The Nation’s new Digital Magazine format offers:

- The **Page-turning** experience of a print magazine

**PLUS:**

- Live **Web Links**
- **Multimedia** Access
BLOWBACK IN SOMALIA

HOW US PROXY WARS HELPED CREATE A MILITANT ISLAMIST THREAT
JEREMY SCAHILL

OBAMA AND JOBS
THE EDITORS

ESCAPING EUROPE’S DEBT TRAP
ANDY ROBINSON

WELFARE REFORM AT 15
KATHA POLLITT

SEPTEMBER 26, 2011
THENATION.COM

T.S. ELIOT’S
EARLY YEARS
JAMES
LONGENBACH
Letters

Words as Weapons

Tempe, Ariz.
Richard Kim, in “Coming Out for Change” [July 18/25], cuts through the political PR to remind us that the gay-marriage victory in New York really belongs to the gay couples willing to “weaponize their personal lives.” And he gives all progressives a new rallying cry.

Jeff McMahon

Minneapolis
Richard Kim misses the point. One of the most difficult things to see when you’re not looking for it is an act of nonviolence. We think of it always as something shown in the face of violence, as an act against violence. But sometimes that act is in words. So I understand how Kim missed the act of nonviolence Jose Antonio Vargas committed when Vargas wrote his New York Times article coming out as an undocumented immigrant.

Kim shows his lack of understanding when he suggests that GLBT people and others tell their stories and say, “Are you with us, or against us?” He suggests that New York organizers did the same and said through their stories, “You’re either with me, or you’re with the haters—but you can’t have it both ways.”

The power of Vargas’s story isn’t that it is a weapon, that it divides people into haters and supporters. Its power comes from his act of laying himself bare in front of the American people, making himself vulnerable to the very thing he was afraid of: deportation from a country and people he loves. He didn’t do it so that he would get deported but so that he could show the injustice of the system. This is exactly how nonviolence worked in the civil rights movement of the 1940s, ’50s and ’60s. People put themselves in harm’s way at lunch counters and on freedom buses to expose the injustice of the oppression.

Never did Vargas say or even imply that his readers either be with him or against him. He said, “Here’s my neck. Cut it if you can. Now reflect on that.”

I refuse to use my own stories as weapons against my neighbors and friends who are not sure how they are going to vote on the Minnesota marriage amendment in 2012. They deserve to have my compassion as they tell me they’re not sure. But I’m going to tell them my stories, which I hope will lay bare the injustice—not to impugn them but to fault the system we all inherited and want to make right.

N. Jeanne Burns

Saint Cloud, Fla.
I am a moderate independent who leans toward the left, but Richard Kim’s “with us or against us” rhetoric exposes a certain ignorance of the complexity of the illegal immigration problem in this country. For every Jose Antonio Vargas story out there—which every thoughtful person sympathizes with—there is an opposite story that involves contempt for our laws and places a blight on communities across the United States who abide by these laws. The proposed Dream Act is a reasonable solution for people who grew up in this country, and should be made law. I commend anyone working toward that goal.

But your accusations of hate, along with your George W. Bush–like attitude, do not serve the cause of fair immigration. They do, however, expose the rabid nature of the ultra–left wing—which, I’m here to tell you, the average American finds repulsive—and serve only to limit the dialogue necessary for all people to come together and understand one another.

Jerry Mobley

Life Under Austerity

Athens
Re “Greece in Debt, Eurozone in Crisis,” by Maria Margaronis [July 18/25]: The politically made debt crisis of Greece, and the EU and IMF’s answer to it, have set in motion a creeping disaster. Other countries could easily follow suit.

Brutal austerity measures are augmenting population vulnerability, fear and want. Young people are fleeing, the middle-aged (continued on page 26)
Go Big, Mr. President

In the wake of a grim August jobs report showing zero job creation, and tied in knots by the obstructionist Republicans, Barack Obama is said to have no good choices, no way out.

Big-spending programs are ruled out by the establishment’s obsession with deficits. The president’s bipartisan entreaties are met with scorn by the GOP. Even some Obama supporters think his presidency is failing. His focus on the jobs crisis—the subject of the major address he’s poised to make as we go to press—was widely dismissed as too little, too late, even before he stepped up to the podium.

Notwithstanding the skepticism and the real political obstacles he faces, President Obama is not powerless to act. In fact, there are many ways he could brighten the darkening circumstances and reshape national destiny. A president has discretionary authority, especially in an emergency, to make seismic changes in fundamental policies—without receiving Congress’s approval or even consulting it in advance. Indeed, the Obama White House could point to the historical precedent set by Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan. In far less dire circumstances, both Republican presidents imposed unilateral policy shifts—wage and price controls or emergency tariffs or arbitrary limits on imports—to halt economic deterioration and protect American jobs.

What could Barack Obama do that doesn’t require currysting before right-wingers? Retired South Carolina Senator Fritz Hollings offered a provocative answer: “He can start by enforcing the laws already on the books.” Hollings meant unenforced trade laws intended to protect US jobs against violations by foreign industries. His point applies just as well to the administration’s failure to prosecute financial fraud and threaten bankers with prison.

Here are four big strokes Obama could take to stimulate job creation and improve prospects for recovery:

- **Write down mortgage debt for the millions of “underwater” homeowners facing foreclosure.** Debt forgiveness would be highly stimulative as well as just. Reducing the capital owed by families would enable them to keep their homes, rebuild savings and begin to act like consumers again. Banks would take a hit on their balance sheets, but those loans could never be repaid anyway. The New Bottom Line, a national campaign of labor/liberal groups and grassroots networks like National People’s Action, estimates that writing down underwater mortgages to market value would pump $71 billion a year into the economy and create 1 million jobs. Because a huge portion of the failed mortgage securities known as “toxic assets” are now federally owned—purchased by housing agencies like Fannie Mae or the Federal Reserve—the White House can use its clout to engineer terms for a general write-down. Bank regulators can lean on bankers to comply.

- Enact trade and tax reforms to shrink US trade deficits and penalize the offshoring of jobs. The swollen trade deficits are a persistent source of American economic weakness and indebtedness. The annual borrowing to pay for excessive imports has accumulated $6.3 trillion in new debt since 2000, according to trade analyst Charles McMillion. This year is on track to add another $500 billion, as US multinationals keep moving production overseas. Obama has pleaded with trade rivals to rebalance the system, to no avail.

  The president should take unilateral action to institute new rules to cap the rising trade deficit, then gradually reduce it with an emergency tariff if trading partners do not cooperate. US
But are Democrats getting a pass on the same policies? Republicans like Wisconsin’s Scott Walker and Michigan’s Rick Snyder have been lightning rods for progressive organizing in response to Tea Party–inspired budgets, which slash social spending while letting corporations and the wealthy off the hook. But are Democrats getting a pass on the same policies?

Let the Federal Reserve lend direct financial support. The central bank is in a vulnerable political position because it created the trillions of dollars devoted to rescuing the financial sector, including nonbank companies like AIG and General Electric. Yet the Fed insists it cannot do the same for the real economy of producers and workers. This hoary doctrine serves bankers and other financial interests, but rightly enrages citizens who are victims of financial recklessness.

President Obama can publicly invite the Federal Reserve to become a willing partner in national recovery, and he can pressure central bankers by showing how they can help underwrite the real economy without violating monetary principle. First, the Fed could provide off-budget financing for a new infrastructure bank by buying its zero-interest bonds to pay for new roads, railroads and other investments. Likewise, the Fed can participate directly in financing the write-down of housing debt by purchasing bonds issued by Fannie Mae or writing off losses on the Fed’s own portfolio.

Most of these ideas are surely too radical for this president. No doubt they would generate powerful pushback from entrenched interests. But these big strokes are bigger than Barack Obama. The challenge is to make ideas like these part of the longer struggle to rebuild the American economy. Despair is wasted energy. True political work is creating the just society.

**Cuomo Fails Public Schools**

As nearly 50 million students return to public school classrooms across the country this month, most of them will find larger class sizes, less music and arts, reductions in college preparatory Advanced Placement classes, cuts in the numbers of guidance counselors and librarians. In all, thirty-four states have cut public school budgets.

**COMMENT**

Republicans like Wisconsin’s Scott Walker and Michigan’s Rick Snyder have been lightning rods for progressive organizing in response to Tea Party–inspired budgets, which slash social spending while letting corporations and the wealthy off the hook. But are Democrats getting a pass on the same policies?

New York Governor Andrew Cuomo, already being hailed...
HEAL AMERICA. TAX WALL STREET:
As the most recent, sobering jobs report showed, the United States needs a jobs program, now. Unfortunately, President Obama does not have a Congress that will cooperate to implement one; he has a Congress that says the United States is broke.

That’s a lie. The country can fund wars of whim and back bailouts and tax breaks for billionaires. There is money. It’s just misallocated. The demand for a jobs program must be coupled with demands for better budgeting and new sources of revenue. To this end, on September 1 the activist union National Nurses United (NNU) took a bold new campaign to the offices of sixty-one members of Congress, calling it the National Day of Action to Tax Wall Street. Legislators were asked to sign a pledge to “support a Wall Street transaction tax that will raise sufficient revenue to make Wall Street pay for the devastation it has caused on Main Street.”

NNU co-president Deborah Burger says a tax on Wall Street trading of stocks, derivatives, currencies, credit default swaps and futures—the same speculative financial tools behind the recession—could raise hundreds of billions of dollars to pay for “desperately needed” programs. That’s not just idealism talking. It’s practical economics.

Writing for the New York Times, University of Massachusetts economics professor and MacArthur Fellow Nancy Folbre praised the Tax Wall Street campaign. “Purchases of stocks, bonds and other financial instruments in the United States go untaxed but for a tiny fee (less than a half-cent) on stock trades that helps finance the Securities and Exchange Commission,” she wrote. “In Britain, by contrast, a 0.5 percent tax on stock transactions raises about $40 billion a year: President Nicolas Sarkozy of France and Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany recently announced plans to introduce a similar tax in the 27 nations of the European Community…. Our current tax policies favor speculative investment in financial instruments over productive investments in human capabilities. This imbalance helps explain why nurses unions in the United States have been particularly outspoken advocates of a financial transactions tax. As they put it: ‘Heal America. Tax Wall Street.”’

JOHN NICHOLS

A WIN AGAINST MEGABANKS: In a victory for community and labor activists, the Federal Reserve announced in late August that it would extend the public comment period on the proposed acquisition by Capital One of the online bank ING Direct by fifty-one days; the merger would create the fifth-largest bank in America. The Fed also scheduled a series of public hearings across the country that activists hope to use as a forum to expose the bad practices of megabanks—in particular, the notorious subprime credit card lender Capital One.

“Make no mistake about it, this was purely driven by advocates pushing for a slowdown of a normally quick and dirty process for approving these mergers,” says National Community Reinvestment Coalition president and CEO John Taylor, who is helping lead a coalition of more than 200 community, faith and labor groups opposed to the merger. “It’s a real victory because anytime you can lift up the veil of secrecy, you can stop bad things from happening.”

Capital One received more than $3.5 billion in bailout funds, yet it has refused to lend to qualified low-income borrowers, requiring them to show credit scores that are higher than the minimum qualifying scores mandated by the Federal Housing Administration. Activists say this has disproportionately affected people of color. They also say that Capital One encourages small businesses to use high-interest credit cards instead of giving them loans.

“Capital One’s model of business is to basically turn people upside down and shake them,” says Taylor. “We shouldn’t reward [the banks] by letting them expand more to become a megabank that we will be forced to bail out once again.”

MIKE ELK

THE NATION, UNCENSORED: In September 2010 Jafar Saidi contacted The Nation to say that after experiencing “interruptions and inordinate delays” with his subscription, he learned that the magazine had been placed on the “Publication Denial” list at the State Correctional Institute in Somerset, Pennsylvania, where he is incarcerated. At first it was unclear why his subscription was being denied—was The Nation being confused with the Nation of Islam (an occasional misperception)? Did Republicans lurk in the mailroom? Or was The Nation simply backlogged on a list of publications waiting to be reviewed, as one SCI-Somerset document suggested?

For a year, Saidi, a paying subscriber, filed grievances and appeals with the prison, all of which were denied. A letter from The Nation to superintendent Gerald Rozum explained that the magazine has no ties to the Nation of Islam and “we do not support inflammatory racist content.” Back and forth the letters went: Saidi would write to say which Nation issues had been denied, attaching copies of the notices of denial. One appeal was dismissed as “frivolous.” The February 14 issue contained “writings that advocate violence, insurrection or guerrilla warfare against the government or any of its facilities”; the March 28 issue had “writings which advocate, assist or are evidence of criminal activity or facility misconduct”; and the April 18 issue was denied for its “racially inflammatory material.”

In June, The Nation contacted John Wetzel, secretary of the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections, who upheld the decision, citing “racially inflammatory” content that may “pose a threat to the inmates, staff, or facility security.” A string of e-mails followed between The Nation, the DOC and KeyPoint Government Solutions, an independent agency that investigates facility security, among other things. At KeyPoint’s prodding, the DOC re-examined its findings; Wetzel agreed that SCI-Somerset was “way over the top” in its denial; and in a final letter dated July 29, Rozum reversed the denial.

In a letter of appreciation, Saidi wrote, “I have always found The Nation full of insight into the powerful political and social forces driving this country, and I eagerly anticipate each weekly issue.” Almost one year later, he can finally read the content he paid for, and the inmates at SCI-Somerset will now be able to read consecutive issues of The Nation for the first time since 2009.

KATELYN BELYUS
as a potential Democratic presidential front-runner for 2016, wants to position himself as a progressive leader. In his sweeping State of the State address earlier this year, he declared that he was going to restore New York’s great progressive tradition.

But his budget is hard to distinguish from Walker’s or Snyder’s. He rammed through $1.3 billion in school cuts and a roughly $4.5 billion tax cut for the wealthiest 3 percent of New Yorkers—a plan praised by the state’s Tea Party leadership. As a result, more than 10,000 educator jobs were eliminated from schools, along with cuts in arts, sports, music, Advanced Placement, pre-kindergarten, and career and technology courses.

Though Cuomo campaigned on a pledge to take from rich school districts and give to the poor, his cuts per pupil were actually twice as large in poor districts as in wealthy ones. He gutted New York’s commitment to the Campaign for Fiscal Equity—plaintiff in the landmark school-funding lawsuit that had led to a commitment to invest $5.5 billion to close the funding gulf between rich and poor classrooms.

While starving schools from above, Cuomo is also choking off local funding by instituting a property tax cap. In California such a cap, enacted via Proposition 13, caused that state’s schools to plummet from among the best in the nation to among the worst. The cap, like the Cuomo funding cuts, will increase existing educational inequities and reduce students’ opportunity to learn. This is why it is so hard to square the word “progressive” with Cuomo’s budget, much less with the governor himself—same-sex marriage success notwithstanding.

Setting the stage for Cuomo’s agenda has been a growing movement of “market based” school reformers. The wind is at their backs thanks to Education Secretary Arne Duncan’s Race to the Top and Davis Guggenheim’s one-sided film Waiting for Superman. Groups like Democrats for Education Reform (DFER) and Stand for Children, representing hedge-fund managers, venture capitalists and private equity investors, provide campaign cash to Democrats nationwide. This enables Democrats like Cuomo to slash funding for schools in poor communities and cash in on political contributions while wrapping themselves in the mantle of “progressive school reform.” DFER, which now has branches in ten states, pumped $17 million into political and advocacy campaigns in its first three years—giving momentum to its agenda and providing Democrats with a new source of funds as an alternative to the teachers unions.

The group’s reform platform includes a heavy emphasis on test scores, replacing public schools with privately run charter schools, top-down school closings and pay for performance. The market reformers also want government to help expand the role of educational entrepreneurs.

Governor Cuomo’s crowning achievement, by DFER’s estimate, was to increase the role of standardized test scores in teacher evaluations (a policy that a state court has since overturned). As with many of the changes promoted by market reformers, there is scant research to justify the use of test scores to evaluate teachers—in fact, pay-for-test-score performance was shown to be a failure by a 2010 study by Vanderbilt University. Cuomo’s next proposal is to force school districts to compete with one another for scarce resources—ensuring that some students are winners while others are losers. It makes a catchy sound bite, but it runs counter to what is being done in nations like Finland, Japan, Singapore and our neighbor Canada, all of which are international leaders in educational outcomes. In these countries they value teachers, promote and fund equity, and ensure all students access to a high-quality curriculum.

The Cuomo cuts were enacted despite vigorous opposition by community organizations and teachers unions, which collaborated to organize dozens of rallies, press events and grassroots lobbying efforts. As the cuts hit classrooms this fall, these same groups are planning a barrage of actions to focus the public’s attention on how the cuts are affecting students. Ultimately, progressive education activists in New York and across the country will have to translate this into electoral action in 2012’s state legislative elections and beyond in order to demonstrate that school cuts have political consequences. Forging a unified approach to fighting budget cuts is a first step; taking on the larger frame of “market reforms” is a bigger challenge. One key opportunity will present itself in 2013, when New York City elects a new mayor and the legacy of Mayor Michael Bloomberg’s nationally touted market reforms of schools will be a central issue.

The Tea Party threat is real, but the future of our public education system could rest in the hands of Democrats like Cuomo. It’s time to remind them, and their constituents, what the word “progressive” means.

---

**Calvin Trillin, Deadline Poet**

**So Why Be So Hard on Vermont?**

*Michèle Bachmann says Hurricane Irene was God’s warning to curb excessive government spending.* —news reports

We know that this God’s an all-powerful God
God’s actions are not nonchalant.
We know he can punish whomever he wants.
So why be so hard on Vermont?

Yes, spending increases our deficit—sure.
Vermont, though, has not been avant
The rest of the country. We all spend a lot.
So why be so hard on Vermont?

Might tick off the Great Commandant?
We know we’re all sinners; we spend and we spend.
So why be so hard on Vermont?

---

Billy Easton, who lives in New York’s Hudson Valley, is the executive director of the Alliance for Quality Education, a coalition of parent, community and teacher organizations.
We don’t invest in nukes.

