Message From the Director

I am very happy to present the winter issue of IDS newsletter and share with what we have done over the past quarter. In this issue, you will find some reports about our students’ conference trips and field work they made to collect data for their capstone projects during the winter break. Some of these trips were made possible thanks to IDS-provided travel subsidies which partially covered the expenses of participating students. You will also find in this issue the excerpts of selected reaction papers our students wrote to reflect on some of talks at international studies forum, and as you will see, these reflections demonstrate their analytical as well as critical comments on diverse issues related to international development. To make this issue more exciting, we will introduce to you an IDS new initiative – a student-led forum on “country presentation”—which is intended to create an opportunity for all IDS folks to get together and share the knowledge about history, society and culture of respective countries they represent. So far two presentations have been done with one on Bulgaria and the other on Palestine, and more will come up in the spring quarter. I believe that this student-centered forum will help promote meaningful discourse and international understanding among our students.

I hope you enjoy this issue and have a relaxing spring break!

Jieli Li

Students Corner

Emerging Ideas

EDITORS:
Jennifer McArdle
Yu You

Please send your contributions, comments, and/or suggestions to:
development.studies@ohio.edu
Or, by mail to:
International Development Studies Program
Center for International Studies
Yamada House
Ohio University
Athens, OH 45701

Country Presentation: the inaugural presentation by Lilia Krasteva on her country Bulgaria

Sevara Sharapova (Uzbekistan) participates in the fashion show at the Ghanaian Independence Day celebration
**Students’ Accomplishments**

**IDS students promote mutual cultural tolerance and share development ideas**

Starting this year, International Development Studies students will organize weekly country presentations to signify the importance of cultural tolerance and mutual understanding. The aim of the student-led forum is to promote knowledge sharing among peers and disseminate information about other nations’ cultural background, political and economic perspectives, as well as promoting future diplomatic dialogue. We have IDS students who come from East and Southeast Asia, Eastern Europe and former Soviet Union countries, Africa, Latin America, the Middle East and the United States. The forum hopes to capture the value of having such an international student body.

On February 6, Lilia Krasteva of Bulgaria shared her country’s political and development portfolio with the IDS students. The presentation covered interesting aspects of political divisions, further development priorities according to the Millennium Development Declaration, and the trials of daily life that Bulgarians endured following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the “shock therapy” reforms. Her presentation raised many questions, and both students and Dr. Li were grateful for her courage in kicking off this series of student led presentations. On March 16, Ramzi Assali gave a presentation on his native Palestine.

Ifoda Abdurazakova

**Vongchanh learns the value of field research**

During winter break, I interviewed and observed the Lao community in Columbus, OH. This fieldwork was part of the data collection for my thesis on the Laotian diaspora and its changing connection to the homeland. I had mixed feelings of excitement, frustration, and gratitude during the field work process. It was challenging to persuade strangers to share their personal stories, and I also had to deal with my own anxiety and uncertainty. I found that this field work was an opportunity for me to learn about my country’s history, culture, politics, and people in a different perspective than what is offered in books.

The early stage of the fieldwork was filled with excitement and frustration. I knew that participant observation requires attention, flexibility, and self-discipline, but I had not realized how difficult it would be. At times, I realized I was getting dishonest stories. Also, some informants disappeared or avoided meeting with me, which I assumed meant that they were in doubt about my identity. Moreover, being a Lao woman put me in a difficult position to establish relationships with elder men in the field who were my target informants. I encountered awkward situations with informants who were too eager to help with my work, but at other times I just felt ignorant. Thus, field work is not only about understanding the community or people studied, but at the same time it reflects how much I understand myself and my own ability to deal with unfamiliar situations.

However, the thing that strikes me the most is the warm welcome and the kind help from some Lao people I met, including the monk at the Lao temple in Columbus. These people were not only good informants for my research, they were also a great help to me throughout the cold winter months of my field work; they provided a cozy room, prepared traditional food, gave me a ride back to Athens, and demonstrated wonderful hospitality despite the fact that we were complete strangers at the beginning.

In sum, doing this field works was a valuable experience that enriched my personal growth. Despite the limitations of my experience, time and resources, I feel that I have learned so much about my own country by trying to understand others’ lives.

Vongchanh Indavong
Students’ Accomplishments

Nickie shares her research at OU’s Progressive Islam Conference

On January 18, I had the honor of presenting at the African Studies sponsored, “100 years of Progressive Islam Conference,” which celebrated the life and work of the great Mahmoud Mohamed Taha. The research paper that I presented was entitled, "Mouride Identity, Work Ethic and their Implications for Economic Development," based on the brotherhood’s positive contributions to peace and development in Senegal. Due to the negative media attention and misconceptions about Islam in America, I saw the conference as a needed opportunity to highlight and praise some of the wonderful and constructive movements happening in the Muslim world today. On a personal level, my exposure, interest, and love of Islam in general, and the Mouride brotherhood specifically, began during my 2005 study abroad experience at University Gaston Berger, in Saint Louis, Senegal.

