizenship; or contestation of dominant development paradigms; or hegemonic discourses driving policy agendas; or corporate interests determining public policy; or exercise of power in social hierarchies; or everyday forms of unequal relationships.

The conference will thus compare and reflect on a range of different empirical and theoretical perspectives on the interplay of politics and development. Early bird registration opens on 6 June.

Find out more: bit.ly/22ie6fj
Four New Ideas on Refugees

Refugee Studies Centre Director Alexander Betts gave a powerful talk on the refugee crisis to the closing session of the TED 2016 conference in Vancouver this year. He called for a new vision, in which refugees are not seen as an inevitable burden but are recognised as individuals with skills, talents and ambitions, and suggested four ‘out of the box’ ideas for expanding the choices available to them:

- Enabling environments – rather than just providing long-term humanitarian assistance in camps, we must provide opportunities for human flourishing... education, connectivity, electricity, transportation, access to capital, and the right to work;
- Economic zones – where refugees could work and contribute to national development in areas of countries, such as Jordan, that are lacking labour and inward investment;
- Preference matching – applying Alvin Roth’s idea of ‘matching markets’ to ‘enable refugees’ destination preferences to be matched with state preferences... on factors such as skills and languages' (with certain essential caveats);
- Humanitarian visas – providing a legal means for asylum seekers to travel to Europe and avoid irregular, perilous journeys (as already enacted by Brazil).

OPHI’s Global Impact Recognised

Work by the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI) was included in a list of the top 20 most impressive examples of UK research contributing to global development, which was compiled by the UK Collaborative on Development Sciences (UKDCS) this year.

The UKDCS selected the list from the 6,975 impact case studies submitted to the Research Excellence Framework, the system used to assess the research quality of UK universities.

OPHI was recognised for its work to develop the Alkire Foster (AF) method for multidimensional poverty measurement. The AF method is a flexible tool that captures the overlapping deprivations that a person or household experiences in different indicators of poverty, such as poor health, a lack of education and inadequate living standards.

The AF method is being used by a growing number of governments to develop their own national or regional multidimensional poverty measures. It has also been used to construct the Global Multidimensional Poverty Index, which has been calculated by OPHI and published in the UN Development Programme’s Human Development Report since 2010.

Find out more: bit.ly/1QZV7PB

MORE NEWS

- ODID’s Olly Owen won an Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Celebrating Impact Prize in 2015 for research on the Nigerian Police Force, coming second in the Outstanding Early Career Impact category. In his doctoral research, Olly explored the world of policing from the officers’ points of view, working closely with more than 130 police officers in north-central Nigeria. The force’s Inspector-General has asked heads of department to provide written responses to Olly’s findings, and his research has also been used in training programmes run by policing assistance project Justice for All. His work on police governance has also been taken up by a Nigerian NGO, the CLEEN Foundation, in their work with the regulatory Police Service Commission.

- The department appointed two new associate professors in 2015. Mathias Czaika was appointed Associate Professor of Migration and Development. He is interested in the political economy of migration and the role of migration policies in shaping international migration flows, and teaches on the MSc in Migration Studies. Tom Scott-Smith was appointed Associate Professor of Refugee Studies and Forced Migration. He specialises in the ethnographic and historical study of humanitarian relief and its impact on the lives of refugees, and teaches on the MSc in Refugee and Forced Migration Studies.

- Dawn Chatty, Professor of Anthropology and Forced Migration at ODID, was elected as a Fellow of the British Academy in 2015. Professor Chatty, a social anthropologist whose ethnographic interests lie in the Middle East, particularly with nomadic pastoral tribes and refugee young people, was among 42 distinguished UK academics from 18 universities elected as fellows in recognition of their outstanding research.

- Young Lives published a report in 2015 taking stock of the achievements and lessons learned since the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals, in the run-up to the new Global Goals for Sustainable Development.

Children of the Millennium, which uses data gathered from 12,000 children and their families over the timeframe of the MDGs, and children’s own words where possible, looks beyond the ‘big data’ to see what has changed in the reality of children’s lives in the context of the shifts in national policy, priorities and outcomes related to the MDGs.

- ODID will be participating in Artweeks this year, with an exhibition of photographs taken by students, alumni and staff, as well as by commissioned photographers from some of the countries we study. Artweeks is an annual Oxfordshire event during which local artists and craftspeople exhibit their work. Over the course of two weeks in May there are some 500 exhibitions throughout the county, ranging from group exhibitions in large public spaces to individual artists showing in their own homes or studios, attracting more than 100,000 visitors.

Watch the talk: bit.ly/1QUdDqX
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