But we are **Ranked in the top 5%** of large-cap domestic core equity funds by Lipper for the 3-Yr period ended 6/30/11*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>DSEFX</th>
<th>S&amp;P 500</th>
<th>Category Rank*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Yr</td>
<td>31.86%</td>
<td>30.69%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Yr</td>
<td>5.21%</td>
<td>3.34%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Yr</td>
<td>3.51%</td>
<td>3.88%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Yr</td>
<td>2.33%</td>
<td>2.58%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The Fund was ranked by total return against 2,838, 2,690, 2,492, and 1,560 large-capitalization domestic core equity funds, for the 1-, 3-, 5-, 10-year periods, respectively, as defined by Lipper.

**The Domini Social Equity Fund:**
socially responsible investment that can do you and the world some good.

*Past performance is no guarantee of future results.*
The Fund’s returns quoted above represent past performance after all expenses. Investment return, principal value, and yield will fluctuate so that an investor’s shares, when redeemed, may be worth more or less than their original cost. Current performance may be lower or higher than the performance data quoted. Contact us for performance information current to the most recent month-end. A 2.00% fee applies on sales/exchanges made less than 30 days after purchase/exchanges, with certain exceptions. The Fund’s gross annual operating expenses totaled 1.29% of net assets as of 11/30/2010. Until 11/30/11, the Fund’s Manager has contractually agreed to limit investor share expenses to 1.25% of its average daily net assets per annum. The Fund’s total return would have been lower without this limit.

Source: Lipper.
Attica at 40

Forty years ago this month, *The Nation* published an editorial, “Slaughter at Attica,” in the wake of the bloodiest prison massacre the country had ever seen. The bloodiest, not for the actions of the more than 1,200 incarcerated men who seized a prison yard and took thirty-eight guards hostage in a spontaneous revolt at New York’s notorious maximum-security penitentiary. But for the official response five days later, on September 13, 1971, when state troopers, with the blessing of New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller, unleashed a lethal aerial assault, dropping tear gas from helicopters and shooting hundreds of rounds of gunfire into that yard, leaving twenty-nine prisoners and ten hostages dead.

The editors quoted Newark Mayor Kenneth Gibson, who called the suppression “one of the most callous and blatantly repressive acts ever carried out by a supposedly civilized society on its own people.” His statement is striking today for its language: that prisoners—staging an insurrection, no less—would be referred to not just as “people” but as people elected leaders would publicly claim as their “own” runs counter to all modern political tendencies. Consider Mayor Michael Bloomberg’s initial response, upon being asked whether prisoners on Rikers Island, many of them juveniles awaiting trial, might be included in the city’s unprecedented emergency protocols in the face of a threatening Hurricane Irene. “We are not evacuating Rikers Island,” he said with an air of annoyance, as if the question was absurd on its face. (Later the mayor would clarify that the jail was “perfectly safe,” but as the New York Times would point out, “no hypothetical evacuation plan for the roughly 12,000 inmates that the facility may house on a given day even exists.”)

The basic fact that prisoners, too, are human is one that society has yet to accept. “WE ARE MEN!” the Attica inmates wrote in a manifesto addressed to “the people of America.” “We are not beasts and do not intend to be beaten or driven as such.” At the top of a list of “demands” was the basic request that officials “provide adequate food, water, and shelter for all inmates.” Others included “adequate medical treatment,” “realistic, effective rehabilitation programs,” “true religious freedom,” an end to “censorship of newspapers, magazines [and] letters” and, tellingly, “a program for the recruitment and employment of a significant number of black and Spanish-speaking officers.”

This last point spoke to an open secret about Attica. “The prison was a hotbed of racism,” *The Nation* declared in a disgruntled editorial a year later, following the official report by the New York State Special Commission on Attica. “The prisoners were almost all black or Puerto Rican; the guards were all white—and drawn from the particular caste of whites whose chief delight is persecution of those of another race.”

Indeed, as the civil rights struggle fought to defend its victories outside prison walls—and as prisoners organized and educated themselves politically—at Attica, segregation ruled. “The white inmates who are sympathetic to the blacks are treated by the officers on a very low scale,” an African-American prisoner named Robert Matthews told members of the commission in 1972. “When they see a white prisoner fraternizing or getting chummy with a black inmate…they try to crush it.” At Attica, a white prisoner, William Jackson, testified, “being white is an asset, you know…. The worst thing is to be black and militant.” But the uprising at Attica crossed racial boundaries. Prisoners found unity in the sense that they were all being treated as less than human. Jackson, imprisoned for selling marijuana, explained that he refused to have his children come to see him, “because if they want to see an animal, they could go to a zoo.”

Dehumanization was at the heart of the uprising at Attica. And it was at the heart of the brutal response, the consequences of which officials tried to hide by claiming the prisoners had slashed the throats of the guards killed in the attack—a lie that would be quickly disproven by autopsies. “Unable to conceive of the inmates as anything but ruthless animals, officials assumed that the hostages would be murdered at the first moment of the onslaught,” Columbia University professor David Rothman wrote in *The Nation* in 1973. “And this mentality, in a final touch of madness, led to the death of ten hostages, not at the hands of the inmates but at the hands of the state.”

Attica, Rothman argued, “must serve as a point for turning away from reliance upon custodial institutions,” adding optimistically, “The task is not as far-fetched or utopian as some might think.” He noted the high cost of incarceration, calling for the decriminalization of victimless drug crimes, “a drastic reduction in sentence length” and “a great increase in the use of probation, with a willingness to tolerate many more failures than we do now.” Countertrends to such efforts, such as the unrepentant Governor Rockefeller’s “call for life sentences for drug sellers”—known today as the Rockefeller Drug Laws—“ought not to inhibit or discourage a very different kind of thinking.”

That we are making these same arguments forty years later can be cause to despair. Although the crisis at Attica inspired countrywide reforms along the lines its prisoners had requested—educational programs central among them—most would be rolled back in the decades that followed. The prisoner population has exploded, from 200,000 to nearly 2.4 million people, many locked up on nonviolent drug crimes and parole violations. Sentences have gotten longer. Prisons are still overcrowded. Inmates still fight for healthcare. Authorities still exploit race to divide and conquer. And as the cruel and pervasive practice of long-term solitary confinement shows, dehumanization remains a “correctional” tool.

And yet victories are possible. In New York State, after years of struggle, the Rockefeller Drug Laws were mostly repealed. In part because of the budget crisis, prison reform is catching on again across the country. Last year, the total number of state prisoners declined, even so slightly, for the first time since 1972. But if the Attica anniversary teaches us anything, it should be that we’ve been here before. It’s time to think bigger, beyond reform; to question our fundamental assumptions about prisons and their purpose; to accept that, like the “war on drugs,” mass incarceration is an experiment that has failed; to move forward, as Rothman wrote in 1973, “with some confidence and boldness. After all, no matter how badly we fare, the legacy we pass on cannot be worse than the one we inherited.”

LILIANA SEGURA
Alexander Cockburn

Secrets of the Keystone XL Pipeline

The protesters outside the White House have furled their banners and headed home. Now the Obama administration will decide whether to issue a presidential permit for the 1,700-mile Keystone XL pipeline extension—a $7 billion project to bring heavy, “sour” crude oil extracted from tar sands in Alberta, Canada, down through Montana and the Plains states to refineries on the Gulf Coast, notably in Port Arthur, Texas.

Even as the protesters savaged the scheme as a fearsome environmental disaster, the State Department issued its final environmental impact statement on August 26. Not surprisingly, it was favorable to the project, furnishing such nuggets of encouragement as “analysis of previous large pipeline oil spills suggest[s] that the depth and distance that the oil would migrate would likely be limited unless it reaches an active river, stream, a steeply sloped area, or another migration pathway such as a drainage ditch.”

There will now be a ninety-day review period. If federal agencies aren’t unanimous, then the final say-so is up to Obama. It’s a sound bet that Obama will issue approval. Would the ductile president risk a thrashing from Republicans for putting birds ahead of jobs? Right before Labor Day he gave the business lobby what it sought on postponement of new air quality standards.

But undoubtedly the prime rationale put forward by the president will be security of supply and energy “independence,” meaning supply from the fine, upstanding Calgary-based TransCanada Corporation, as opposed to “not secure and reliable sources of crude oil, including the Middle East, Africa, Mexico, and South America.”

We saw this bait-and-switch game a generation ago amid the battles over oil in Alaska, where the North Slope drilling and pipeline were approved by Congress only because the oil was intended to buttress America’s energy independence. Congress required the oil companies operating on the North Slope to refine the crude in the United States, with no exports permitted.

In fact, the companies had a long-term strategy to export Alaska’s crude to Asia. In 1996 President Bill Clinton, extending Lincoln Bedroom sleeping privileges and a Rose Garden birthday party to Arco’s former CEO Lodwrick Cook in exchange for campaign cash, signed an executive order OK’ing foreign sales of Alaskan crude.

This time there will be no twenty-five-year pause. From day one of the Keystone XL scheme the oil companies’ plan has been to take the heavy crude from Alberta, refine it in Texas and then ship it out in the form of middle distillates—diesel, jet fuel, heating oil—primarily to Europe and Latin America.

Contrary to the lurid predictions of declining US oil production, disastrous dependence on foreign oil and the need for new offshore drilling, not to mention the gloom-sodden predictions of the “peak oil” crowd, the big crisis for the US oil companies can be summed up in a single word: glut.

Here let me wheel on a very useful report, “Exporting Energy Security: Keystone XL Exposed,” just issued by Oil Change International (OCI), a “clean energy” advocate. The explosive sentences (buttressed by figures from the government’s Energy Information Administration) come on pages 3 and 4: “For the last two years, and for the foreseeable future…demand [for oil in the United States] is in decline, while domestic supply is rising…. Gasoline demand is declining due to increasing vehicle efficiency and slow economic growth”; meanwhile, “as a result of stagnant demand and the rise in both domestic [notably North Dakota] and Canadian oil production, there is a glut of oil in the US market. Refiners have therefore identified the export market as their primary hope for growth and maximum profits.”

Enter San Antonio–based Valero Energy, the largest exporter of refined oil products in the United States and a big-time retailer of gasoline in this country through its Valero, Diamond Shamrock and Beacon stations. As OCI’s report emphasizes, the Keystone XL pipeline would “probably not have gotten off the drawing board” if it hadn’t been for Valero. The company has the biggest commitment to the pipeline, guaranteeing a TransCanada purchase of at least 100,000 barrels a day, 20 percent of Keystone XL’s capacity, until 2030.

Valero’s CEO and chairman, Bill Klesse, doesn’t keep his firm’s business plan a secret. The big overseas market is diesel because Europeans, Latin Americans and others like the more fuel-efficient diesel engine. Valero’s Port Arthur refinery can process cheap heavy crude from Canadian tar sands into high-value, ultra-low-sulfur diesel. Better still, since the refinery operates as a “foreign trade zone,” it won’t pay tax and custom duties on exports or on any gasoline imports from its Welsh refinery.

There’s no national need for the Keystone XL extension. It spares TransCanada the task of trying to send the tar sands oil to Canadian terminals through fractious First Nations north of the border. It feeds Big Oil’s bottom line. It’s an environmental nightmare—mainly because of the certainty of corporate penny-pinching in maintenance and the equally appalling (and deliberate) lack of government safety enforcement.

Money talks, of course. Obama received $884,000 from the oil and gas industry during the 2008 campaign, more than any other lawmaker except John McCain. Valero throws the money around. Across 2008, 2010 and thus far in the 2012 campaign, it ranks in the top six contributors from the oil and gas industry—favoring Republicans by 80 percent or more. Between 1998 and 2010 Valero gave $147,895 to Rick Perry, outstripped only by Exxon. Surely, one way or the other, Bill Klesse can hope for a night in the Lincoln Bedroom.
Katha Pollitt

The Poor: Still Here, Still Poor

What ever happened to poor people? Even on the left, Cornel West and Tavis Smiley’s Poverty Tour was an exception. Mostly, the talk is of the “middle class”—its stagnant wages, foreclosed houses, maxed-out credit cards and adult kids still living in their childhood bedrooms. The New York Times’s Bob Herbert, the last columnist who covered poverty consistently and with passion, is gone. Among progressive organizations, Rebuild the Dream, a new group co-founded with much fanfare by Van Jones and MoveOn, is typical. It bills its mission as “rebuilding the middle class”—i.e., the “people willing to work hard and play by the rules.” (What are those rules? I always wonder. And do middle-class people really work all that hard compared with a home health aide or a waitress, who cannot get ahead no matter how hard she works and how many rules she plays by?) The ten steps in its “Contract” contain many worthy suggestions—invest in America’s infrastructure, return to fairer tax rates, secure Social Security by lifting the cap on Social Security taxes. There’s nothing wrong with any of this as far as it goes—middle-class people have indeed suffered in the current recession. But let’s not forget that the unemployment rate for white college grads is 4 percent, and every single one of them has been written up in Salon. It’s who’s missing that troubles me: poor people.

The last time poor people were on the national agenda was during the run-up to welfare reform, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, written by Republicans and signed by President Clinton in 1996. Welfare reform was supposed to transform poor single mothers into full-time or near full-time workers by tying government assistance to employment. Millions of mothers got jobs, which might or might not have had the positive psychological effects reformers promised—but (surprise!) fifteen years later, they and their children are still poor or near poor. “Once they start to make around $13 an hour, they lose the supports that helped them get into the workplace,” feminist economist Randy Albelda told me by phone. “Your costs have gone up, you’re paying for healthcare, you get less in food stamps and you have less time with your kids—so you’re worse off.” “It’s an issue,” liberal economist Robert Cherry acknowledges. “Many women are trapped in near poverty. But once you add in the Earned Income Tax Credit and the childcare tax credit, they’re still better off than they were on welfare.”

Albelda notes the hidden costs of reform: with mothers working and often commuting long hours, adolescents now take care of the house and younger siblings, which means they have less time for school. She points out that most women who had been receiving cash assistance had already been working: welfare helped them out between jobs, or when they quit because of a family emergency. “They decided to reform women, but they didn’t reform the labor market. In the retail and hospitality fields poor women have flooded into, the employer has lots of flexibility—to hire, fire, cut your hours, rearrange your schedule. Workers have none.”

Some of the worst fears of welfare reform opponents seem not to have come to pass: women have not been pushed into relying on abusive men more than they had before. Nor have the more grandiose hopes of reform proponents: marriage rates have not increased for poor women (or, indeed, anyone else); out-of-wedlock births have continued to rise; “fatherhood” programs have not done much to reconnect disaffected fathers with their kids. Cherry argues that welfare reform, by reconceiving low-income single mothers as workers, has indirectly promoted some good policies: some states have made it a bit easier for them to claim unemployment insurance; some have expanded pre-kindergarten programs. But, he quickly adds, “how can you talk about public policy in the world we live in? Money for this, money for that? It’s an alternate universe.” Indeed, by turning welfare from an entitlement into a block grant program, reform made it vulnerable to the economy in a new way: the funding can be cut without much fuss. It certainly didn’t expand to deal with rising numbers of desperate people in the recession. Opponents warned that the boom times wouldn’t last, and they were right.

Could it be that the chief outcome of welfare reform was to take poor women off the table completely? Now that they are less often seen as monstrous stereotypes—welfare queens, mothers of eight, teenagers having a baby to get a free apartment—they are of no interest at all. As political scientist Lawrence Mead, a major proponent of reform, told me in an e-mail, “For most observers, welfare reform has ceased to be a grand issue of justice or inequality, and has become a problem of management.” Rebuild the Dream’s contract has nothing to say about these women, or their brothers: nothing about childcare, income support, housing, the drug wars that have destroyed so many black communities, the prisonification of America or, for that matter, racism and sexism, which still structure the labor market, including for “middle class” people. But it’s a free-market fantasy that all single mothers can work full time and raise a family in decency without significant government help. Once again, on the left as on the right, the ideal worker is conceived of as unencumbered, with the needs and circumstances of mothers, especially single mothers, ignored. But women are half the workforce now, and the vast majority of women have kids.

The failure to talk about the poor, male or female, doesn’t mean they’ve gone away. In 2009 the official poverty rate was 14.3 percent—43.6 million people, up from 39.8 million in 2008. One in three Americans is low income (below 200 percent of the poverty line). What kind of American dream leaves them out?
The notorious Somali paramilitary warlord who goes by the nom de guerre Indha Adde, or White Eyes, walks alongside trenches on the outskirts of Mogadishu's Bakara Market once occupied by fighters from the Shabab, the Islamic militant group that has pledged allegiance to Al Qaeda. In one of the trenches, the foot of a corpse pokes out from a makeshift grave consisting of some sand dumped loosely over the body. One of Indha Adde's militiamen says the body is that of a foreigner who fought alongside the Shabab. “We bury their dead, and we also capture them alive,” says Indha Adde in a low, raspy voice. “We take care of them if they are Somali, but if we capture a foreigner we execute them so that others will see we have no mercy.”

Despite such thug talk, Indha Adde is not simply a warlord, at least not officially, anymore. Nowadays, he is addressed as Gen. Yusuf Mohamed Siad, and he wears a Somali military uniform, complete with red beret and three stars on his shoulder. His weapons and his newfound legitimacy were bestowed upon him by the US-sponsored African Union force, known as AMISOM, that currently occupies large swaths of Mogadishu.

It is quite a turnabout. Five years ago, Indha Adde was one of Al Qaeda and the Shabab’s key paramilitary allies and a commander of one of the most powerful Islamic factions in Somalia fighting against foreign forces and the US-backed Somali government. He openly admits to having sheltered some of the most notorious Al Qaeda figures—including Fazul Abdullah Mohammed, the alleged mastermind of the 1998 bombings of the US Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania—and to deceiving the CIA in order to protect the men. (Fazul was killed in June in Mogadishu.)

“The CIA failed to convince me to work with them,” Indha Adde recalls of his meetings in Somalia, Kenya and Dubai with agency operatives beginning in 2004, when, he says, he met the CIA’s East Africa chief in the Emirates. “They offered me money, they offered funding for the region I was controlling, they offered me influence and power in Somalia through US cooperation, but I refused all those offers.” At the time, Indha Adde—like many Muslims around the globe—viewed the United States as “arrogant” and on a crusade against Islam. “Personally, I thought of even Osama [bin Laden] himself as a good man who only wanted the implementation of Islamic law,” he tells me at one of his homes in Mogadishu.