My paper for the conference focused on the Mouride brotherhood of Senegal which has enjoyed much praise (both domestically and internationally) over the past century based on their unique religious philosophy that places hard work and faith at the center of one’s spiritual experience. The Mouride brotherhood is one of the most prominent Sufi Islamic orders in Senegal, and the Mourides have been an especially powerful economic and political constituency. The importance given to work ethic and supporting one's family is pertinent to both social progress and economic development through a uniquely Mouride Islamic lens. This religious perspective has serious implications for development, as it has become a rallying point for international development projects and presidential development goals within the country. The financial gains of devotees’ labor contribute to various Islamic activities and projects, including mosque construction, Koranic schooling and the development of the Mouride holy city, Touba. In my paper I explored the history of the Mourides’ rise to popularity and power during colonization and investigated how their followers’ strict devotion and willingness to work has given them economic and political dominance within the country and amongst their diaspora abroad. Having the opportunity to present at an Ohio University Conference on an issue that is so important to me both personally and academically was a great experience and I appreciate all the support I received from the conference programmers and my fellow IDS cohort.

Nickie Séne (Tamny)

Kazi to present at National Conference of Black Political Scientists

I have been invited to present at the National Conference of Black Political Scientists March 18-22, 2009 in Houston, Texas http://www.ncobps.org/. The theme of the conference is: Racial Americana: Continuities and Changes in Racial Politics. The title of my paper is "South Africa's 2009 elections: COPE hope for the opposition?" an analysis of the dynamics that will likely influence the outcome of the 2009 elections. This past year saw the advent of an opposition party in South Africa breaking away from the ruling African National Congress; this party is called Congress of the People (COPE). For the past three elections analysts have argued that there are three dominant factors influencing voter behavior in South Africa: race, ethnicity and lack of opposition parties. This has been largely due to the fact that the main opposition is led by the white minority, while the ruling party is black African. My paper argues that this new opposition from the ruling party will likely provide a much needed shift away from identity politics of race and ethnicity, and possibly awaken a very weak opposition in South Africa.

Siphokazi (Kazi) Magadla
“Geographies of Waste: The Spatial Politics of Informal Garbage Collection” by Dr. Risa Whitson, Professor of Geography, Ohio University

The forum discussed the speaker’s research examining the topic of informal garbage collection and its effects on the economy of the city of Buenos Aires, Argentina. According to the speaker, trash is an inherently spatial thing because society views it as something that does not belong “here”; trash is shifted “there” so as not to be seen. At the turn of the century, Buenos Aires began moving its trash to the outer edges of the city to avoid its presence within the city. The existence of large quantities of trash in centralized locations created the presence of *cartoneras*, impoverished individuals sifting through the trash in search of resources. When trash management became privatized, trash picking was prohibited, so *cartoneras* worked invisibly in the night and undercover. As the landfills reached their capacities, trash began to pile within the cities. When the economy collapsed in 2002 and unemployment and poverty levels began to rise, the number of *cartoneras* increased fivefold. Suddenly, trash and the presence of the *cartoneras* became problematic because they could no longer be ignored. So, the government legalized the process of informal recycling, and cooperatives started to form around groups of trash pickers. Recycling centers were established, and *cartoneras* were required to register with the government. Through the legalization of informal recycling, the city seeks to reduce the amount of waste within the city 100% by the year 2020. The city of Buenos Aires was forced to redefine the way it viewed and managed trash because of the existence of labor and social relations associated with trash after its economic crisis.

Damion Croston

“When ‘Foreign’ Languages are not Foreign: Heritage Speakers in the US” by Dr. Kim Potowski, Professor of Spanish, University of Chicago

Dr. Potowski defined a heritage speaker as a person who grew up in a household with a minority language being spoken. She stated that people have a right to maintain their heritage language and not be accused of rejecting mainstream society. One really interesting point from this lecture was that the Founding Fathers argued that language should be a local and regional level issue in order to respond to the needs and goals these communities have identified, which throws out that age old argument of “America for Americans.” I also appreciated the fact that she discussed many of the challenges immigrants face when coming to this country. It reminded me of a lot of the problems my mother faced, such as trying to find ESL classes, which was difficult since she had a small child to take care of. I found that another interesting topic Dr. Potowski discussed was “English-only” legislation in some US states. She stated that these laws do very little in assisting immigrants to learn English. First, it is unnecessary to have these laws because English is not threatened. Second, learning English is punitive. Third, it is divisive since it creates hostilities between minority groups. Fourth, it is unconstitutional. Lastly, these laws are foolish since, as we live in a globalized world, multilingual skills are essential to economic prosperity and national security.

