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Featuring:
Canada's Growing Oil Creation
by John Vining

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Somali man takes time out of his day to pray towards Mecca.

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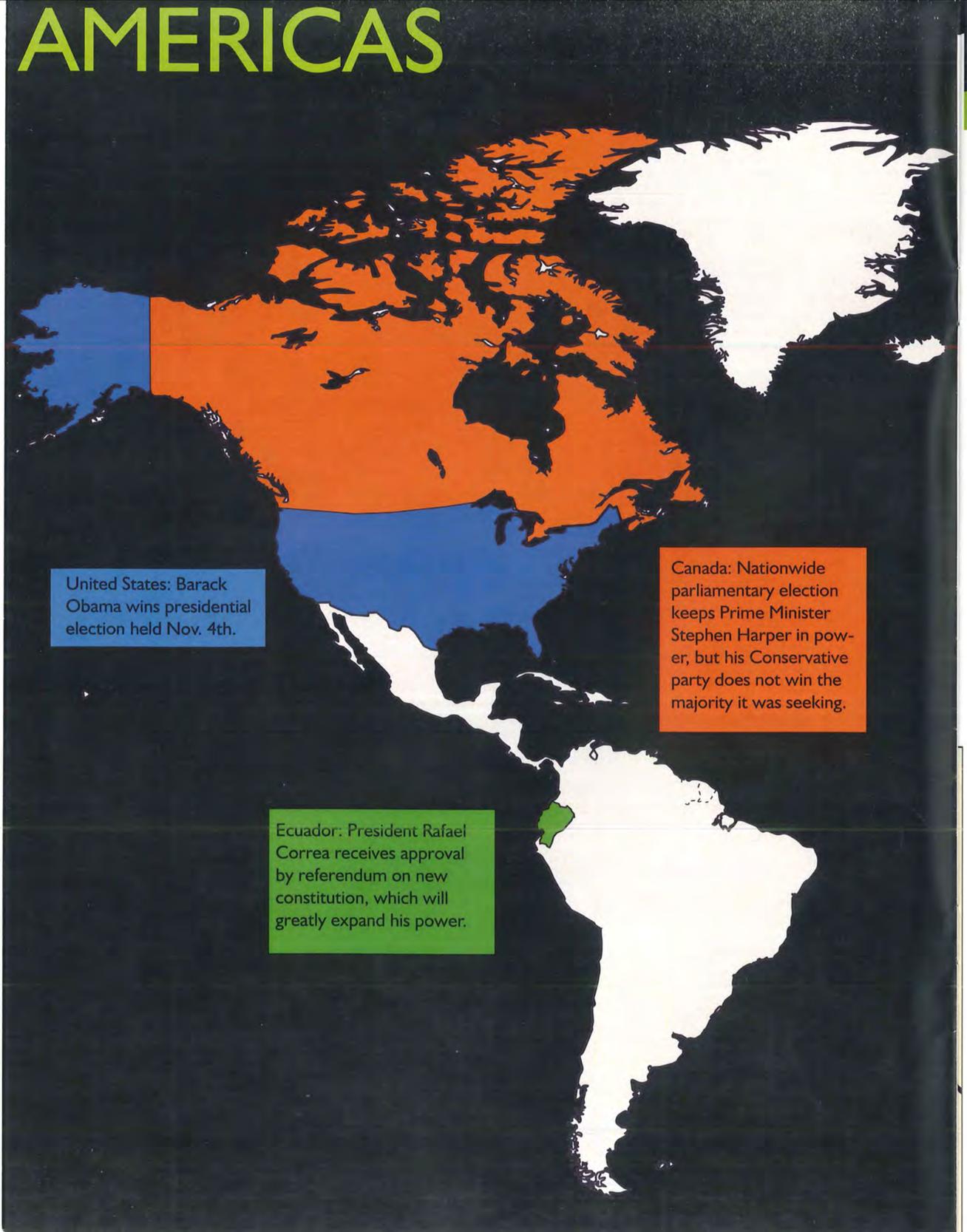


Canada's Growing Oil Creation

John Vining, Annapolis, '11

The Syncrude flag flies in Fort McMurray, Canada, center of the tarsands industry.

"We're not trying to tell Alberta what necessarily to do," says Mike Nagy, a former Green Party candidate for the Canadian parliament. "But [the tarsands are] an environmental, a very bad environmental situation, as well as being one of the single largest sources for not meeting our Kyoto commitment."