Yusuf Mohamed Siad was not always known just as Indha Adde. As one of the main warlords who divided and destroyed Somalia during the civil war that raged through the 1990s, he brutally took control of the Lower Shabelle region, which was overwhelmingly populated by a rival clan, earning him the moniker “The Butcher.” There are allegations that he ran drug and weapons trafficking operations from the Merca port. Then, as the religious and political winds began to shift in Somalia after 9/11, he remade himself into an Islamic sheik of sorts in the mid-2000s and vowed to fight foreign invaders, including rival warlords funded and directed by the CIA.

Perhaps more than any other figure, Indha Adde embodies the mind-boggling constellation of allegiances and double-crosses that has marked Somalia since its last stable government fell in 1991. And his current role encapsulates the contradictions of the country’s present: he is a warlord who believes in Sharia law, is friendly with the CIA, and takes money and weapons from AMISOM. There are large parts of Mogadishu that are not accessible without his permission.

How US proxy wars helped create a militant Islamist threat.

by JEREMY SCHAHILL

The CIA failed to convince me to work with them,” Indha Adde recalls of his meetings in Somalia, Kenya and Dubai with agency operatives beginning in 2004, when, he says, he met the CIA’s East Africa chief in the Emirates. “They offered me money, they offered funding for the region I was controlling, they offered me influence and power in Somalia through US cooperation, but I refused all those offers.” At the time, Indha Adde—like many Muslims around the globe—viewed the United States as “arrogant” and on a crusade against Islam. “Personally, I thought of even Osama [bin Laden] himself as a good man who only wanted the implementation of Islamic law,” he tells me at one of his homes in Mogadishu.

Yusuf Mohamed Siad was not always known just as Indha Adde. As one of the main warlords who divided and destroyed Somalia during the civil war that raged through the 1990s, he brutally took control of the Lower Shabelle region, which was overwhelmingly populated by a rival clan, earning him the moniker “The Butcher.” There are allegations that he ran drug and weapons trafficking operations from the Merca port. Then, as the religious and political winds began to shift in Somalia after 9/11, he remade himself into an Islamic sheik of sorts in the mid-2000s and vowed to fight foreign invaders, including rival warlords funded and directed by the CIA.

Perhaps more than any other figure, Indha Adde embodies the mind-boggling constellation of allegiances and double-crosses that has marked Somalia since its last stable government fell in 1991. And his current role encapsulates the contradictions of the country’s present: he is a warlord who believes in Sharia law, is friendly with the CIA, and takes money and weapons from AMISOM. There are large parts of Mogadishu that are not accessible without his permission,
and he controls one of the largest militias and possesses more technicals (truck-mounted heavy automatic weapons) in the city than any other warlord.

While the United States and other Western powers have spent hundreds of millions of dollars on arms, training and equipment for the Ugandan and Burundian militaries under the auspices of AMISOM, the Somali military remains under-funded and under-armed. Its soldiers are poorly paid, highly undisciplined and, at the end of the day, more loyal to their clans than to the central government. That’s where Indha Adde’s rent-a-militia comes in.

Over the past year, the Somali government and AMISOM have turned to some unsavory characters in a dual effort to build something resembling a national army and, as the United States attempted to do with its Awakening Councils in the Sunni areas of Iraq in 2006, to purchase strategic loyalty from former allies of the current enemy—in this case, the Shabab. Some warlords, like Indha Adde, have been given government ministries or military rank in return for allocating their forces to the fight against the Shabab. Several are former allies of Al Qaeda or the Somali Parliament who has come to pay his respects to Qanyare. He continues, “In any case, you are making a huge mistake” in backing the former Shabab- and Al Qaeda–allied warlords like Indha Adde. “There is a difference between conflict of ideology and conflict of interest,” he declares. “The warlords being backed by you [America] have only a conflict of interest with the Shabab, not of ideology. That’s why [arming and supporting them] is a dangerous game.”

A
fter the 9/11 attacks and President Bush’s “You’re either with us or you’re with the terrorists” declaration, Somalia was quick to pledge its support for the United States. At the time, the Somali government had virtually no control over the country, which had been ruled by warlords since the early ‘90s. Nonetheless, its foreign minister, Ismail Mahmoud “Buubaa” Hurre, swiftly penned a letter to the US secretary of state. “We are with you, and we are as much concerned with the possibility of Al Qaeda moving into [Somalia] as you are,” Buubaa recalls writing. “But the response was lukewarm.” He says it took Washington “a long time” to “decide to move in,” and when it did, Buubaa says, it “backfired.” Spectacularly.

As the “global war on terror” kicked off, the United States established a Combined Joint Task Force for the Horn of Africa. In 2002 some 900 military and intelligence personnel were deployed to the former French military outpost, Camp Lemonier, in the African nation of Djibouti. The secretive base would soon serve as a command center for covert US action in the Horn of Africa and the Arabian Peninsula, and as the launch pad for operations by the CIA and the elite Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) to strike Al Qaeda targets outside the declared battlefield of Afghanistan, as part of the Bush administration’s borderless war strategy.

While there were rumblings early on that the United States intended to hit in Somalia, seasoned US experts on the region spoke out against it. “There’s no need to be rushing into Somalia,” former US ambassador to Ethiopia David Shinn said. “If you think about military targets, I doubt they exist.”

The Somali government and US-backed AMISOM have purchased loyalty from warlords who are former allies of the current enemy.

Shabab, and many fought against the US-sponsored Ethiopian invasion in 2006 or against the US-led mission in Somalia in the early 1990s that culminated in the infamous “Black Hawk Down” incident.

Somali President Sheik Sharif Sheik Ahmed claims that Indha Adde and other warlords have sworn allegiance to the government, but it is abundantly clear from traveling extensively through Mogadishu with Indha Adde that his men are loyal to him above all else. President Sharif seemed almost detached from this reality when I met him at his offices in Mogadishu. “As more territory is gained, it will be easier to unite [the various militias] under one umbrella,” he says.

Not everyone in the Somali government sees it that way. “These people are not supposed to have any role in this government,” says Ahmed Nur Mohamed, the mayor of Mogadishu. “They are not supporting the government, but they are waiting. It’s a time bomb: they are waiting, they want to weaken the government, and they are waiting any time that the government falls, so that each one will grab an area.”

Mohamed Afrah Qanyare, an infamous warlord who for years was backed by the CIA, concurs with that assessment. Interviewed over coffee at one of his homes in Mogadishu, Qanyare expresses his displeasure that the CIA has stopped pursuing a relationship with him, and he refuses to believe that I am not in the agency. “You guys are usually Irish-American,” he tells me as he laughs and slaps the knee of a member of

Jeremy Scahill, a Puffin Writing Fellow at The Nation Institute, is The Nation’s national security correspondent.
Free cleft surgery which takes as little as 45 minutes and costs as little as $250, can give desperate children not just a new smile—but a new life.

“...one of the most productive charities — dollar for deed — in the world.”
—The New York Times

According to the U.S. Government, women should take sufficient levels of folic acid (400 micrograms/day) during pregnancy to help prevent neural tube defects and reduce the risk for cleft lip and palate. When folic acid is taken one month before conception and throughout the first trimester, it has been proven to reduce the risk for neural tube defects by 50 to 70 percent. Be sure to receive proper prenatal care, quit smoking and drinking alcohol and follow your health care provider’s guidelines for foods to avoid during pregnancy. Foods to avoid may include raw or undercooked seafood, beef, pork or poultry; deli meats; fish that contain high levels of mercury; smoked seafood; fish exposed to industrial pollutants; raw shellfish or eggs; soft cheeses; unpasteurized milk; pâté, caffeine; and unwashed vegetables. For more information, visit www.SmileTrain.org. Smile Train is a 501 (c)(3) nonprofit recognized by the IRS, and all donations to Smile Train are tax-deductible in accordance with IRS regulations. © 2011 Smile Train.

Donate online: www.smiletrain.org or call: 1-800-932-9541

Your support can provide free treatment for poor children with clefts.

✓ $250 Surgery.  ❏ $125 Half surgery.  ❏ $50 Medications.  ❏ $ __________

Mr./Mrs./Ms. ___________________________ Zip _________________

Address __________________________________ City ___________________ State ___________________

Telephone ____________________________ eMail ______________________

Credit Card #: ___________________________ Expires __________

Visa  ❏ MasterCard  ❏ AMEX  ❏ Discover  Signature ___________

☐ My check is enclosed.  Z11091093ZFAVY28

SmileTrain, P.O. Box 96211, Washington, DC 20090-6211
Qanyare is a striking presence, physically and intellectually. He is tall, and his eyes, ringed with wrinkles, gleam with intensity. As he tells it, he grew up “in the bush” in Somalia and conned his way into an education by Mennonite missionaries, who taught him the trade of accounting. As a young man, Qanyare parlayed that skill into a job doing the books for the Somali secret police, which kicked off his career in Somali war politics. He often dresses in guayabera suits, perfectly pressed, though his unkempt mane gives him a rougher edge.

When I first met Qanyare, in Nairobi, he was living at the Laico Regency Hotel, owned by then–Libyan dictator Muammar el-Qaddafi. Qanyare has made millions of dollars over the decades on real estate investments in Nairobi and uses the city as a base to plot his return to Somali politics. He retains a seat in the Somali Parliament, but that is a pro forma designation, allocated by the country’s clan-based system of representation. He tells me that he intends to run for president if the country ever has an election. That was supposed to happen in August, but an intervention by the Ugandan president postponed elections, extending the current government’s mandate for another year. “My agenda is very clear,” he says. “I know Al Qaeda and Al Shabab. What we need is to fight with them mercilessly.”

In December 2002, Qanyare was approached by a friend who told him that some agents from the CIA wanted to talk with him. The day after Christmas, he met them at a hotel in Nairobi. Qanyare had certain assets that were of strategic value to the United States. After 9/11 the Bush administration was concerned about Al Qaeda members fleeing Afghanistan in the aftermath of the US invasion and using Somalia as a base from which to plot attacks against US interests in East Africa. Indeed, on November 28, 2002, a month before Qanyare met with the CIA, Al Qaeda operatives had carried out simultaneous attacks in Mombasa, Kenya. One was on a vacation resort, the other was on an Israeli jetliner at Mombasa’s Moi International Airport. Details emerged that implicated suspects in the 1998 US Embassy bombings.

At the time, Qanyare was known as a secular warlord who commanded a militia of about 1,500 men. More important, he had his own airport outside Mogadishu. “The airport is inland, inside the bush. So the airport itself is very secretive,” he boasts. “We designed it not to expose or to see easily who is landing.”

While the Americans, according to Qanyare, were reluctant at the time to conduct the type of targeted-killing operations in Somalia that have become the norm in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen and, eventually, Somalia, the program was hardly one of passive intelligence-gathering. Believing they had the backing of Washington, Qanyare and other secular warlords began hunting down people the United States had identified, as well as those the warlords deemed worthy of Washington’s attention. Although there was certainly a small Al Qaeda presence in Somalia before the United States launched its operations—and Islamic militants did carry out assassinations, including the killing of four foreign aid workers in the relatively peaceful Somaliland region in late 2003 and early 2004—the actions of Qanyare and his fellow CIA-backed warlords gave the Islamic militants fodder for an effective propaganda and recruitment campaign.

Qanyare and his allied warlords engaged in a targeted kill-and-capture campaign against individuals they suspected of supporting Islamic radicals. “These people were already heinous warlords; they were widely reviled in Mogadishu. And then they start assassinating imams and local prayer leaders who had nothing to do with terror,” says Abdirahman “Aynte” Ali, a Somali analyst who has written extensively on the history of the Shabab and warlord politics. “They were either capturing them and then renditioning them to Djibouti, where there is a major American base, or in many cases they were chopping their head off and taking the head to the Americans or whoever. And telling them, ‘We killed this guy.’”

In a handful of cases, the warlords caught someone the United States considered to be of value, like Suleiman Ahmed Hemed Salim, captured in March 2003. One of Qanyare’s fellow warlords, Mohamed Dheere, seized Salim and rendered him into US custody. Salim was reportedly later held in two secret prisons in Afghanistan. Scores of other “suspects” were abducted by the CIA-backed warlords and handed over to American agents. In many cases, the United States would determine they had no intelligence value and repatriate them to Somalia. Sometimes,
according to several former senior Somali government and military officials, they would be executed by the warlords so that they could not speak of what had happened to them.

The “US government was not helping the [Somali] government but was helping the warlords that were against the government,” Buubaa, the former foreign minister, tells me. Washington “thought that the warlords were strong enough to chase away the Islamists or get rid of them. But it did completely the opposite. Completely the opposite.”

While the CIA was working with the warlords in Mogadishu, who grew more brutal and powerful by the day, Somalia’s internationally recognized Transitional Federal Government (TFG) was powerless in exile. “The whole mess started from that point,” says Ali Mohamed Gedi, who served as Somalia’s prime minister from 2004 to 2007. Qanyare and the other warlords, Gedi says, “were misinforming the US government” and in the process weakening the newly formed government while strengthening and encouraging individual warlords.

By the beginning of 2006 (if not well before), the CIA’s warlords had become universally despised in Mogadishu. Nearly everyone I interviewed in Mogadishu about this period characterized them as murderers and criminals. The warlords formed a formal coalition whose title reeked of CIA influence: the Alliance for the Restoration of Peace and Counterterrorism.

“This was a turning point in Somalia,” says Aynte. At the time, he explains, the Islamic courts were little more than small groups of poorly armed, autonomous militias who supported the implementation of Sharia law and the provision of social services in their regions as a counterbalance to the warlord-sponsored lawlessness that infected the country. They had no central authority. “But they realized that the sooner they unite, the sooner they can defend these innocent people who have been murdered across the city.” And so they formed the Islamic Courts Union, and local businessmen funded it, allowing the ICU to purchase weapons to take on the warlords. “People started siding with the Islamic courts,” says Buubaa. The ICU “brought about some semblance of order and stability to Mogadishu. And a lot of people in Mogadishu appreciated that.”

In the summer of 2006 the ICU, along with fighters from the Shabab, ran the CIA’s men out of town. “The warlords were ejected out of Mogadishu for the first time in sixteen years. No one thought this was possible,” recalls Aynte. From June to December 2006, the ICU “brought a modicum of stability that’s unprecedented in Mogadishu,” reopening the airport and the seaport. “You could drive in Mogadishu at midnight, no problem, no guards. You could be a foreigner or Somali. It was at total peace.”

Qanyare and the other warlords were forced to flee to bases outside Mogadishu or outside Somalia. I ask Qanyare why the Counterterrorism Alliance failed. Lack of money and willpower from Washington, he replies. “If they funded it, we should win. We should defeat them,” he says. “But that did not happen.” He says that at the time, he warned his US handlers that if they failed to eliminate Al Qaeda and its allies, “it would be too expensive to defeat them in the future.”

“I was right,” he concludes. In the Horn of Africa, Qanyare says, “Al Qaeda is growing rapidly, and they are recruiting. And they have a foothold, safe haven—vast land, all sorts of money that they have got. Taxing, getting revenues, growing, training.”

Indha Adde, who had cast his lot with the ICU and the regional militias, says the ICU had two goals. “One was to rule Somalia according to the Holy Koran. The other goal was to defeat the warlords,” he recalls. “We disarmed the warlords, but we didn’t reach our first goal. Outside intervention blocked Islamic rule in Somalia.”

Mr.

ost of the entities that made up the Islamic Courts Union did not have anything resembling a global jihadist agenda. Nor did they take their orders from Al Qaeda. The Shabab was a different story, but it was not the most influential or powerful of the ICU groups. Moreover, clan politics in Somalia held the foreign operatives in check. “We deployed our fighters to Mogadishu with the intent of ceasing the civil war and bringing an end to the warlords’ ruthlessness,” says Sheik Ahmed Mohammed Islam, whose Ras Kamboni militia, based in the Jubba region of southern Somalia, joined the ICU in 2006. “Those of us within the ICU were people with different views; moderates, midlevel and extremists.” Other than expelling the warlords and stabilizing the country through Sharia law, he says, there was “no commonly shared political agenda.”

Sheik Islam says that almost immediately there were deep divisions within the ICU, and no one seemed to have a plan to govern beyond the revolution. Buubaa and other former Somali government officials told me that if the ICU had made overtures, a power-sharing deal could have been reached. Instead of capitalizing on the good will generated by expelling the warlords and working with officials from Somalia’s transitional government under the banner of national unity, the ICU leaders “started behaving like the warlords,” alleges Buubaa, saying they wanted to “squash” the government, the only “remaining national symbol of the Somali state.”
Legally speaking, of course, everything has an owner, but as a Nation editor once wrote, “it is one of the superb facts about The Nation that you can no more ‘own’ it than you can own the spirit it represents.”

Nobody owns the Nation. That’s why so many Somebodies read it.

Walter Mosley is a longstanding Nation reader.

Not GE (or Comcast). Not Disney. Not Murdoch or Time Warner. We are a wholly owned subsidiary of our own conscience.

This independence is why great writers have always used The Nation as an Early Warning System—to expose before it’s too late the frauds, felonies and follies of the all-too-private enterprise we call Our Government.

And it’s why week in, week out we’re read by an audience as illustrious as our authors.

If you believe, as our readers do, that the highest form of patriotism is demanding to know exactly what Government’s doing in your name, why not sign on today at this very low rate? You can save a lot—not least of which could be your country.

Subscribe now.
www.thenation.com/trial-rate
800-333-8536
The Bush administration considered the ICU unreconcilable. It was viewed as a de facto Al Qaeda–supporting government taking control of an African capital. Many in the administration believed the ICU represented a dramatic reascension of al–Itihaad al-Islami (AIAI), a small jihadist group that had peaked in influence in Somalia in the 1990s during the civil war. Two weeks after 9/11, AIAI was declared a terrorist entity by the US government, but the group crumbled soon thereafter as more powerful militias overran Mogadishu. AIAI’s military commander, Hassan Dahir Aweys, a former Somali air force colonel, later rebranded as “Sheik” Aweys, became a leader of the ICU. The ICU also counted among its associates Aden Hashi Farah Ayro, whom the United States alleged attended Al Qaeda training camps in Afghanistan and was behind the killing of foreign aid workers in Somalia; and Fazul, the alleged mastermind of the embassy bombings.