Alexandra Doles
“Decolonizing the Intellectual and the Quotidian: African Intellectuals in the post-Colonial Moment” by Dr. Oyeronke Oyewumi, Professor of Sociology, Stony Brook University

The problem here is that people from a certain area consider themselves as having inferior culture or habits compared to what exists abroad. This is, according to Professor Oyewumi, colonialism of people’s minds. In Africa, lots of things that are embedded in the culture are considered evil by some African intellectuals. Dr. Oyewumi advocates change in African intellectual’s thinking, church, and so on. She thinks, for example, that by being tribal, the Africans are not wrong. Tribal is to Africa what Papua is to Indonesia; that is, different groups can live in the same areas respecting each other. Therefore, African intellectuals may try to further their studies of their own society instead of diabolizing it.

Frednel Isma

Dr. Oyewumi spoke about the need to decolonize the African mind, particularly with respect to gender. She spoke about the languages of her native Nigeria originally having no gender markers, such as gendered pronouns, gendered family markers, etc. Words that have been added to these languages as a result of contact with colonizing powers have very much changed the way that people shape the world with their language into gendered categories. I enjoyed this lecture because it made me think of the role of language in shaping a people’s world. I tried to imagine what it would be like to function in a language that did not have such hard lines between that which is female and that which is male. I tried to imagine language without derogatory words aimed at the sexes, and particularly what those words typically mean when aimed at men and when aimed at women. I certainly agree that language is very powerful, and the role of the intellectual (whether African or not) should be to include questioning of the role of gender and the language of gender.

Lauren Young

“Beyond Ancient Hatreds: Identity Construction and Democratization in Africa” by Dr. Dauda Abubakar, Visiting Professor of Political Science, Ohio University

This forum lecture reminded me of the genocide that took place in Rwanda in 1994. The genocide is attributed to the colonial division of the Rwanda people into ethnicities and races during the colonial era and to the empowerment of minorities at the expense of majorities. This led to sharp divisions and animosities among the people of Rwanda. These divisions were ignored by all of the Rwandan leaders in the post-independence era. Inclusion and emphasis on citizenship, rather than tribalism, could have prevented this tragedy and would prevent similar tragedies in the future, especially given the situation that conflicts and ethnic animosities are rife on the African continent.

Ramzi Assali
“Scenarios from Africa: Young People, HIV/AIDS and Cultural Change” by Daniel Enger and Kate Winskell, Co-Managers of the Scenarios from Africa HIV/AIDS Communication Process

“Scenarios from Africa” is a community mobilization, education, and media process about HIV/AIDS. It primarily targets young people in Senegal, Mali, and Burkina Faso. The project involves the production of short fiction films on HIV/AIDS by leading African directors. The idea of making movies and short films is an effective and informative effort that is culturally and linguistically accessible for the community. Between 1997 and 2008 there were five contexts implemented by over 1,000 local and international NGOs, CBOs, and individual outreach workers. More than 155,000 participants from 47 countries joined the contest; 40% of them were women. The main idea of the competition is to bring the whole community together. The winning ideas are selected by juries at the national, and then international level. Over 90,000 copies of videos, DVDs, and audio cassettes are distributed in Africa. The films are screened in classrooms and in the wider community as a means of providing information on HIV/AIDS and how to live with the disease. This project certainly gives children and young adults an exciting opportunity to educate themselves and others about HIV/AIDS by inviting them to work with internationally acclaimed directors in the production of a collection of short films. By visualizing and adopting the scripts into daily activities, the information can be easily accepted by the community.

Niken Hardiani

“Why is Cultural Exchange so Important in Education?” by Dr. Charles J. Ping, President Emeritus, Ohio University

The lecture by Dr. Charles J. Ping was about a global education exchange. According to him, the importance of a global exchange of education is to interact with others for diffusing their culture, values, language, and many other things. This leads to more understanding among people in the world. He also said that language is important to interacting with people from different countries, and education is one of the means to let people acquire language ability. I was really glad to listen to this lecture as a recipient of a Dr. Charles J. Ping Scholarship from Chubu University. It was a very important opportunity to know why Chubu University has this scholarship program. I strongly agree with Dr. Ping about international exchange education. In actuality, I have learned a lot of things at OU, not only development studies, but also culture, values, thoughts, and language of different countries due to the diversity of students’ nationalities. However, I think the most important thing about a global education exchange is inclusion. Therefore, international students have a responsibility to be active toward various issues during their stay in different countries.

Hisako Inomata