Mike Nagy, who is also the Green Party's Environment Critic, is referring to the Kyoto protocol, which was adopted in 1997 and put into force in 2005, with the intent of cutting green house gas emissions an average of 5% bellow 1990 levels by 2008-2012.

The Sierra Club echoes Nagy, saying that much of Canada's greenhouse gas emissions are from Alberta's tarsands, which are a fairly recent development in the search for oil and now account for 28% of Canada's oil exports.

Tarsands contain a type of oil which has been extracted only since the late-60's and early-70's, and which were not heavily utilized until the mid 1990s. This was known as early as 1913, when the tarsands were originally approached in the search for asphalt. The Sierra Club predicts tarsands will become Canada's greatest cause of emission by 2015 further distancing Canada from its Kyoto commitments.

"Kyoto is not a novel idea," says Dennis Makar, the CEO of World Oil Tools, Inc., a Calgary, Alberta-based company that specializes in manufacturing hardware required for conventional oil drilling. "Many firms, and ours included, are striving very hard for zero impact to the environment regardless of where we work around the world."

The tarsands take the form of huge lakes filled with sand, water and bitumen, which in their natural state can only be used for asphalt. After a resource-intensive process, bitumen, a compressed organic material, can become usable oil.

"When the syncrude industry was first founded," Nagy explains, "it was just designed to be a smaller scale project to develop synthetic oils and look at a different energy source. It was not envisioned by Premier Lougheed to become this massive, very-expanding scale of dirty devel-

The Alberta Oilsands

1962
The Alberta Government announces its plan to organize development of oilsands which could suplement conventional oil extraction.

1968
Suncor ships its first barrel of oilsands oil.

1972-85
Peter Lougheed is premier of Alberta, works to get the oilsands running.

1978
Syncrude finishes construction and ships its first barrel of oilsands oil.

1995
The National Oil Sands Task Force released The Oil Sands: A New Energy Vision for Canada, which called the oilsands "the largest potential private sector investment opportunity for the public good remaining in Western Canada."

1996
Suncor ships its 500 millionth barrel since production began. It will go on to ship its billionth in 2006.

1960 — 2000

opment."

Peter Lougheed was the premier of Alberta from 1971-1985, and is credited with much of the push to make the tarsands operational.

Two of the largest companies operating in the tarsands, Suncor and Syncrude, both got their start in the late 1960s. By 1969, both Suncor and Syncrude had been approved for tarsands extraction and had begun excavations. Syncrude shipped its first barrel in 1978, and Suncor its first in 1968.

Lougheed, whose grandfather had worked to make Alberta a province in 1905, helped to start the oilsands' development, including Syncrude's first project, which was completed with participation from the provincial government under Lougheed.

The tarsands were not viewed as profitable on a large scale, however, until Canada released a 1995 report which set out a 25 year plan to extract usable oil. In 2001, Suncor announced its strategy that would, when complete, allow them to ship half a million barrels a day. Nagy sees this growth as dangerous.

"It was a project that was never planned," he said. "We never did environmental assessments and actually saying that this was a sustainable industry. There was never a looking-forward and saying, 'What are the consequences of this?"

Nagy paints a grim picture of what is now the scene in Alberta, and specifically in Fort McMurray, where most of the tarsands' operations are centered. He cites both official reports and a conversation he had with Chief Allan Adam of the Fort Chipewyan First Nations, an indigenous people living near the tarsands.

"An Alberta-funded doctor, Mr. Clarke [has] been reporting a statistically large number of people getting illnesses that should not even be appearing in those populations. The thing that Chief Adams told me was that the game is dying and the flora and fauna, both the plants and the animals are being affected tremendously. So even their game is being affected. So it's affecting the berries on the plants, he told me this personally, in Ottawa when I was speaking with him."

The Pembina Institute, a Canadian environmental think tank, echoes Nagy, reporting dirty and wasted water, deforestation, polluted air and the creation of tailing ponds.

Tailing ponds are created when the firm extracting the oil pumps a solution of water, salt, bitumen and clay into "ponds," which are in fact massive man-made lakes. The ponds altogether cover a surface area of 50 square kilometers, and can facilitate the movement of pollutants into ground water and surrounding soil.

The Sierra Club reports that for every barrel of mined bitumen, 4 to 5 times that quantity of water is necessary to extract the bitumen, some of which can come from the tops of the tailings ponds, once the solids have separated from the water.