But by most credible accounts, the Al Qaeda influence at the time was small—consisting of about a dozen foreign operatives and a handful of Somalis with global jihadist aspirations. A UN cable from June 2006, containing notes of a meeting with senior State Department and US military officials from the Horn of Africa task force, indicates that the United States was aware of the ICU’s diversity, but would “not allow” it to rule Somalia. The United States, according to the notes, intended to “rally the ground, US Special Operations forces. You had CIA on invasion, paying for everything including the gas that it had to expend, to undertake this. And you also had US forces on the ground, US Special Operations forces. You had CIA on the ground. US airpower was a part of the story as well. All of which gave massive military superiority to the Ethiopians,” says Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, director of the Center for the Study of Terrorist Radicalization and a frequent adviser to the US military, including Centcom. “If there’s one lesson in terms of military operations of the past ten years, it’s that the US is a very effective insurgent force. In areas where it’s seeking to overthrow a government, it’s good at doing that. What it’s not shown any luck in doing is establishing a viable government structure.”

The US-backed Ethiopian forces swiftly overthrew the Islamic Courts Union and sent its leaders fleeing or to the grave. Many were rendered to Ethiopia, Kenya or Djibouti; others were killed by US Special Operations forces or the CIA. By New Year’s Day 2007, Prime Minister Gedi was installed in Mogadishu, thanks to the Ethiopians. “The warlord era in Somalia is now over,” he declared. In a sign of what was to come, Somalis swiftly and angrily began protesting the Ethiopian “occupation.”

“If you know the history of Somalia, Ethiopia and Somalia were archenemies, historical enemies, and people felt that this was adding insult to the injury,” says Aynte. “An insurgency was born out of there.”

Since the early 1990s, the stretch of land just across the Somali border from Kenya’s Dadaab refugee camp—the world’s largest, and the epicenter of the humanitarian crisis in the region today—has been the stronghold of the Ras Kamboni movement, currently led by Sheikh Islam, also known as Madobe, or Black. Madobe was a long-time deputy of Hassan Turki, one of the founders of militant Islamic radicalism in Somalia and a US-designated terrorist. As the Ethiopians invaded, Madobe, like other ICU leaders, was forced to retreat from Mogadishu to his home base. But his name was already on a US list of targeted ICU leaders. On January 23, 2007, as US Special Operations forces began using a secret airbase in eastern Ethiopia to launch raids inside Somalia, Madobe became the hunted.

In June of this year, I snuck across the Kenyan-Somali border with two photojournalist colleagues to meet Madobe, who provided me with an extensive account of the elite Joint Special Operations Command’s attempt to assassinate him.

To get to Madobe, we drove through a famine- and drought-plagued wasteland where we witnessed the beginning of what would become a globally recognized exodus of Somalis fleeing across the border. As Somalis trickled past us, carrying all the possessions they could handle, one of Madobe’s men met us on the Somali side of the border and directed us to a secluded area lined by trees, where we were told to wait.

About ten minutes later, pickup trucks of armed men approached us. The men searched all our bags and belongings and then produced a feast of processed junk food—candy bars, crackers, Coke and Sprite—and laid it out on a folding table. In the distance, more pickups descended. A cavalry of armed men formed a perimeter around Madobe, who was dressed in olive green fatigues and a matching boonie hat. Perched on his nose were reading glasses, and his full beard had traces of henna dye. Madobe, a hardened guerrilla, is soft-spoken and has the demeanor of a librarian.

“Every step taken by the US has benefited Al Shabab,” he told me. “What brought about the ICU? It was the US-backed warlords. If Ethiopia did not invade and the US did not carry out airstrikes, Al Shabab would not have survived so long, because they were outnumbered by those who had positive agendas.”
I asked him about the JSOC strike against him. He and eight of his people were on the run and were being surveilled regularly by US aircraft, he recalled. “Most of the time they were tracking us using unmanned drones. At night we were afraid of lighting a fire to cook, and in the daylight we did not want to create smoke and we had no precooked food, so it was really very tough. We also had Thuraya satellite phones, which clearly helped them easily trace us.”

On the night of January 23, Madobe and his small group set up camp under a large tree in rural southern Somalia. “At around 4 AM we woke up to perform the dawn prayers, and that’s when the planes started to hit us. The entire airspace was full of planes. There was AC-130, helicopters and fighter jets. The sky was full of strikes. They were hitting us, pounding us with heavy weaponry.” The eight people with him, who Madobe said included men and women, were all killed.

Madobe was wounded. He believed that a ground force would come for him. “I picked a gun and a lot of magazines. I believed that death was in front of me, and I wanted to kill the first enemy I saw. But it did not happen.” Madobe lay there, losing blood and energy. At around 10 AM, he said, US and Ethiopian forces landed by helicopter near his position. He recalled a US soldier approaching him as he lay shirtless on the ground. “Are you Ahmed Madobe?” the soldier asked. “Who are you?” he replied. “We are the people that are capturing you,” he recalled the soldier telling him.

They loaded Madobe onto a helicopter and took him to a makeshift base in Kismayo. The US forces, he said, immediately began interrogating him, and only after Ethiopian forces intervened did they give him water and medical treatment. In Kismayo, he was regularly interrogated by the Americans. “They had names of different rebels and fighters on a list, and they were asking me if I knew them or had information about them,” he said. A month later, on March 1, he was rendered to Mogadishu by the Ethiopian forces and says he worked closely with the United States, denies that any such abuses took place, saying soldiers “never targeted” any civilians. “I don’t believe that Al Qaeda is a negotiable institution. They have to kill you, or you have to kill them. Sometimes human rights agencies, they exaggerate in their activities.” In June 2007 Gedi survived a massive attack on his residence in Mogadishu, when a suicide bomber burst through his gates in a Toyota Land Cruiser laden with explosives, killing six of Gedi’s guards. It was the fifth assassination attempt against him. Later that year, he resigned.

Upon his return, Madobe discovered that local leaders had cut a deal with the Shabab forces that had filled the void after he was snatched. By 2010 Madobe's forces had announced they were at war with the Shabab and supporting Somalia’s government forces. I asked him who is financing and supporting his fight against the Shabab. Some say it is Kenya, others Ethiopia. He smiled as he provided a nonanswer: “I would accept any American offer to support me,” he said. “The legal way.” According to the UN Monitoring Group on Somalia, Madobe’s forces have received “training and support” from the Kenyan government, as well as “technicals.” In some battles with the Shabab around the key city of Dhubley, including this past March, “artillery for these incursions was provided by the Kenyan military, which included military helicopters to provide air support.”

As we finished our discussion, Madobe headed out with his men, all of them wearing crisp new uniforms and wielding new weapons and technicals, and they disappeared back into the bush.

The Ethiopian invasion was marked by indiscriminate brutality against Somali civilians. Ethiopian and Somali government soldiers secured Mogadishu’s neighborhoods by force, raiding houses in search of ICU combatants, looting civilian property and beating or shooting anyone suspected of collaboration with antigovernment forces. They positioned snipers on the roofs of buildings and reportedly responded to any attack with disproportionate fire, shelling densely populated areas and several hospitals, according to Human Rights Watch.

Extrajudicial killings by Ethiopian soldiers were widely reported, particularly in the final months of 2007. Reports of Ethiopian soldiers “slaughtering” men, women and children “like goats”—slitting throats—were widespread, according to Amnesty International. Both Somali government and Ethiopian forces were accused of horrific sexual violence. Gedi, who was returned to Mogadishu by the Ethiopian forces and says he worked closely with the United States, denies that any such abuses took place, saying soldiers “never targeted” any civilians. “I don’t believe that Al Qaeda is a negotiable institution. They have to kill you, or you have to kill them. Sometimes human rights agencies, they exaggerate in their activities.” In June 2007 Gedi survived a massive attack on his residence in Mogadishu, when a suicide bomber burst through his gates in a Toyota Land Cruiser laden with explosives, killing six of Gedi’s guards. It was the fifth assassination attempt against him. Later that year, he resigned.

In backing the Ethiopian invasion, the United States calculated that it could crush the “jihadist” elements of the ICU, while encouraging a reconciliation between its more moderate members and officials of the TFG. While the government that would emerge after the invasion included many former leaders of the ICU, Washington grossly miscalculated the blowback from the invasion. “The end result of the US-backed Ethiopian invasion and occupation,” Buubaa, the former foreign minister, told me, was “driving Somalia into the Al Qaeda fold.” If Somalia was already a playground for Islamic militants,
The History of the Bible: The Making of the New Testament Canon

Taught by Professor Bart D. Ehrman
UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT CHAPEL HILL

LECTURE TITLES
1. The New Testament—An Overview
2. Paul—Our Earliest Christian Author
3. The Pauline Epistles
4. The Problem of Pseudonymity
5. The Beginnings of the Gospel Traditions
6. The Earliest Gospels
7. The Other Gospels
8. Apocalypticism and the Apocalypse of John
9. The Copyists Who Gave Us Scripture
10. Authority in the Early Church
11. The Importance of Interpretation
12. When Did the Canon Get Finalized?

Deepen Your Understanding of the New Testament

The New Testament stands unchallenged, in the words of Professor Bart D. Ehrman, not only as the “bestseller of all time” but also as the most important “book—or collection of books—in the history of Western civilization.” Yet many of us, Christian or otherwise, have questions about the history of this important religious text and significant cultural artifact.

The History of the Bible: The Making of the New Testament Canon offers you a fast-moving yet thorough introduction to key issues in the development of the New Testament, including its different kinds of books, the conditions in which they were composed, what they teach, who actually wrote them, and, perhaps most important of all, why and how some books and not others became part of the canon of Scripture that would define Christianity for all time. With their scholarly approach, these 12 insightful lectures provide a deeper understanding of the New Testament for both Christians and non-Christians alike.

Offer expires 10/09/11
1-800-832-2412
WWW.THEGREATCOURSES.COM/5NTN
the Ethiopian invasion blew open the gates of Mogadishu for Al Qaeda. Within some US counterterrorism circles, the rise of the Shabab in Somalia was predictable and preventable. Some veteran counterterrorism analysts agree with Aynte that the ICU could have been engaged. Others say the United States dropped the ball when it turned its focus to Iraq, and thus opened the door for an insurgency. “The top policy-makers made the decision that the pre-eminent national security threat to America was Iraq,” says a former aide to a US Special Operations team that participated in the Ethiopian invasion.

Gartenstein-Ross, who has advised US military forces deploying to the Horn of Africa, believes the ICU was a threat but acknowledges that may be a minority view, even within the US intelligence community. “The major problem is that no steps were taken to avert an insurgency—and indeed, very early on you had an insurgency arise because of lack of stability in the country,” he says. “What we ended up doing was basically depending upon the Ethiopians to stabilize Somalia. And that in itself was a terrible assumption.”

The Shabab, once a ragtag group, became a major force that continued to benefit from a US policy that doubled down on past mistakes.

With the ICU dismantled and the brutal Ethiopian occupation continuing for two more years, the Shabab emerged as the vanguard of the fight against foreign occupation. “For them, it was the break that they were looking for,” says Aynte. “It was the anger that they had been looking for, to harness the anger of the people and present themselves as the new nationalist movement that would kick Ethiopia out. So throughout the three years that Ethiopia was in Somalia, Al Shabab never uttered a word of global jihad at all. They always said that their main goal was just to kick the Ethiopians out.”

With the ICU leaders on the run, Al Qaeda saw Somalia as an ideal frontline for jihad and began increasing its support for the Shabab. “With the help of all these foreign fighters, Al Shabab took over the fighting, with Al Qaeda leadership,” recalls Indha Adde, who had been the ICU defense minister. “The Shabab started ordering executions, and innocent Muslims were killed. They even targeted members of [the ICU]. I turned against the Shabab after seeing these violations against Islam.” Indha Adde eventually fled Somalia, along with Hassan Dahir Aweys, and began receiving support from Ethiopia’s archenemy, Eritrea.

Sheik Sharif, who was the commander in chief of the ICU, escaped to Kenya in early 2007 with the help of US intelligence. Gedi tells me, “I believe that [Sharif] was also working with the CIA. They protected him.” Gedi says that when Sharif fled to Kenya, the US government asked him to issue Sharif documents allowing him to travel to Yemen. Gedi says he also wrote letters on Sharif’s behalf to the Kenyan and Yemeni governments asking that Sharif be permitted to relocate to Yemen. “I did that upon the request of the government of the US,” he recalls. The New York Times reported that US officials considered Sharif to be a “moderate Islamist.” In Yemen, Sharif began organiz-

When President Obama took office in 2009, the United States increased its covert military involvement in and around Somalia, as the CIA and JSOC intensified air and drone strikes in Somalia and Yemen, and began openly hunting people the United States alleged were Al Qaeda leaders. In September of that year, Obama authorized the assassination of Saleh Ali Nabhan, in his administration’s first known targeted-killing operation in Somalia. A JSOC team helicoptered into Somalia and gunned down Nabhan. JSOC troops then landed and collected the body. Earlier, in April, Obama had authorized JSOC to kill Somali pirates who had hijacked the Maersk Alabama, a
ship operated by a major Defense Department contractor. But as the United States began striking in Somalia, the Shabab’s influence was spreading.

By 2010 the Shabab was in control of a greater swath of Somalia—by a long shot—than the Transitional Federal Government, even though the TFG was supported by thousands of US-trained, -armed and -funded African Union troops. The Ugandan government essentially picked up where the Ethiopian government had left off, and in Mogadishu AMISOM forces consistently shelled Shabab-held neighborhoods teeming with civilians. While the United States and its allies began bumping off militant figures, the civilian death toll pushed some clan leaders to lend support to the Shabab. Suicide bombings by Shabab militants, including US citizens, killed more than a dozen government ministers and other officials, and the Shabab regularly staged paramilitary parades. Under pressure from its paymasters to show that it had some control in Mogadishu, President Sharif’s government began turning to former ICU warlords for help. In parallel, Washington intensified its dealings with various regional power players and warlords.

By late 2010 the Obama administration unveiled what it referred to as a “dual-track” approach to Somalia wherein Washington would simultaneously deal with the “central government” in Mogadishu as well as regional and clan players in Somalia. “The dual track policy only provides a new label for the old (and failed) Bush Administration’s approach,” observed Somalia analyst Afyare Abdi Elmi. “It inadvertently strengthens clan divisions, undermines inclusive and democratic trends and most importantly, creates a conducive environment for the return of the organized chaos or warlordism in the country.”

The dual-track policy encouraged self-declared, clan-based regional administrations to seek recognition and support from the United States. “Local administrations are popping up every week,” says Aynlte. “Most of them don’t control anywhere, but people are announcing local governments in the hopes that CIA will set up a little outpost in their small village.”

One of the more powerful forces that has emerged in Somalia’s anti-Shabab, government-militia nexus is Ahlu Sunna Wa’Jama (ASWJ), a Sufi Muslim paramilitary organization. Founded in the 1990s as a quasi-political organization dedicated to Sufi religious scholarship and community works—and avowedly nonmilitant—ASWJ viewed itself as a buffer against the encroachment of Wahhabism in Somalia. Its proclaimed mandate was to “preach a message of peace and delegitimize the beliefs and political platform of [al-Itihaad] and other fundamentalist movements.”

The group largely stayed out of Somalia’s civil war until 2008, when the Shabab began targeting its leaders, carrying out assassinations and desecrating the tombs of ASWJ’s elders. The Shabab considered ASWJ to be a mystic cult whose practice of praying at the tombs of Sufi saints was heresy. After much debate within the ASWJ community, militias were formed to take up arms against the Shabab. In the beginning, ASWJ’s fighting force of undisciplined clan fighters and religious scholars left much to be desired. Then, quietly, Ethiopia started arming and financing the group, as well as providing its forces with training and occasional boots on the ground. By early 2010 ASWJ was widely seen as an Ethiopian—and therefore US—proxy. In March 2010 it signed a formal cooperation agreement with Sheikh Sharif’s government.

Among ASWJ’s key leaders is Abdulkadir Moallin Noor, known as The Khalifa, or The Successor. His father, a widely revered holy man, died in 2009 at 91, and had designated Noor as the new spiritual leader. Noor, educated in London, left his life of safety and comfort to return to Mogadishu, where he was given the title of minister of state for the presidency. Now he rolls around Mogadishu in an armored SUV with animal skins over the seats. Unlike Indha Adde, Noor is hardly a battle-hardened warlord, as evidenced by his tailored robes, pristine combat boots with the price tag still attached and the Koran he reads from his iPad. In his view, ASWJ is a natural US ally. Sufis, he says, are “good Muslims,” the antithesis of Wahhabis and Al Qaeda, and a natural fit for a close friendship with the United States.

As we walk through a camp outside Mogadishu that houses about 700 ASWJ members, Noor tells me his father built more than a thousand madrassas and forty-six mosques. Making our way through a labyrinth of tin structures, we pass a large kitchen, where women are preparing the afternoon meal of camel meat and pasta, a small medical clinic and large community sleeping areas. We enter a large barn where young men learn the Koran in the price tag still attached and the Koran he reads from his iPad. In his view, ASWJ is a natural US ally. Sufis, he says, are “good Muslims,” the antithesis of Wahhabis and Al Qaeda, and a natural fit for a close friendship with the United States.

![Fighters from the Shabab, the Islamic militant group tied to Al Qaeda](image)

As we walk through a camp outside Mogadishu that houses about 700 ASWJ members, Noor tells me his father built more than a thousand madrassas and forty-six mosques. Making our way through a labyrinth of tin structures, we pass a large kitchen, where women are preparing the afternoon meal of camel meat and pasta, a small medical clinic and large community sleeping areas. We enter a large barn where young men learn the Koran by studying verses written on wooden planks. “Since [the Shabab] started destroying the country and fighting with the government, we decided to take up arms. So the students who were here, you know, learning Koran and all those things, are now fighting against the Shabab. They are the ones who go to the frontline. They are not normal soldiers—they just have been given quick training, three months, and now they are fighting.”

Noor declines to reveal who funds ASWJ, but he singles out the United States as Somalia’s “number-one” ally. “I’m here to thank them, because they are helping us, fighting against the terrorists,” he tells me. What about on a military level? “I don’t
As the drought and famine grabbed international headlines in July, the Shabab announced a tactical retreat from Mogadishu in August, paving the way for Somali and AMISOM forces to move into areas that had been under the total control of the Shabab for more than two years. The Somali government has portrayed this as a military victory and has declared the beginning of the end of the group. However, “These assessments owe more to wishful thinking than reality,” according to an analysis published in the well-respected journal *Africa Confidential*. “The military and political damage to Al Shabaab is likely to prove temporary.”

The drought has undoubtedly weakened the Shabab’s short-term ability to collect taxes, and diaspora revenue has slowed, partly because of increased US monitoring of Somali money transfers, resulting in an inability to buy sufficient ammunition to fight the well-armed AMISOM forces. While the Shabab has taken heavy casualties among its leadership, the group remains a powerful force, one that has shown an ability to adapt. “The war in Mogadishu and elsewhere is by no means over,” according to *Africa Confidential’s* analysis. “Al Shabaab could adopt low-level insurgency and avenge the loss of its senior cadres by carrying out a ‘spectacular,’ a major bombing in Somalia or a neighboring country.”

There is evidence that even before the drought and famine became major news, the group was already deliberating a major shift in tactics.

In June the man the United States alleged was Al Qaeda’s chief of operations in East Africa, Fazul Abdullah Mohammed, was killed after he and a colleague got lost in the middle of the night and approached a Somali military checkpoint on the outskirts of Mogadishu. The Somali forces, not knowing his identity, riddled Fazul with bullets. US intelligence later determined it was indeed the most wanted man in Somalia.

In Mogadishu, a week after Fazul’s death, I interviewed senior Somali intelligence officials who were poring over the materials seized from the mobile command post Fazul had operated from his car. Among the documents recovered were writings by Fazul criticizing the Shabab leadership for trying to fight AMISOM and Somali government forces head-on. Instead of seeking to hold territory, he advised Shabab fighters to “go back to their old ways of hit-and-run insurgency and underground operations, and to disband the areas that they control,” according to a source who directly reviewed the documents. Fazul was “arguing that Al Shabaab essentially give up the vast areas that they control in Somalia, in exchange for going underground across the country, including peaceful areas, in Somaliland and Puntland, and disrupting the whole country,” says the source. Fazul argued that “Al Shabaab controls about 40 percent of Somalia. And the other 60 percent is either peaceful or semi-peaceful, and most people in Somalia are not feeling the pinch of Al Shabaab.” Fazul advocated that the Shabab “just wreak havoc, carry out small operations, assassinations, throughout Somalia. And that creates a situation like in Mogadishu, where everyone is fearful of them—whether you live in a Shabab-controlled area or under the government area. You cannot travel at night and so on. So that’s his vision, to create a total savagery throughout the country.”

Perhaps the Shabab is truly on the ropes, as the Somali government claims. Or maybe the group is implementing Fazul’s vision of a guerrilla terror campaign that gives up territory in favor of sowing fear throughout the country. In any case, the Shabab’s meteoric rise in Somalia, and the legacy of terror it has wrought, is blowback sparked by a decade of disastrous US policy that ultimately strengthened the very threat it was officially intended to crush. In the end, the greatest beneficiaries of US policy are the warlords, including those who once counted the Shabab among their allies and friends. “They are not fighting for a cause,” says Ahmed Nur Mohamed, the Mogadishu mayor. “And the conflict will start tomorrow, when we defeat Shabab. These militias are based on clan and warlordism and all these things. They don’t want a system. They want to keep that turf as a fixed post—then, whenever the government becomes weak, they want to say, ‘We control here.’”
Trapped on the European Fringe

Caught in debt, being fed the poison of austerity, the victims of Europe’s crisis seek a path out.

by ANDY ROBINSON

Trapped in Euroland. That’s the title of the horror movie now reaching its climax in the eurozone periphery. From Greece to Portugal, Spain to Ireland, and now Italy, the countries of the European fringe are all locked into Depression-style economic orthodoxy with no clear escape routes in sight.

Nowhere is the debt trap more treacherous than in Valdemoro, a once-burgeoning dormitory town less than twenty miles south of Madrid, frontier of the suburban sprawl that stretches far across the parched Castilian plateau toward Toledo. Here, Rolando Jimenez, a 40-year-old Peruvian security guard, is attempting to enter the now foreclosed and auctioned apartment he bought in 2006 for 216,000 euros, courtesy of a 90 percent mortgage from Basque savings bank Kutxa. Jimenez and his Russian wife had dared hope that a protest held the previous day by a hundred or so young indignado activists, outside the bank’s head office in central Madrid, might ward off the bailiffs. But that was just the euphoria of the demo. “They’ve been and changed the lock,” he says, forcing the key to no avail.

During the frantic construction of the bubble years, this new suburban frontier of apartment blocks, chalets and malls turned Madrid into Europe’s third largest city—after London and Paris—as mass immigration pushed the population of the Spanish metropolis past 5 million. Now it is a semidesert of ghost housing estates. Five miles farther south, a burning wind blows like a hair dryer through the empty blocks of Residencias Francisco Hernandez in Nueva Seseña. The eponymous developer, known popularly as Paco El Pocero—the drains man—planned to build 13,500 apartments financed by a consortium of five banks, and openly encouraged buyers to flip their properties for a profit once the papers were signed. Now banners hang from half-finished blocks: “Pocero: you neither sell nor you pay.”

Beyond, shimmering in the heat, a forest of signs advertise new chalets at discount prices. “When they liberalized zoning requirements, twenty million square meters of farmland here became buildable overnight,” says former mayor of Seseña Manuel Fuentes, of the Communist Party–led Izquierda Unida coalition. Spain built more homes in mid-decade than Germany, France and Italy combined, many in suburban developments outside the big cities, even more as vacation homes on the Mediterranean coast. Now between 700,000 and 1 million remain unsold, with little prospect of a recovery in the foreseeable future. Perversely, though possibly a sign of things to come in November’s general elections, Fuentes lost the Seseña town hall in the May poll to the very same deregulating People’s Party (PP) that liberalized zoning in the late ’90s.

Valdemoro and Seseña could be Southern California. Another burst bubble in the desert. But the Jimenez family finds itself in a worse trap than the foreclosed masses of the American Southwest. Here there is no key in the envelope dispatched to the bank before moving on. Unlike in California, strategic default on home loans is not recognized in Spain, and once the house is sold at fire-sale prices, the remaining mortgage debt is still claimed by the bank after foreclosure. This is a life sentence for Jimenez, who, like so many low-paid workers on the European periphery, blindly saw opportunity in debt. He channeled up to 80 percent of his wages into mortgage payments before rising interest costs and a shortage of work forced him to cease paying last year. Now in temporary rented accommodation, after paying 85,000 euros to Kutxa, he still owes 115,000.

Maybe it is a sign of how bad things are in Spain, but the Platform for Mortgage Victims, the housing spinoff of the innovative indignado protest movement that filled Spain’s plazas in May, looks west for inspiration: “We want what many already have in the US: the chance to hand over the home and be free of debt,” says Eloy Morte, who has led a series of actions aimed at preventing evictions. There are 300,000 foreclosed homes in Spain, and Morte reckons 20,000 families were evicted in the first six months of 2011.

As anxious bond investors force up interest rates on the sovereign debt of the eurozone periphery, Jimenez’s trap personifies a solvency crisis that threatens the integrity of the European monetary union. It is the mirror image of the early days of the eurozone, when cheap money pumped up housing bubbles in Spain and Ireland and a credit boom financed nonproductive

Andy Robinson, a reporter for the Barcelona daily La Vanguardia, has written on Spain for the Guardian and the New Statesman.
With flaws in the austerity thesis appearing like cracks in a ghost estate, the bond markets have suddenly learned its devious logic.

Ireland is perhaps the most shocking case of the eurozone debt trap. A bailout of zombie banks, headed by Anglo Irish—creditor extraordinaire of the big Irish property moguls who had aggressively redeveloped Europe over the past decade, from Knightsbridge to the Costa Brava—cost the taxpayers a staggering 70 billion euros. At 44 percent of GDP, it was the costliest bank rescue ever. With an estimated 300,000 empty dwellings in a country of only 5 million inhabitants, Ireland was looking at a legacy of overbuilding that was a blight as ugly as that in the Madrid exurbs.

When I drove toward Cork from Dublin earlier this year, a slick new complex of condominiums in Newtownmountkennedy, twenty miles south of the Irish capital, promised the “summit of life in the garden of Ireland.” But the apartments were empty, as was a brand-new four-star hotel in the complex. “No one knows where these apartments are,” remarked a shop worker enigmatically at the new shopping mall opposite. Farther inland the situation is worse, says Rob Kitchin, a geographer at the National University of Ireland in Maynooth. The ghost estates that litter Ireland’s pastoral interior deteriorate faster in the dank climate than in the arid exurbs of Madrid. “Cracks open up; plants grow through. Many will have to be demolished.”

Meanwhile, in Greece and Portugal, the poorest of the original countries in the union, IMF-designed austerity measures have wound the development clock back decades. Motivated by lurid stories in German tabloids of public sector workers happily retired at 50 or unscrupulously claiming the pensions of their deceased relatives, the Troika has forced cuts to pensions averaging 20 percent in Greece. But, while retirement at 58 after thirty-seven years’ employment was possible in some jobs before the draconian pension reform, there was another reality beyond the scope of Bild’s banner headlines. “Old age poverty is back just as we had begun to combat it,” says Christos Papatheodorou, a poverty expert at Democritus University of Thrace.

Portugal, with a minimum wage of just 470 euros per month even before the crisis, has seen an explosive increase in the number of working poor as value-added tax increases push up the cost of living. “Families on food support are up 40 percent,” said Isabel Baptista of the Center for Social Research in Lisbon. This is the collateral damage of austerity and “internal devaluation,” the only Brussels-approved exit from the debt trap. With currency devaluation no longer an option to regain competitiveness, because of the universal adoption of the euro, wage and benefits cuts will enable low productivity economies in the south to export their way out of the crisis. Or so the theory goes. It’s an exact reincarnation of the economic orthodoxy in vogue before John Maynard Keynes arrived on the scene in the midst of the Great Depression.

But flaws in the austerity thesis have appeared like cracks in an abandoned ghost estate. As spending cuts and a deteriorating world economy threaten to trigger a double-dip recession in the eurozone, the bond markets have suddenly learned the devious logic of the austerity paradox. After clamoring for wage and spending cuts, investors now fear the impact of low growth on debt and have pushed rates up even further, making the cost of financing the debt of the peripheral countries at least three times higher than that in Germany. And in a monetary union, where a country is indebted in a currency it does not issue, investor panic tends to produce the very results it most fears. “Money leaves for safer parts of the union, and a liquidity crisis becomes a solvency crisis,” says Paul de Grauwe, a Belgian economist who has been a clairvoyant critic of the new orthodoxy in the eurozone.

Whereas in the United States, Britain or any developed economy with its own currency, a debt crisis can be resolved by the purchase of debt by the central bank—generating some very welcome inflation—Greece, Portugal and Ireland find themselves in a trap familiar to Latin America in the ’80s and ’90s, indebted in dollars. In a catastrophic act of denial, the statutes of the monetary union, agreed upon in the ’90s, avoided any reference to sovereign insolvency or even bailouts for individual member states. Just as foreclosed homeowners in Spain or Ireland lack a strategic default mechanism to escape their mortgage debt trap, the eurozone has no bankruptcy procedures for insolvent mem-

investment, from retail to tourism, in Portugal and Greece. Over the course of the first seven years of monetary union, combined private and public debt tripled in the countries of the periphery, reaching levels four or five times greater than their economies. Ratings agencies, as seduced by eurozone convergence as they were by US subprime mortgages, placed peripheral bonds on a par with German bunds. External debt soared, especially in Greece. Exports from the core countries to the north poured in, and new highways, built with Siemens material, were soon crowded with new Audis and BMWs. “Local business abandoned manufacturing, started building shopping malls and hotels, and our external balances collapsed,” says José Reis, an economist at the University of Coimbra in Portugal.

By the end of the decade, all of the so-called PIIGS (Portugal, Ireland, Italy, Greece, Spain) relied on billions of euros of capital inflows to fund massive current account deficits. When Lehman Brothers collapsed in September 2008, the flows froze up and the bubbles burst. Official financing packages provided by “the Troika” of EU governments, the European Central Bank and the IMF, in exchange for rescue packages, forced austerity measures.
bers. Nor does the European Central Bank (ECB) have a means
to buy newly issued debt and act like the US Federal Reserve,
as a lender of last resort. The result: at every turn, the official
response to the crisis has been desperate improvisation.

First to receive emergency financing in April 2010, Greece
was also first into insolvency a year later. At an emergency
summit in Brussels this past July, the Troika recognized,
finally, that Greece’s $350 billion euro debt was not payable,
and cobbled together a so-called soft default procedure
designed to minimize losses to its external creditors, mainly
German and French banks. Ireland and Portugal looked sure to
follow, despite the summit’s insistence that they had “solemnly”
promised to meet their obligations. All three had received Troika
support when their interest rates broached 7 percent and debt
service costs soared out of control. By midsummer, as bond vigil-
antes and hedge funds geared up for a gargantuan test of nerves
with the ECB, the interest rates on the bonds of Spain and Italy
were both above 6.5 percent and rising. In one apocalyptic week
in August, even France seemed to have been targeted, and ana-
lysts began to ask where the eurozone periphery
began and where the center ended.

While bond purchases by the ECB held off
the markets in August, the central bank insisted
that it could not continue buying peripheral debt
and that the new European Financial Stabilization
Fund—a eurozone IMF—should take on that role.
Most economists agreed that this would require at
least a tripling of the fund’s $440 billion euro resources, a daunting
prospect given public opposition to support for the periphery
in the core countries, especially Germany.

There was also a growing consensus in the eurozone center
left that in the medium term, only the conversion of members’
sovereign debt into euro bonds, backed by an embryonic United
States of Europe, would placate the markets and avoid the break-
up of the union. A European New Deal based on euro bonds and
public investment financed by the European Investment Bank
is now supported by several social democratic leaders, even in
Germany. “The model should be Treasury bonds like those
issued under Roosevelt to finance public works; this was federal
debt and did not require the backing of individual states,” says
Stuart Holland, a veteran of the European left who was an advis-
er to former European Commission president Jacques Delors,
who has garnered support in parts of the European establish-
ment and buzzes with moneymaking acumen. He seemed
unfazed by the Spanish experience of boom and bust in the
vacation-home business. “There is huge scope for developing
the privatized land for tourism here; in comparison to Spain,
Greece is virgin,” he told me. The assets were to be packaged
in special-purpose vehicles and sold at huge discounts. Who
would buy? Elias Karakitsos, who manages Greek ship owners’
fortunes at Guildhall hedge fund in London, answered can-
didly: “This is the ideal environment for vulture funds.”

Portugal and Ireland have also announced fire-sale privat-
ization programs. With little else left to auction, Spain put its
century-old state lottery on the block; and when Italy became
the midsummer target of the bond vigilantes, Silvio Berlusconi
rushed through plans to privatize state utilities. Public beaches on
the Italian Riviera had already been leased, while heavily indebted
medieval cities, downgraded by S&P and Moody’s, resorted
to selling Renaissance palaces such as the Palazzo Diedo and San
Casciano in Venice. “The best way to explain what is happen-
ing is that episode of The Sopranos when they lend money to the
deadbeat because his wife has a shop they would like to own,”
says Michael Burke, a former Citibank economist in London.

But with opposition to austerity and forced privatization
growing in Athens, Madrid and beyond, the question for the
future is whether the eurozone periphery will continue to
obediently make its mortgage payments—even as the Troika

As opposition grows in Madrid, Athens and
beyond, will the eurozone periphery continue
to obediently make its mortgage payments?
embargoes its most prized assets—or return the keys and move on. This is the great default debate now engaging the European left, just as it did in Latin America in the ’80s and ’90s.

In Greece, a growing indignati movement defends immediate default and, if necessary, withdrawal from the euro. An unofficial debt audit commission has been set up by activists, following precedents in Latin America, to study the legitimacy of Greece’s 350 billion euro debt. In May, I observed delegates of the new commission at one of the first meetings held at Athens Polytechnic behind the buckled Iron Gate, crushed by tanks during the student uprisings against the military junta in 1973. One committee discussed the legitimacy of debt securitized by Goldman Sachs in the late ’90s to help Greece meet entry requirements to the monetary union. JPMorgan Chase’s role in overselling 280 million euros’ worth of government debt to pension funds in 2007 was also discussed. Another group asked whether debt dating from the Athens Olympics in 2004, whose 9 billion euro bill to taxpayers was four times initial estimates, should be paid. “The truth is, none of it is legitimate; it’s a political vehicle more than just an audit,” said commission member Alissi Vegiri, a physicist at a government research institute, whose 30,000 euro salary has been cut by 23 percent in the past year. Debtocracy, a documentary film distributed for free online that calls for default on odious debt run up by corrupt administrations, was seen by a million people in Greece within a month of its release in April. That’s one in every ten Greeks. Parts of the Irish and Portuguese left have followed suit and set up their own audit commissions.

These groups are looking closely at the experiences of Ecuador and Argentina. After taking power in January 2007, Ecuadorean President Rafael Correa formed an audit commission to assess the legitimacy of $3.2 billion in external debt. Then, to the astonishment of banks, bond holders and the world media, Ecuador unilaterally defaulted. Wall Street and the IMF warned that the small Andean economy would suffer permanent ostracism. Yet within two years, Correa’s government had negotiated a buyback of the defaulted bonds for just 30 cents on the dollar, and was back again selling bonds on international markets. Rating agencies now value Ecuador’s debt on more or less the same terms as before the default.