Not everyone, however, is as concerned as Nagy. Herb Enns, owns Hepalta Purified Air, Inc., located in Alberta. He has not noticed a change in his Fort McMurray sales due to the tarsands: "I don't think they notice any difference."

Dennis Makar, whose company has offices in Syria, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Latin America, is similarly unconvinced. "My farm is located within 200 kilometers from the major tarsand producing region in Canada. There are no apparent visible signs the projects are affecting the environment locally."

The once-pioneer of the tarsands, Peter Lougheed, however, now thinks Canada should instate a moratorium on new tarsands projects.

"Loughheed is from Alberta, he's called the grandfather of modern Alberta," Nagy said. "He is one of the founders of the oil sands, tarsands,

whatever you want to call it. Even he, an ex-Conservative premier of Alberta, has been calling for a moratorium on the tar sands… This is the ultimate irony, you have the Greens calling for it, and an ex-premier of Alberta, a Progressive Conservative, because it does not, in his words, meet the vision and the intent the of the industry."

But Lougheed, Nagy and his Greens will have a hard time stopping or slowing the tarsands operations, as the industry now has momentum in its favor. The sheer amount of capital that has been invested in the tarsands makes it very hard to change their plans.

"They are in it for the long haul," Dennis Makar explains. "Their plants are already operational, and regular, scheduled maintenance is still required. However, cost of maintenance is perhaps much less compared to construction of new plants. You must remember, companies such as Suncor conducted feasibility studies and started construction at a time when oil prices were much lower, and extraction methods were less efficient."

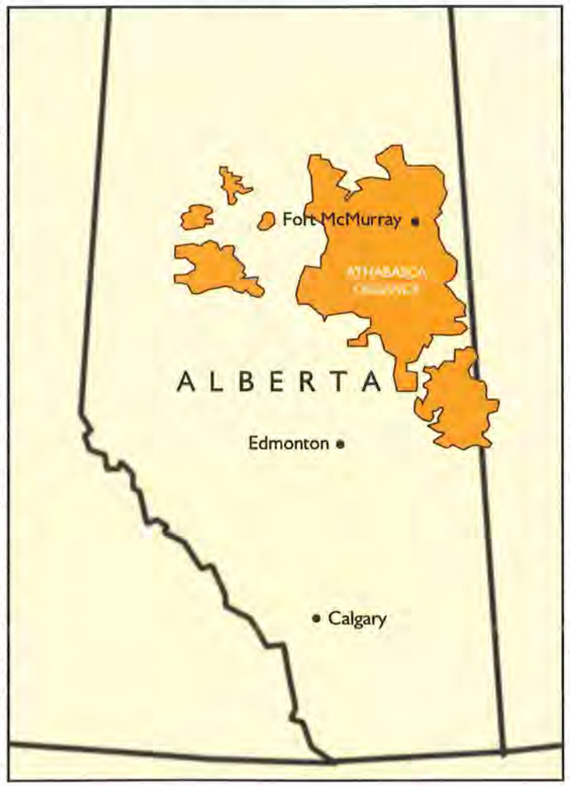
As Makar says, the tarsands have found themselves in a more than beneficial position, even if oil prices are now in a trough. Ujjayant Chakravorty, University of Alberta Professor of Business and Economics, explains that short-term low oil prices will only marginally change the plans of Suncor and Syncrude.

"Given what's happened in the last couple of months," he says, "the margin projects that could be operated will not be happening and new projects that are in the pipeline will be delayed somewhat. Although, this is a short-run phenomenon. I believe, as an economist, that oil prices will come back up maybe in a few months or at the most a year. But what is economical, what projects are viable at $120 a barrel may not be viable at $70 a barrel."

The scaling-up and scaling-down of production is not tied to the price of oil as tightly as it may be with conventional drilling. Makar, who works in conventional drilling, explains the sluggishness of the tarsands operations.

"Conventional drilling is a short-term solution towards increasing oil and gas production. If successful, wells may be put in production relatively quickly, provided pipeline facilities are nearby. However, if initial results are unsuccessful, conventional drilling programs may be axed.

"In addition, if oil and natural gas prices fall, conventional drilling programs are stopped very quickly. On the other hand, tarsands extraction requires major construction of oil extraction facilities and plants before any oil may be produced."