Argentina, meanwhile, broke Latin American growth records after its own massive debt restructuring in 2001. But default was not enough. A massive devaluation of the peso was also needed to boost exports and provide space for expansionary macroeconomic policies to generate growth and employment. “We’re following the example of Argentina both on default and devaluation, which means exiting the euro,” said Costas Lapavitsas, an economist at the University of London’s School of Oriental and African Studies, who is involved in the campaigns in Greece, Portugal and Ireland. However traumatic withdrawal from the euro would prove for the periphery, unless Berlin and Frankfurt agree to assume their debt, it may be the only escape from the trap.

Letters

(continued from page 2)

desperately seek jobs and the elderly watch as a lifetime of effort evaporates. Chronos has finally lost his crown.

Families anxious for their children’s future have difficulty making ends meet, while the elderly are worried about medicines and health services. Some are experiencing hand-to-mouth existence or disruption to life. Unemployment is precipitating mental malaise in a country where mental health treatment is still taboo. Home loss, homelessness and violence are growing.

Business-as-usual must be scrapped, and the straitjacketed bureaucracy must be re-engineered. We need an effectively governed Greek state and a more socially oriented Europe whose value systems brake political transgressions and hold the EU economic model in check.

JEFFREY LEVETT

Frances Perkins Pride

SOUTH BRISTOL, Me.

As a longtime reader and Nation Associate, I was particularly pleased to see Sasha Abramsky take on Maine’s Governor Paul LePage for his attack on the state’s labor history and the beloved Frances Perkins, FDR’s labor secretary and a force behind much of the New Deal (“Turning LePage,” July 18/25).

It is surely worth drawing your readers’ attention to the Frances Perkins Center (FrancesPerkinsCenter.org), which seeks to honor her by advancing her goals of economic security and social justice through discussion, scholarship and leadership. The center also preserves her place of respite and renewal, the 250-year-old Perkins family homestead in Newcastle, Maine.

Besides removing the eleven-panel mural depicting Maine’s labor history, Governor LePage also removed the educational plaque designating the Frances Perkins Conference Room at the state Labor Department headquarters in Augusta. After meeting with directors of the Frances Perkins Center, local Republican representatives were inspired to write to LePage and secured a restoration of the plaque, if not yet a return of the murals.

Representative Jon McKane told the Lincoln County News, “I am glad we were able to get the plaque back up where it belongs…. It is honoring the individual, not necessarily the labor movement.”

He added, “We should be proud of her…. She was out there, and she wasn’t afraid.”

LETITIA WHEELER UFFORD

Stop the Foreclosure Flood

MURRIETA, Calif.

The Boston Community Capital program reported on by Sasha Abramsky (“The Boston Home Team,” July 4/11) works for three reasons: the banks expunge the defaulted mortgages; they reduce the home on their books to three-fourths of current market value; and the rescued homeowners remain in their homes/units rebuilding their lost equity.

The Obama administration needs to replicate some version of this formula nationally as soon as possible. Forget mortgage modifications. Without aggressive action this relentless bank-led foreclosure/eviction purge will continue to flood the market with millions of empty houses, further depress home prices, push more homeowners underwater, kill homebuilders’ prospects and devastate more neighborhoods.

JOHN STICKLER
By the time T.S. Eliot was born in St. Louis on September 26, 1888, he had been preceded in this world by a brother and four sisters, the eldest of whom was nineteen years his senior. Inevitably, great care was lavished on the youngest Eliot; he had five mothers. Or perhaps six. Next door to the Eliot house on Locust Street lived Abigail Adams Eliot, Eliot’s grandmother, who had grown up in Washington, DC, and could recall clearly her great-uncle, the second president of the United States, after whose wife she had been named.

Great things were expected of the youngest Eliot, and a crucial part of his genius was to have achieved greatness in forms that no one in his family was fully equipped to countenance. Simultaneously, he fulfilled and decimated their expectations, constructing a life that allowed his family to admire his achievement only inasmuch as they were also bewildered, incapable of helping themselves to the side dish of self-congratulation that usually accompanies the main course of familial pride. The author of The Waste Land and Four Quartets secured the loyalty of his admirers (as well as the unshakable attention of his detractors) in precisely the same way.

"As a scholar his rank is high," wrote Charlotte Eliot of her 16-year-old son to the headmaster of Milton Academy, “but he has been growing rapidly, and for the sake of his physical well being we have felt that it might be better for him to wait a year before entering on his college career.” Eliot had already been accepted at Harvard, but his mother preferred that he endure another year of preparatory school. At Milton he was infantilized because of his frailty, the only boy forbidden to play football or swim in a nearby quarry pond. But at the same time he was expected to reflect his family’s ambitions with achievements of immense precocity. Only a few years later, when Eliot began to buck the family’s notions of what constituted achievement, declining to defend his doctoral dissertation in philosophy, his mother would show that she understood the newly professionalized world of higher education as well as she understood the benefits of fresh pajamas: “The Ph.D. is becoming in America, and presumably also in England, almost an essential for an Academic position and promotion therein. The male teachers in our secondary schools, are as a rule inferior to the women teachers, and they have little social position or distinction.” Eliot, who by this time was living in England, did not return to Harvard to receive his degree, despite having written a dissertation that the philosopher Josiah Royce declared the work of an expert, despite the Harvard philosophy department having made it clear that a position in its ranks awaited him.

Instead, in 1915, Eliot married Vivien Haigh-Wood, only two months after having met her at a punting expedition in Oxford, and he embarked on a precarious career as a poet and journalist. Vivien was at this point everything her husband was not—vivacious, performative, unpredictable—but her high-strung energy disguised a neediness that drained the marriage emotionally and financially. Eliot supplemented his literary work first with teaching at High Wycombe Grammar School and later with a full-time position in the Colonial and Foreign Department of Lloyds Bank, where he would help settle the financial fate of Europe in the aftermath of World War I. In 1920 he published The Sacred Wood, a work of literary criticism so influential in England and the United States (where it became the foundation of the New Criticism) that Eliot created the taste by which he himself was judged for the next fifty years. Then, in 1922, he published a long poem on which he had been working for some years, at first intermittently and finally, after a breakdown in 1921, with great fervor.

“...the marriage brought no happiness,”
remembered Eliot of his first wife. “To me, it brought the state of mind out of which came _The Waste Land._”

The marriage was crucial to Eliot’s life and work, but not precisely in the way this theatrically grim comment suggests. Both Eliots were chronically ill, often despondent, and their hypochondria was mutually reinforcing; the letters are brimming with long rehearsals of their physical complaints, and as one might expect, most of the complaints were aimed at Eliot’s mother, whom Eliot entreated repeatedly to visit: “If I were dangerously ill, I believe you would come no matter how inconvenient.” But Charlotte Eliot alternately ignored or parried her son’s entreaties, so much so that Eliot was driven to examine her behavior with the intensity that distinguishes all his writing. “It is almost impossible for any of our family to make up their minds,” he confessed to his brother. If their mother could “look ahead and not see, in the Eliot way, only the immediate difficulties and details, she would make up her mind at once and come this summer.”

The Eliot Way—a stultifying compulsion to weigh the details of everything from pajamas to the PhD—was something Eliot himself knew all too well. In an uncollected essay about Henry Adams, to whom Eliot was distantly related (Adams having been the great-grandson of the second president), he referred to the Eliot Way more generally as the Boston Doubt, “a scepticism which is difficult to explain to those who are not born to it.” Eliot’s ancestor Andrew Eliot had settled in Massachusetts around 1670, and there the family remained until William Greenleaf Eliot, Eliot’s grandfather, moved to St. Louis to establish the first Unitarian church west of the Mississippi. “This scepticism,” Eliot went on, “is a product, or a concomitant, of Unitarianism.”

Greenleaf Eliot’s move from St. Louis to establish the first Unitarian church west of the Mississippi suggested. Both Eliots were chronically ill, often despondent, and their hypochondria was mutually reinforcing; the letters are brimming with long rehearsals of their physical complaints, and as one might expect, most of the complaints were aimed at Eliot’s mother, whom Eliot entreated repeatedly to visit: “If I were dangerously ill, I believe you would come no matter how inconvenient.” But Charlotte Eliot alternately ignored or parried her son’s entreaties, so much so that Eliot was driven to examine her behavior with the intensity that distinguishes all his writing. “It is almost impossible for any of our family to make up their minds,” he confessed to his brother. If their mother could “look ahead and not see, in the Eliot way, only the immediate difficulties and details, she would make up her mind at once and come this summer.”

The Eliot Way—a stultifying compulsion to weigh the details of everything from pajamas to the PhD—was something Eliot himself knew all too well. In an uncollected essay about Henry Adams, to whom Eliot was distantly related (Adams having been the great-grandson of the second president), he referred to the Eliot Way more generally as the Boston Doubt, “a scepticism which is difficult to explain to those who are not born to it.” Eliot’s ancestor Andrew Eliot had settled in Massachusetts around 1670, and there the family remained until William Greenleaf Eliot, Eliot’s grandfather, moved to St. Louis to establish the first Unitarian church west of the Mississippi. “This scepticism,” Eliot went on, “is a product, or a concomitant, of Unitarianism.”

Wherever someone infected with the Eliot Way stepped, “the ground did not simply give way, it flew into particles.” Such people “want to do something great,” said Eliot, but “they are predestined failures.”

Eliot’s first great artistic success grew from an effort to distance himself from the threat of such failure by dramatizing it. Not only the voice but the very linguistic texture of _The Waste Land_ and _Sweeney Agonistes_ (1932), painfully aware of the difficulty of exteriorizing the inner life. How is a moment of awful daring to be represented in language, not only in the language of poetry but in the daily language of letters one writes to one’s mother or sisters, to one’s fellow writers or friends? What prevents such moments from seeming merely capricious and shallow, rather than essential and irrevocable? Unlike his contemporary Virginia Woolf, whose letters, diaries, essays and manuscripts have been edited meticulously, Eliot is only beginning to be edited, and the vast majority of his writing remains uncollected in any form. Full-scale editions of his complete poems and prose are under way (the poems are to be edited by Christopher Ricks and Jim McCue; the prose, by Ronald Schuchard), but they have yet to be published. The first volume of Eliot’s letters, edited by his widow, Valerie Eliot, appeared in 1988, twenty-three years after the poet’s death. Now, another twenty-three years later, the letters are being published under the general editorship of John Haffenden, the first volume appearing in an expanded form as _The Letters of T.S. Eliot, Vol. 1: 1898–1922_, edited by Valerie Eliot and Hugh Haughton, and accompanied by a second volume, which takes more than 800 pages to move the correspondence forward just three years to 1925.

Often these letters are boring to a degree that can hardly be borne. After publishing _The Waste Land_ in 1922, Eliot settled into his work at the bank and at _The Criterion_, the literary magazine he founded and edited, with an avidity for indecisions and decisions that makes his mother’s affliction with the Eliot Way seem insignificant. “I enclose two more articles for No. 3,” he wrote to Richard Cobden-Sanderson, the magazine’s publisher. “This is nearly everything; there will certainly be one more if not two but not more than two; one possibly from myself. I should like to know the number of words in each contribution as soon as possible.”

Yet these letters are also weirdly gripping because one never knows when one might be stopped dead by a letter of singular importance, a letter in which the Eliot Way is superseded by the awful daring of a moment’s surrender:

> I have made myself into a machine. I have done it deliberately—in order to endure, in order not to feel—but it has...
Solar Energy Dilemma Solved!
Powered by any kind of light — no winding no battery

Atomic Clock synchronized — always-accurate time

Glow-in-the-dark hands and face for easy read

Genuine leather band and stainless steel case

Unparalleled time-keeping accuracy…
even if the sun burns out

Revolutionary new timepiece is powered by light and is accurate to within a billionth of a second—guaranteed!

With the cost of oil, the environmental impact of coal and the dangers of nuclear power, everyone is looking to the sun for energy. Will it be able to power our homes and our cars? Maybe, someday… but it can power something you use all day, every day… your watch. No more fumbling to install batteries, no more winding, this watch harnesses the power of the sun to power itself. Innovative solar receptors in the face store up the solar energy from the sun or even incandescent light and will keep the watch running for days, so it never runs down. You’ll never need to buy a watch battery again!

This is not only an environmentally-friendly watch, it is accurate to within a billionth of a second. It receives a radio signal from the US Atomic Clock in Fort Collins Colorado, the standard for time-keeping around the country. All you have to do is select your time zone, and this watch is always precise. You never have to set it again, because it automatically adjusts for Daylight Savings Time. Travelling? Just change the time zone setting and the watch automatically adjusts the time. It even has a digital display of the day and month.

This watch is stylish, durable and will become a treasured keepsake… and a conversation piece. Best of all, it comes with firstSTREET’s exclusive trial offer. Try it for yourself, and if you are not completely satisfied for any reason, simply return it within 30 days for a refund of the product purchase price. Call now… time’s wasting!

Atomic Solar-Powered Watch . . . . . . was $119
Now available for only $99 + s&h
Please mention code 43192.
1-877-509-2597

1998 Ruffin Mill Road • Colonial Heights, VA 23834
killed V .... I have deliberately killed my senses—I have deliberately died—in order to go on with the outward form of living—This I did in 1915 .... But the dilemma—to kill another person by being dead, or to kill them by being alive? Is it best to make oneself a machine, and kill them by not giving nourishment, or to be alive, and kill them by wanting something that one cannot get from that person? Does it happen that two persons’ lives are absolutely hostile? Is it true that sometimes one can only live by another’s dying? .... Must I kill her or kill myself? I have tried to kill myself—but only to make the machine which kills her .... Does she want to die? Can I save myself and her by recognizing that she is more important than I?

This letter, written to the critic John Middleton Murry in the spring of 1925, has already gained a kind of notoriety since it was published in England in 2009; it seems to confirm handy and longstanding notions about the poet who said in his most famous essay, “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” that poetry “is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion.” But Eliot was no mere manipulator of masks, and this letter does not represent anything so simple as a dropping of his guard. Like his poems, his letters vacillate between the life-deadening equivocations of the Eliot Way and the life-determining thrill of a moment’s surrender to decisive action; and the latter impulse is rendered powerful by the former, not occluded by it. “Of course,” added Eliot in “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” “only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things.”

Eliot was not literally violent, but psychic life seemed to him essentially violent; he believed that by existing he couldn’t help harming his wife, either by continuing to live with her (the Eliot Way) or by abandoning her for a new life (the awful daring). This dilemma is not confined to one letter but recurs throughout Eliot’s work, most prominently in The Family Reunion (1939), his finest play, in which the protagonist suffers from the horrible, guilt-ridden illusion that he has killed his wife. It also glimmers in the jazzy dialogue of Sweeney Agonistes:

I knew a man once did a girl in
Any man might do a girl in
Any man has to, needs to, wants to
Once in a lifetime, do a girl in

And as far as I know, the dilemma is first dramatized in “Eeldrop and Appleplex,” a curious short story Eliot published in 1917 that remains, like “A Sceptical Patrician,” the essay on Henry Adams, uncollected:

In Gopsun Street a man murders his mistress. The important fact is that for the man the act is eternal, and that for the brief space he has to live, he is already dead. He is already in a different world from ours. He has crossed the frontier. The important fact that something is done which cannot be undone—a possibility which none of us realize until we face it ourselves. For the man’s neighbors the important fact is what the man killed her with? And at precisely what time? And who found the body? .... But the medieval world, insisting on the eternity of punishment, expressed something nearer the truth.

This is Eliot’s most articulate account of the moment of awful daring—the irrevocable action, in this case literally violent, that obliterates the Eliot Way. The aftermath of the action, an otherwise unavailable sense of damnation, crystallizes the actor, making him seem horrifying to himself if not to other people, who go on perceiving him through more readily available categories of knowledge. Shortly after writing “Eeldrop and Appleplex,” Eliot went on a walking tour of Southern France with Ezra Pound, and at a castle near Excideuil (as Pound would remember the incident in Canto 29) he suddenly turned to Pound and blurted, “I am afraid of the life after death,” and then, after a pause, “Now, at last, I have shocked him.” Eliot had already crossed the frontier, living publicly in the inane doldrums of the Eliot Way but living privately in a medieval world of sin, guilt and eternal punishment.

Judging from the evidence of the letters alone, Eliot would seem to have been one of the unhappiest people who has ever lived. But the tensions that had always characterized his sensibility, inflated from Prufrock’s drawing room to an eschatological arena of Dantean proportions, continued to fuel his best work even at the unhappiest times. Almost immediately after completing The Waste Land he confessed that the poem seemed to him “a thing of the past” and that he was “feeling toward a new form and style.” What he wanted was a way to represent in language what could not be represented—the inner life of a person beyond the frontier, a person doomed to be recognizable to other people when in fact he is already dead. In a sense, all of Eliot’s later work, from Four Quartets (1943) to the later plays, grows out of this dilemma, but it was played out most immediately in The Hollow Men, the poetic sequence with which he struggled, trying out a variety of drafts and rearrangements, between 1922 and 1925, when it appeared as the final poem in Poems 1909–1925.

Audible here are the familiar equivocations of the Eliot Way:

Between the desire
And the potency
Between the existence
And the essence
Falls the Shadow

But in contrast to the earlier poems, Eliot’s language has become severely chastened, more oracular than spoken, as if the poem were attempting to give the impression of being uttered from a space beyond language, the space of the dead, the damned, a space in which the everyday marks of human individuality have fallen away. Inexpiable guilt drives the sequence, nowhere more poignantly than in these lines, which Eliot published in two preliminary versions of The Hollow Men but ultimately cut from the final version:

This is my affliction
Eyes I shall not see again
Eyes of decision
Eyes I shall not see unless
At the door of death’s other kingdom
Where, as in this,
The eyes outlast a little while
A little while outlast the tears
And hold us in derision.

Nowhere in The Hollow Men does Eliot make reference to the everyday world in which people drink tea, work at banks, write letters, torture their wives; but the presence of Vivien Eliot, the woman through whom Eliot constructed his life as a poet, hovers over every line. “I am sorry I tortured you and drove you mad,” wrote Vivien from a nursing home in 1925. “I had no notion until yesterday afternoon that I had done it. I have been simply raving mad.”

The Hollow Men remains a confounding performance, at once viscerally immediate and yet strangely abstracted, resistant to commentary in a way that the achievements that precede and follow it, The Waste Land and Four Quartets, are not, whatever their difficulties. Perhaps for this reason, the
Uncertainty and Anxiety

by BENJAMIN NATHANS

In his bestselling novel Fatherland, published in 1992, the British writer Robert Harris imagined a postwar Europe in which a victorious Germany prepares to celebrate Hitler’s seventy-fifth birthday. It’s the early 1960s, and the Third Reich, having annexed vast territories from the defeated Soviet Union, is engaged in a protracted cold war with the United States, even as rock ‘n’ roll and other corrupting Western influences are seeping into German society and a younger generation of Germans are starting to question the brutal turpitude and revelation, the letters lay out the tensions and obsessions of the poem in broader brush strokes, not so much elucidating as embodying its energies.

Harrises’s stunning silence surrounding the darker aspects of German society and a younger generation of Germans are starting to question the brutal turpitude and revelation, the letters lay out the tensions and obsessions of the poem in broader brush strokes, not so much elucidating as embodying its energies.

Fatherland could also serve as a mirror to a history that wasn’t virtual: the post-Stalin era of the Soviet Union, the sole totalitarian power to emerge intact from World War II. As British historian Miriam Dobson writes of Stalin’s successors in Khrushchev’s Cold Summer, “unlike many other countries embracing on the process of transitional justice theirs was not a new regime, but a continuation of the party-state system which had been responsible for the atrocities they now sought to rectify.” Imagining a post-Hitler Germany run by Rudolf Hess or Albert Speer helps to cast in sharp relief the quanties faced by Nikita Khrushchev and other Communist Party leaders as they confronted a lethal legacy of state-sponsored terror in which they too were deeply complicit. Khrushchev’s “Secret Speech” at the Twentieth Party Congress in February 1956 may have instigated Stalin’s oedipal dethronement (in effect, his second death) by revealing a portion of the mass murder committed on orders signed by the dictator’s own hand. Yet as Khrushchev privately confessed near the end of his life, he was himself “up to the elbows in blood” shed by the victims of communist purges and forced collectivization.

The Khrushchev era ended in 1964 (the year that would have marked Hitler’s seventy-fifth birthday), and it was the first great attempt to stabilize the Soviet project and make it a going concern fully competitive with the capitalist West. For Vladislav Zubok, the author of Zhivago’s Children, Khrushchev’s “Thaw” inaugurated a period of tremendous optimism, a Soviet-style New Deal following the deep freeze of postwar Stalinism. Surveying a vast array of published and unpublished sources with an exquisite eye for telling detail, Zubok shows how the optimism of the era drew deeply on the classical inheritance of Marxism-Leninism. Contrary to assessments by foreign observers eager for signs of anticomunist ferment, the ‘60s intellectuals of the USSR were inspired by the dream of fulfilling, not transcending, the ideals of 1917.

As the title of her book suggests, Miriam Dobson keeps her distance from the thaw metaphor, and for good reason: optimism didn’t brighten her protagonists’ experience of the Khrushchev years. Unlike Zubok, who is primarily interested in the intelligentsia, Dobson has mined from Soviet archives the fragmented voices of a wide range of Soviet citizens, for many of whom Khrushchev’s denunciation of Stalin provoked feelings of profound uncertainty and anxiety. It was not just a matter of waking up to the news that the man previously heralded as “The Lenin of Today” and “Generalissimo” had defiled Lenin’s sacred legacy and nearly botched the war against Hitler. Even more upsetting was the Soviet leadership’s decision to reduce Stalin’s Gulag population by roughly 80 percent, thereby releasing into Soviet society some 4 million concentration camp prisoners, including people who only yesterday had been branded “enemies of the people.” That mass amnesties of Gulag inmates were followed by a dramatic spike in crime only served to stoke the fears of ordinary citizens: for them, what was melting under Khrushchev’s Thaw was not only the received moral order of things, but public order itself.

How are we to make sense of these starkly opposed views of the post-Stalin era? Khrushchev was famous for his zigzagging domestic and foreign policies, but it would be a mistake to reduce the tensions of the Thaw to the temperament of one man, or even to the volatility of competing inter-
est groups within the closed world of the Communist Party leadership. Rather, the tensions are best understood as hints of something that was supposed to have long since vanished from the Soviet landscape: the hierarchy of class.

Just over half a century ago, on the eve of the Khrushchev era, a group of Harvard scholars undertook a large-scale study of Soviet society, which at the time was nearly as opaque to the outside world beyond its borders as North Korea is today, but of exponentially greater consequence. Based on hundreds of interviews with Soviet citizens who found themselves in the West after the war—former POWs, slave laborers from Nazi Germany, émigrés—the Harvard Refugee Interview Project marked the first social-scientific attempt to analyze public opinion and the structures of daily life inside the socialist superpower. A key item on the research agenda was to determine whether one of Moscow’s proudest claims was true: had the abolition of private property succeeded in eliminating the division of society into antagonistic classes, as Marx had predicted? Was the USSR a fundamentally new kind of society, in which social origins no longer governed life chances, lifestyle and attitudes? Was the Soviet world truly “flat,” perhaps marking the end of social history?

The answer from Cambridge: not really. While it’s true that conventional Western hierarchies of income and occupational status carried far less weight in the USSR, and that the dream of a propertyless egalitarianism still held sway over much of the population, differences in cultural capital, and specifically in levels of education, still acted as an enduring social classifier within the Soviet populace. Such differences helped preserve the intelligentsia not just as an “imagined community” but as an actual stratum of society, and they help explain why different segments of the Soviet population experienced Khrushchev’s Thaw in radically contrasting ways.

Vladislav Zubok began his academic career in Moscow as a specialist in American political history, only to move to the United States in the mid-1980s, where he became an internationally renowned scholar of Soviet cold war foreign policy. With Zhivago’s Children Zubok has reinvented himself yet again, this time as an accomplished cultural historian of his native land. His book is an elegiac account of the final chapter in the history of the Russian intelligentsia, a group that survived revolution, civil war, Nazi onslaught and Stalinist repression, only to succumb to the supreme solvent of its life-ways: the free market. Driven by a vision of itself as “a civic community that could become a moral and cultural vanguard for society,” the post-Stalin intelligentsia combined a “profound hunger for personal freedom” with unquestioned faith in “the Holy Grail of collectivism.” There was good reason to believe in its collective strength: by the time the Sputnik satellite was thrust into orbit from a launching pad in the Soviet republic of Kazakhstan in October 1957, the USSR could boast over a million university graduates, marking a roughly tenfold increase during the preceding three decades. Having emerged from the Armageddon of the Great Fatherland War, the postwar generation was aglow with youthful revolutionary romanticism, and poised to play a key role in Khrushchev’s plan to move the country from socialism into the bright future of communism—if not in his lifetime, then surely in theirs.

The alliance of optimists, however, never materialized. Conservatives in the party elite, Iagos eager to exploit the anxieties of their Othello, preyed on Khrushchev’s inferiority complex about intellectuals, which because Khrushchev had never attended university was acute. In one memorable encounter in the fall of 1962, Khrushchev berated a group of abstract artists during a special tour of their paintings and sculptures, calling them “faggots” and their work “dog shit” and “ass hole art.” A year later, at a gathering of the “creative intelligentsia” inside the Kremlin, Khrushchev denounced members of the audience: “They think that Stalin is dead and anything is allowed.” Barely hidden beneath such outbursts was the simmering resentment of what Zubok calls “simple, popular, working-class Russia” against the “young, cosmopolitan, elitist, and Westernized cultural vanguard.”

A series of sham trials against members of the vanguard in the mid-1960s carried out by Khrushchev’s successors signaled the Thaw’s approaching end. Lingering hopes for the flowering of a Moscow Spring were crushed when Soviet tanks rumbled into Prague in August 1968 and put a halt to a popular program of political liberalization. This was the moment that “set in motion the group defection of many intellectuals and cultural figures from the Soviet communist project,” writes Zubok. But the splintering of the intelligentsia was by no means the result of external pressures alone. Well before the end of the Thaw, Zubok argues, fault lines had begun to appear within the intelligentsia, particularly with regard to the “Jewish Question” and its pertinence to the identity of the intelligentsia itself. As a xenophobic Russian nationalism percolated just below the surface of Soviet public discourse, the educated class increasingly split into a philo-Semitic “left” and an anti-Semitic “right” (insofar as traditional spatial metaphors of political contestation still made sense in the Soviet context). The resulting schism, according to Zubok, made it difficult for the intelligentsia to find “an acceptable ‘national’ form and acquire a mass following among Russian people.”

While it certainly is true that a remarkable proportion of the leading representatives of the intelligentsia were of Jewish origin, it is doubtful that antagonisms over the Jewish Question were primarily responsible for disagreements within their ranks. For one thing, disenchantment with revolutionary romanticism all but guaranteed the turn to a wide range of alternative worldviews. Andrei Sakharov and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, iconic figures of the emerging “Westernizing” and “Slavophile” opposition (neither of whom was Jewish), did cross pens over many other issues too—from democracy and relations with the West to technology and the Russian Orthodox Church. None of this, incidentally, deterred the KGB from planting rumors that Sakharov’s and Solzhenitsyn’s real names were Tsukerman (a play on “sakh,” Russian for “sugar”) and Solzhenitsker, or from issuing visas to Israel to non-Jewish dissidents who sought to leave the USSR.

Whatever the sources of the growing rifts among Soviet intellectuals, and despite his unmistakable admiration for their high ideals and civic engagement, Zubok finds their collective endeavor deficient, a conclusion that reflects his stark neoliberal skepticism. “The dream of socialism with a human face,” he writes, represented an attempt “to marry the Soviet project to freedom without a return to private property and capitalism,” and was therefore fatally marked by “political and moral sterility.” If measured by its unintended consequences, of course, that dream was anything but sterile: the belated attempt by Mikhail Gorbachev, Alexander Yakovlev and other perestroika-era reformers to bring it to fruition led the Soviet superpower to a miraculously peaceful demise.

The contrast between Zubok’s warm (and repeated) evocation of the “intelligentsia ethos” and his chilly verdict on its utter lack of historical viability comes to a head in his discussion of the ethos’s ultimate avatars: Soviet dissidents. They were “living the intelligentsia’s ideals,” he tells us, but those same ideals, he argues, (continued on page 34)
With The Hemlock Cup: Socrates, Athens and the Search for the Good Life (Knopf; $35), Hughes has turned her attention to a figure who certainly did exist, but whose real philosophical beliefs and character are notoriously difficult to disentangle from the literary creations of Aristophanes, Plato and Xenophon that form the main evidence for his life. Hughes opens the book with a good anecdote about discussing her new project with “an award-winning novelist” over a hotel breakfast. “Socrates!” the novelist exclaims. “What a doughnut subject!… Gloriously rich, with a whacking hole in the middle where the central character should be.” It is to Hughes’s credit that she has included this story, because it conveys precisely the strengths and weaknesses of her book. It has a lot of calories—a wealth of information about ancient Athens, though not necessarily presented in the healthiest way. Some readers will lick their lips; others may feel a little sick if they eat the whole thing.

The Hemlock Cup is not a biography of Socrates. Nor is it a book for a specialist, or one that any reader, specialist or not, will want to take slowly. Hughes has nothing to say about Socrates that is not pure cliché: Socrates was “a maverick,” “individual to his core,” “very human,” somebody with a “radical” and “refreshing” “take on the issues of life,” and who “decided to pursue not just the what, but the why.” In general the prose limps along from dangling modifiers to dramatic, verbless sentences to one-sentence paragraphs. Socrates, inspired by his daimonion, was “Rapt. Lost in his own mind.” Vivid. Also annoying. The first sentence of the introduction—“We think the way we do because Socrates thought the way he did”—is, as it stands, clearly false, though you can roughly understand its meaning. There are lots of sentences like that, which one can easily imagine Socrates himself, on a mean day, tearing to shreds.

Readers of Plato may be surprised to learn from Hughes that “Socrates did not believe in or deal with abstractions.” In dialogues such as Laches, Lysis and Euthyphro, Socrates is ostensibly concerned with nothing but the attempt to define the “abstractions” of courage, friendship and holiness. This Socrates may not be a historical character, but Hughes gives no indication of whether, or why or how, she mistrusts Plato as a source. Her use of textual evidence is also sketchy. No sources are given for the injunction “Understand yourself by loving those around you”; one might well doubt that either the historical or the Platonic Socrates held any such belief. Readers may puzzle over what it means to say that “Socrates believed humanity was society”—unless it’s just a rhetorical way of saying that Socrates, like everybody else, knew that people are social. Surely it doesn’t take the wisest man in the world to figure that out.

It’s thanks to her television-presenter’s eye for visual detail that Hughes makes a valuable contribution to the wealth of popular contemporary literature on Socrates. Her descriptions of the physical landscape and material remains of ancient Athens and its environs do not enrich my understanding of Socrates, but they helpfully evoke the world in which he lived. So too do her descriptions of the plague, which made bodies “purple-stained, twisted in the agony of their death throes, their mouths gaping, their dying wish always water, water.” Hughes makes good use of descriptions of artifacts, such as the fifth-century BCE ballot box in the Agora Museum in Athens, used for containing voting discs. Her account of the trial of Socrates is framed by a discussion of the “pissing stream of the water-clock,” the mechanism used in Athenian law-courts to limit a speaker’s time.

Emily Wilson teaches classics at the University of Pennsylvania and is the author of The Death of Socrates: Hero, Villain, Chatterbox, Saint.
The hero of Boris Pasternak's novel, whose name stems from the Russian word for "living." It is an odd choice, given how frequently Zubok's own evidence points to the stark differences between Zhivago's pre-revolutionary sensibilities—"frozen music," as Pasternak put it—and those of the Thaw-era intelligentsia. Even figures like Andrei Sinyavsky, a Pasternak scholar and a pall-bearer at his funeral in 1960, drew a clear distinction between old-school "heretics" such as Pasternak (and Anna Akhmatova and Osip Mandelstam) and younger dissident writers such as himself, offspring of the official public sphere, late Soviet society, Party apparatus. Beyond its highly uniform progressive thought within the Communist system and its revolutionary values. More than a few of the people Zubok artfully brings to life referred to themselves and their generation as children not of Zhivago but of the Twentieth Party Congress, that historic moment when Khrushchev attempted to cleanse the USSR of the father's sins—without revealing his own. The postwar episode of Soviet history is haunted by a kind of paternity suit, as if a gen-...
the monstrous crimes of his predecessor (and his living rivals like Molotov) while reaffirming the innocence of the party and the glory of its historical mission. What better way to damn the father but preserve the family than to recount the patient triumph of dutiful sons and daughters who had been unjustly punished? And so some of the earliest stories of the camps, attached to petitions read by Khrushchev and other Soviet leaders, were knitted into the Secret Speech, thereby estab-
lishing a template for other survivors to follow when arranging their Gulag memories.

Many ex-zeks, of course, had never joined the party; if they had, they did not leave the camps with renewed faith in the Soviet system. Some of their stories would eventually make their way to Western readers on the wings of Solzhenitsyn’s _Gulag Archipelago_ (1973) or Varlam Shalamov’s less-known but far more subtly crafted _Kolyma Tales_ (1980). (These and other masterpieces of literary testimony, every bit as powerful as their Holocaust counterparts, are superbly analyzed in Leona Toker’s _Return From the Archipelago: Narratives of Gulag Survivors_.) Unlike the handful of officially sanctioned accounts of redemptive suffering by loyal communists, they offer an unflinching portrait of the Gulag’s moral chaos: lethal physical deprivation, wanton cruelty and sexual exploitation.

Official censorship as well as unofficial social taboos kept contemporary Soviet readers largely quarantined from such texts—but not from the returning inmates. The most original aspect of Dobson’s book is her account of the reactions of ordinary citizens to the influx of ex-zeks, the “politics” as well as those convicted of crimes like murder, rape, robbery and assault. The Soviet system rarely made formal distinctions between the two groups, because antisocial behavior of all kinds was thought to be proof of ideological deviance. For much of the Soviet population, the Gulag amnesties were the first and most visible effect of the Thaw, and they hardly inspired the kind of hopes for revolutionary renewal championed by Zabok’s intellectuals. On the contrary, one Moscow trolley-car driver wrote in her letter to party leaders, “We conquered Germany when it was armed to the teeth, can it really be that our state is without the strength to conquer these parasites?” A worker in a car factory in Kalinin, contemptuous of the humanism he assumed to be behind the decision to amnesty so many of Stalin’s prisoners, noted, “For the working man, it certainly doesn’t make things easier that there are these swinish gangs of bandits who commit hooligan acts and refuse to contribute to our enormous work.”

Dobson argues that, far more than the regime’s fear of a too rapidly liberalizing intelligentsia, the harsh popular reaction to the amnesties helped curtail the attempt to reform the Soviet legal system in the late 1950s, thereby derailing the effort to create safeguards against the state-sponsored terror-

ism of the Stalin era. One of the strengths of Dobson’s explanation of the Thaw era’s zigzags is that it incorporates influences from below, much as the Russian historian Vladimir Kozlov has done in his work on how food riots and other popular disturbances paved the way for the unsustainable terms of the Brezhnev-era welfare state. By the time Gorbachev came to power, reducing the USSR’s costly cradle-to-grave entitlements proved even more difficult than containing its bloated military budget.

It took Germany—or rather, West Germany—nearly a quarter-century after its crushing military defeat to begin in earnest the job of _Vergangenheitsbewältigung_, mastering or coming to terms with the Nazi past. In an extraordinary but deeply flawed act, Nikita Khrushchev attempted to undertake a limited version of that process long before his country’s self-induced implosion, only to panic at the Pandora’s box he had opened regarding the Soviet Union’s history, and his own. For the next thirty years, the Communist Party kept a close eye on the box, responding to periodic attempts to pry open its lid by tightening the screws yet again, until the threads had all but eaten away the wood housing them. Today, nearly a quarter-century after the Soviet Union began to come apart, the box is mostly open, despite President Dmitri Medvedev’s creation in May 2009 of an omnious Commission to Counter Attempts to Falsify History to the Detriment of Russia’s Interests. Russians now watch excellent TV dramas based on Solzhenitsyn’s Gulag novels, along with documentaries glorifying Stalin’s role as an “effective manager” of the Soviet Union’s industrial revolution and the Great Fatherland War against Hitler’s Germany. The process of coming to terms with its contents has only just begun.

---

## Break Their Hearts

by AARON THIER

The problem with most funny stories is that they’re funny. How can we take them seriously? If a funny story is to be meaningful in itself rather than an example of an already familiar genre—one-of-a-kind rather than one-of-a-type—it needs another dimension or a larger resonance. The novels of P.G. Wodehouse, exceedingly wonderful as they are, are written according to an endlessly reproducible formula, with the result that we are more likely to say we like P.G. Wodehouse himself than any one of his books. The greatest comic novels—books like Saul Bellow’s _The Adventures of Augie March_, Samuel Beckett’s _Malloy_ and _Malone Dies_, Italo Svevo’s _Confessions of Zeno_—are the kind we might hesitate to call “comic” in the first place, because humor is not what makes them linger in the mind and quicken the heart.

Beckett is an extreme example. The single fixation throughout his vast output is the absurdity of our continuing existence in the context of the pain our existence will cause us. His characters are subjected to absurd levels of degradation and misery—blind, deaf, aphasic, immobilized—and the anguish of their condition is the only subject of the stories. But they can be pushed to such an extremity only because they’re comic characters. We don’t expect them to think clearly about their circumstances, and they aren’t real enough or relatable enough to inspire sympathy of the kind that would make their humiliation too much to bear. Beckett is funny, and only because he’s funny are we willing to follow him down his appalling rabbit hole. Comedy is a means to an end, like any other literary device. “What must wacky modes do?” asked Donald Barthelme. “Break their hearts.”

Like any young writer with an inclination toward wackiness, Chris Bachelder has been trying to figure out how his wanness might be employed to greatest effect. Bachelder has many talents, but his obvious talent for comic writing has tended to eclipse his other gifts. His first book appeared in 2001 with _Bear v. Shark_, a variety show of a novel about the media frenzy associated with a computer-animated pay-per-view fight between a bear and a shark. In 2006 he published his second novel, _U.S._, in which a very elderly but

---

Aarón Thier is a freelance writer.
resolutely optimistic Upton Sinclair is assas-
sinated and reanimated again and again in a
kind of alternate history of American progress-
ive politics.

I have a lot of affection for both of these
books, and there is a great deal of nasty truth
in Bachelder’s characterization of American
culture. The persistent theme in U.S.!, for instance, is that killing Sinclair
is considered part of an admirable tradit-
on of political dialogue. But neither book is as compact, balanced and lucid
as Bachelder’s new novel, Abbott Awaits.
Here, Bachelder has discovered how to
balance his instinct for wackiness with
his immense intelligence and sincerity.
Abbott Awaits is as inventive as its
predecessors, but its inventions are less
noisy and they produce less smoke. The
conceit is not overabundance and excess
but an absence of plot elements: Abbott
is a university professor—an “untenured
humanist”—on summer break. He has
a 2-year-old daughter, and when the
novel begins, his wife is about six months
pregnant. The book ends with the birth
of their second child. That’s all we get in the
way of story, and if Bachelder’s wit is still
on display, it’s never an end in itself. It’s an
enticement that keeps the novel brisk
and readable and gives Bachelder space to explore
his real subject, which is the bewildering and
painful complexity of domestic life.

Abbott is the only character with a
name, and the novel is entirely focused
on the rhythms of his psyche. I think
he’s a good man, but the inside of any-
one’s head is going to be upsetting if
its contents are examined closely enough, and
Bachelder renders the agony of conscience
so minutely that the novel can be unsettling.
There is little action because the book is about
the moments before action: the nervous wait-
ing, the mood swings, the slow drift of the
summer days. Each chapter is a vignette that
corresponds to a calendar date, and each one
is self-contained. They have titles like “Abbott
Discovers an Idiom in His Yard” and “On the
Very Possibility of Kindness.”

In the first chapter, Abbott takes his
daughter to the pet store (although “one
should always be wary of a pet store that is
also a soft-drink outlet”). Inside, they find
an aquarium filled with hermit crabs whose
shells have been decorated, “whereupon
Abbott suffers an elaborate reaction” and we get
our first glimpse into his psyche. He begins to
think about “assembly lines” and “improper
ventilation,” and he “speculates that crab
painting does not fulfill what he considers the
fundamental human need to create beauty.”
He thinks about evolutionary history: “Homo
sapiens…emerged approximately two hun-
dred thousand years ago, at which point they
immediately, relatively speaking, began deco-
rating other species.” Later in the summer, in
any of them. It turns out that the coexistence
of incompatible ideas is one of the book’s
central themes. How is it, for example, that
“the following propositions are both true:
(A) Abbott would not, given the opportunity,
change one significant element of his life, but
(B) Abbott cannot stand his life”?

Paradox is Bachelder’s preferred
narrative mode, the vehicle of his
humor, but also—and this seems
perfect and true—the medium of his
character’s thought. Abbott is con-
stantly tormented by irreconcilable
ideas. We get something approaching
a summary of the problem in a
chapter about Internet porn: Abbott
“just wonders if the consumption of
pornography can legitimately be con-
sidered a component of human flour-
ishing.” He thinks about Stephen Jay
Gould’s description of the accident
of human consciousness (“Replay the
tape a million times…and I doubt
whether anything like Homo sapiens
would ever evolve again”), but when
he “tries, in his mind, to add the prolif-
eration of Internet pornography to Gould’s
thesis on historical contingency, the strain
becomes too much and he nearly blacks out
in titillation and despondency.”

He knows from Keats that the fancy
thing to do is to reside in Paradox
without any irritable reaching. But he
also knows that he is, above all else, an
irritable reader, and about as capable
of reform as a trembling dog. (There is
rain on the roof, song on the monitor.
He could just type in wild sluts, get it
over with).

Abbott’s thoughts about marriage, too—
that great balancing act—occupy a large part
of the book and are again described in the
same terms. In “On the Very Possibility
of Kindness,” for example, Abbott makes ba-
nana bread. He has never done this before,
and he’s doing it now because he wants to
surprise his wife. But he becomes alarmed
by the realization that he’s less interested in
helping out than in appearing to be a “re-
markable spouse.” Now he has “spoiled the
experience, and when she comes home he is
gloomy with the certainty that he has never
been and will never be genuinely nice, a quality
he admires.”

Even though Abbott knows that bak-
ing bread in order to exhibit his limit-
less depth is sophsiticated and spiritually
deficient—the very opposite of gener-
ous, in fact, and the cause of his cur-
rent despondency—yes, even though he knows it, he still wants his wife to notice his limitless depth.

Abbott is a good father and a good husband, at least on balance, and there are scenes with his wife and daughter that bring tears to the eyes. But even if a large part of the novel is devoted to a description of family life, Abbott Awaits strikes me as a book about being, or feeling, alone. Maybe this is the greatest paradox. Abbott lives in the company of his family, but he leads a solitary life. The suggestion is that this is true of others as well: Abbott knows that “his wife is a separate person, large on the inside.” And Bachelder’s ability to capture the feeling of companionable solitude is what makes the book sing.

Despite its preoccupation with the minutiae of everyday life, or because of it, Abbott Awaits is a book about the present moment in American history. Abbott is a man afflicted by his time, and his struggle to retain a sense of intellectual freedom in the face of an overwhelming abundance of information should be familiar to all of us.

For Abbott, who is drawn to suffering, the Internet is spiritually destructive. In a short prologue, we see him exploring a site about a Chernobyl orphanage. “There is a warning about disturbing images. He cannot very well turn away now, lest he be someone who turns away from the disturbing.” This is one of his central preoccupations and the source of much unhappiness. He is too well informed, too full of the world’s vast hurt. And what good is all this guilt and worry? “Preoccupation with suffering does not alleviate suffering,” he thinks. “Preoccupation with suffering actually causes suffering. Therefore, it is both practical and ethical to ignore suffering...”

But he can’t convince himself, and he can’t turn away. Images of suffering hunker down behind his computer screen, and he can view them at the click of a button. Certainly these moments are funny, and the Internet is central to the humor of the book, but that humor is also a way of illustrating and contextualizing his pain. This is the Beckett paradox: Abbott is helpless and lost, and the only thing funny about it is that it’s funny.

The Internet is a structural principle as well as a thematic element in Abbott Awaits, and although it causes Abbott a lot of grief, it does Bachelder a great deal of good. It’s woven into the fabric of the writing, and it enriches the style of the book. Into each present moment Bachelder incorporates things that Abbott will learn “much later” on the Internet. The writing therefore includes, whenever events in the present inspire Internet searches in the future, specialized vocabulary and the dispassionate language of encyclopedia entries. The hermit crab scene is one example. Later, Abbott wonders where his daughter has learned a folk song about “Charles Edward Stuart (‘Bonnie Prince Charlie’) who, in 1745, after two decades of exile in Italy, returned to his homeland to regain the English throne for his family, only to be routed by the Redcoats and forced to flee the country disguised as a servant girl.” Only after we read the informative sentence do we learn that Abbott has “a spotty grasp” of this history and that he has learned these things twenty minutes later.

Sometimes, the narrator does not distinguish acts of memory from Internet research. So what does Abbott really know, and what does that verb—“know”—really mean? The Internet seems to function here as an external hard drive for the human mind: infinitely capacious; a Pandora’s box of paradox; flawed, as memory is flawed; and also, like memory, a source of pain.

---

**ORGANIZATIONS**

**INDIANAPOLIS NATION ASSOCIATES DISCUSSION GROUP:** Contact (317) 919-4622 or lortonb@netscape.net.

**CHAPEL HILL, N.C., DISCUSSION GROUP** starting up. Contact (919) 370-4114 or mthompson015@nc.rr.com.

**HANOVER, N.H., AND UPPER VALLEY DISCUSSION GROUP** now meeting. For info, contact Susananne at (603) 643-2560 or dovetree1830@yahoo.com.

**HILO, HAWAII.** Bob and Nan Summer-Mack exploring possible Nation discussion group. Contact (808) 315-7031 or rsm4@earthlink.net.

**GIG HARBOR, WASH., DISCUSSION GROUP** Contact Bill Nerin at (253) 851-8888 or nerin@comcast.net.

**BOSTON AREA.** Nation discussion group seeks new members! Please contact Sam Pilato, sam@alcove.arlington.ma.us, (781) 643-0038.

**THE CHICAGO NATION DISCUSSION GROUP,** which began three years ago, is looking for new members. Monthly meeting. For information, call June at (312) 670-0966 in the evenings.

**ROCK HILL/FORT MILL, SC.** Nation discussion group forming. Contact addgroup@camporium.net.

**GRAND LEDGE, MI.** Nation discussion group. Contact Richard Currier if interested, (517) 627-4591, richardc@msn.com.

**DOVER, DEL.** Nation discussion group is forming. Contact Bruce Dudley if interested, (302) 657-6057.

**BRADENTON/SARASOTA NATION DISCUSSION GROUP** meets monthly. For further information call (941) 761-4873.

---

**FAREWELL TO PALESTINE**

by BISHARA BENDECK SARIOGLU

Memoir of a Palestinian refugee told in compelling straightforward prose. Relying on history, current affairs, and firsthand knowledge of regional and cultural differences, Bendec Sarioğlu examines the root of the problems that continue to devastate the Middle East and how they could possibly be solved without bloodshed. This is a vital resource for anyone who wants to understand the issues that are holding back the two Semitic people, the Jewish and the Arab living in the Middle East, from working together and taking on a leadership role in the world. Bendec Sarioğlu seeks to bridge gaps that keep people apart. He clarifies the obscure, exposes false beliefs, and builds an argument against Nationalism, Zionism, and Western hegemony in Farewell to Palestine.

---

**THE FIRST AMERICAN REPUBLIC:**

★ 1774–1789 ★

The First Fourteen American Presidents Before Washington

www.firstamericanrepublic.com

---

**PROPHETS STALK THE LAND**

A novel dedicated to the memory of Rachel Corrie and the Palestinians who suffer and endure the Israeli occupation.

Available at: Amazon and Barnes & Noble

Mail Order:

Eduardo Díaz

P.M.B. 104

525 N. Central Ave

Phoenix, AZ 85012-1520

$18.00 plus $3.99 s/h

ISBN 13: 9781936885046

---

**CHICAGO PSYCHOTHERAPIST.**

28 years, all issues including depression, anxiety, relationships. Creative blocks. Sliding scale, insurance. Deborah Hellerstein, Ph.D., (312) 409-9516, theraphyinchicago.com

---

**NOVA SCOTIA — So Near! So Far!**

Oceanfront Land & Residential Property for the Politically Weary

NovaScotiaPropertyFinders.com

Roger Dial (902) 277-0593 Coastal Winds Realty
Puzzle No. 3206

JOSHUA KOSMAN AND HENRI PICCIOTTO

ACROSS
1. Ancient Peruvians facing east as a precaution (2,4)
4. Fuse “clean” fossil fuel, and see distortion: “carbon captured!” (8)
9. Sir, I act subversively—like Jonathan Swift (7)
11. Football formation, slanted and complex (7)
12. Smoother malefactor concealing a type of renewable energy (7)
13. Liberal leader withdraws from all-out struggle (7)
14. Bird left boat (4)
15. For instance, soap and shampoo and oil discovered in Trieste? Maybe (10)
18. LA personal: “eccentric with source of clean energy” (5,5)
21. Pen surrounding a lodge (4)
22. Doctor seated around no one with no seat (7)
24. Mysterious nuclear meltdown (7)
27. Orchestra violinists full of Italian food (7)
28. Stories of feet? (7)
29. Swapping heads, find warm source of clean energy (4,4)
30. France has expressions of displeasure (6)

DOWN
1. Encrusted Baroque stein (5)
2. Church hater clad in tatters (9)
3. Go away, short stuff! (5)
5. Capitol is dysfunctional—it’s a kind of illusion (7)
6. Insect’s weird tonal hum (4,4)
7. What you’re trying to do, primarily: send love all about (5)
8. Dense plastic encircles large arch without limits (9)
10. Compartment with old musical instrument (5)
14. Blemishes rising underneath endure as fatal danger for a camel? (4,5)
16. Well-informed engineer: “Think about energy immediately” (2,3,4)
17. Frantic effort to hide notice of quid pro quo (5-3)
19. Saint abandons loftier workshop (5)
20. Identical, as in a Chicago train (5)
23. Religious reformer decapitated a chipmunk (5)
25. Invest one grand in automobile for Havana, perhaps (5)
26. Republican employs deceptive practices (5)

The Nation (ISSN 0027-8378) is published weekly (except for seven double issues published the second week in January, the first week in March, and from the first week in July through the second week in September, with each counting as two issues delivered to subscribers) by The Nation Company, L.P. © 2011 in the U.S.A. by The Nation Company, L.P., 33 Irving Place, New York, NY 10003. (212) 209-5400. Washington Bureau: Suite 308, 110 Maryland Avenue N.E., Washington, DC 20002. (202) 546-2239. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. Subscription orders, changes of address and all subscription inquiries: The Nation, PO Box 37853, Boone, IA 50037-0853, or call 1-800-333-8536. Publications Mail Agreement No: 4004477. Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to Bleuchip International, PO Box 25542, London, ON N6C 6B2. Canada Post: Publications Mail Agreement No.: 40612608. When ordering a subscription, please allow 4–6 weeks for receipt of your first issue and for all subscription transactions. Basic annual subscription price: $79 for 47 issues. Back issues $6 prepaid ($8 foreign) from: The Nation, 33 Irving Place, New York, NY 10003. The Nation is available on microfilm from: University Microfilms, 300 North Zeib Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106. Member, Audit Bureau of Circulations. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Nation, PO Box 37853, Boone, IA 50037-0853. Printed in U.S.A. on recycled paper.
The 1964 Kennedy Silver Half Dollars have become some of the most sought after silver half dollars since their inception in 1964. The coins carry the image of one of the most popular Presidents in American history. He was assassinated only one year before their release. Now, over forty five years later, with silver hovering near $40 an ounce, the demand for these works of art is higher than ever before. If you had invested $10,000 in silver in the beginning of 2010 at $17.00/oz you would have over $20,000 in silver today. Experts are now predicting silver to go as high as $200 in the next 6 years. The National Bullion & Currency Depository is pleased to announce a limited release of the elusive 1964 Kennedy Silver Half Dollars at the low price of only $23. Please understand, these coins were minted for one year only and The National Bullion & Currency Depository cannot guarantee sufficient inventory to meet current demand. Please order now to avoid disappointment. We strongly suggest that those of you who wish to own 1964 Kennedy Half Dollars in sealed rolls, call immediately. Don’t be fooled by cheaper prices in later year Half Dollars—in 1965 the mint decreased the silver content to only 40% in all future Half Dollars. Our specialists are available to take your order 24 hours a day, 7 days a week CALL 1 (877) 231-6201 NOW.

ORDER IMMEDIATELY
1.877.231.6201
1 – 19 COINS............................... $23.00 PER COIN
20 COINS (1 ROLL) – 5 ROLLS...... $22.50 PER COIN
6 – 10 ROLLS.............................. $22.00 PER COIN
11 ROLLS AND ABOVE............... $21.50 PER COIN

CALL TOLL FREE (24 HRS A DAY, 7 DAYS A WEEK)

PROMO CODE: LTNSK-0901 • MINIMUM ORDER 10 COINS

THE NATIONAL BULLION & CURRENCY DEPOSITORY

ONE NATION UNDER GOD

EXPERTS ARE NOW PREDICTING SILVER TO RISE AS HIGH AS $200 oz IN THE NEXT 6 YEARS!

ONE TIME ONLY
LOW-COST OFFER

Only $23 ea

LIMITED RELEASE

FREE $5 GOLD COIN WITH ORDER OF 11 ROLLS OR MORE
Know who's behind you

Boardwalk Empire

Sunday, September 25, 9 PM

Or watch it on HBO