All signs point to a tarsands operation that will be in Alberta for a long time, even if there are some temporary obstacles, like low oil prices. Perhaps because of this perceived permanence, the tarsands have been causing others, including most of Alberta itself, to adjust to accommodate them, as Prof. Chakravorty explains.

"There is a tremendous shortage of labor," he says. "I mean, recently, I've heard of stores closing, the minimum wage is quite high, almost $18, $20 an hour. There's a lot of turnover of people in different retail establishments and so on. So yeah, they have a shortage. There's a lot of people coming from the east coast of Canada."

One of those people is a 19-year-old boy from Manitoba who asked not to be named. He works doing unspecialized labor in Alberta at Firebag, a Suncor site that is two provinces away from his home.

"Well, I'm on a 14/7," he said. "14 days on, 7 days off. I work 10 hours a day. ... I live in Manitoba, but for the 14 days I'm at work, I live at a camp about 10 minutes from Firebag."

He continues by mentioning that he is paid more than double what he earned in Manitoba. On top of that, his flights to and from Alberta are paid for.

"For what I do," he continued, "I think I'm getting paid way too much."

People are flocking to the high wages, which have, in turn, inflated the cost of living. This makes traveling back and forth financially feasi-

ble, as workers can earn wages in Alberta and can support their families in provinces with lower costs.

Prof. Chakravorty thinks that Suncor has to fly people in not because this is a temporary project, but because Alberta and the people working have not yet had the chance to adapt.

"There is a time lag in these things," he says. "I've heard stories of people from Newfoundland and the Halifax area coming and basically leaving their families behind. It's expensive, it's a hard job in the oil fields. Home prices, I am told, are exorbitant. It's not very cheap to live in Alberta right now, but things are becoming better. So yes, it'll take time to even out."

The economy in Alberta is rushing to serve this massive influx of labor and business, but its inability to do so as quickly as demand requires has driven up prices. Harvey P. Weingarten, president of University of Calgary, recently moved to Alberta.

"There is $21.3 billion in major capital projects announced or underway in Calgary," he said in a speech to the Economic Club of Toronto, "and not surprisingly, the construction inflation rate is running at about 1.5% a month... The housing market is finally showing signs of moderating. Nonetheless, housing prices have risen at triple the national pace since July 2005."

Construction Inflation is high because of contractors, public and private, scrambling to accommodate the influx of people, and so raw materials have become more expensive. Nearly all of this pressure has the oilsands at its base.

"Across the province, oilsands' investment in 2007 alone is expected to hit $12 billion, and there is $40 billion of new infrastructure planned," Weingarten stats. "Most of it associated with the oilsands–all of this in a province that has a population smaller than the Greater Toronto Area. That sucking sound you hear is 170,000 new jobs expected to be created over the next 4 years out west."

Although Alberta has plenty of reason to welcome this influx of capital and business, people from other parts of Canada tend to focus more on the negative environmental effects of the tarsands.

"We have a polarized society," Mike Nagy says. "And it shouldn't be like this. It's a bit of the west-versus-the-rest in issues with this."

Nathan Paul Pinno, a citizen living outside of Edmonton, Alberta, agrees. "Most Easterners see it as a big source of pollution," he says. "And [they] would love to take the money away from us in Alberta. Most Albertans I believe recognize how important the tarsands are to our economy. ... We also believe they have no business interfering in what we see as a provincial issue."

This divide and the compartmentalization of Alberta is one of the reasons the tarsands have been difficult to regulate, since the provincial and federal governments wanted mostly different things.

For Chakravorty, the October 13, 2008, election provided a signal about the best way to approach the task of cleaning up the tarsands.

"The reason the Liberals lost was because of the carbon tax. It would have been a tax on Alberta. They would take money from Alberta and subsidize the rest of Canada. So it would have been a net transfer out of Alberta. This is being debated. I'm not sure a tax mechanism, given this current economic situation will go down well."

Instead of a carbon tax, which would tax carbon emitters on a federal level and then spend the money on projects across the country, Chakravorty prefers a carbon market, like the cap-and-trade systems which have been discussed in the U.S.

"I mean there are significant environmental issues that need to be dealt with and even the government of Alberta is now trying to see how that can be done. I am part of a study with a couple of my colleagues, trying to think of a carbon market. So the carbon can be sequestered by the refineries and it can be sold to people who might use carbon to extract more oil. We are looking at things like this and there is definitely a feeling that the environmental question will have to be solved."

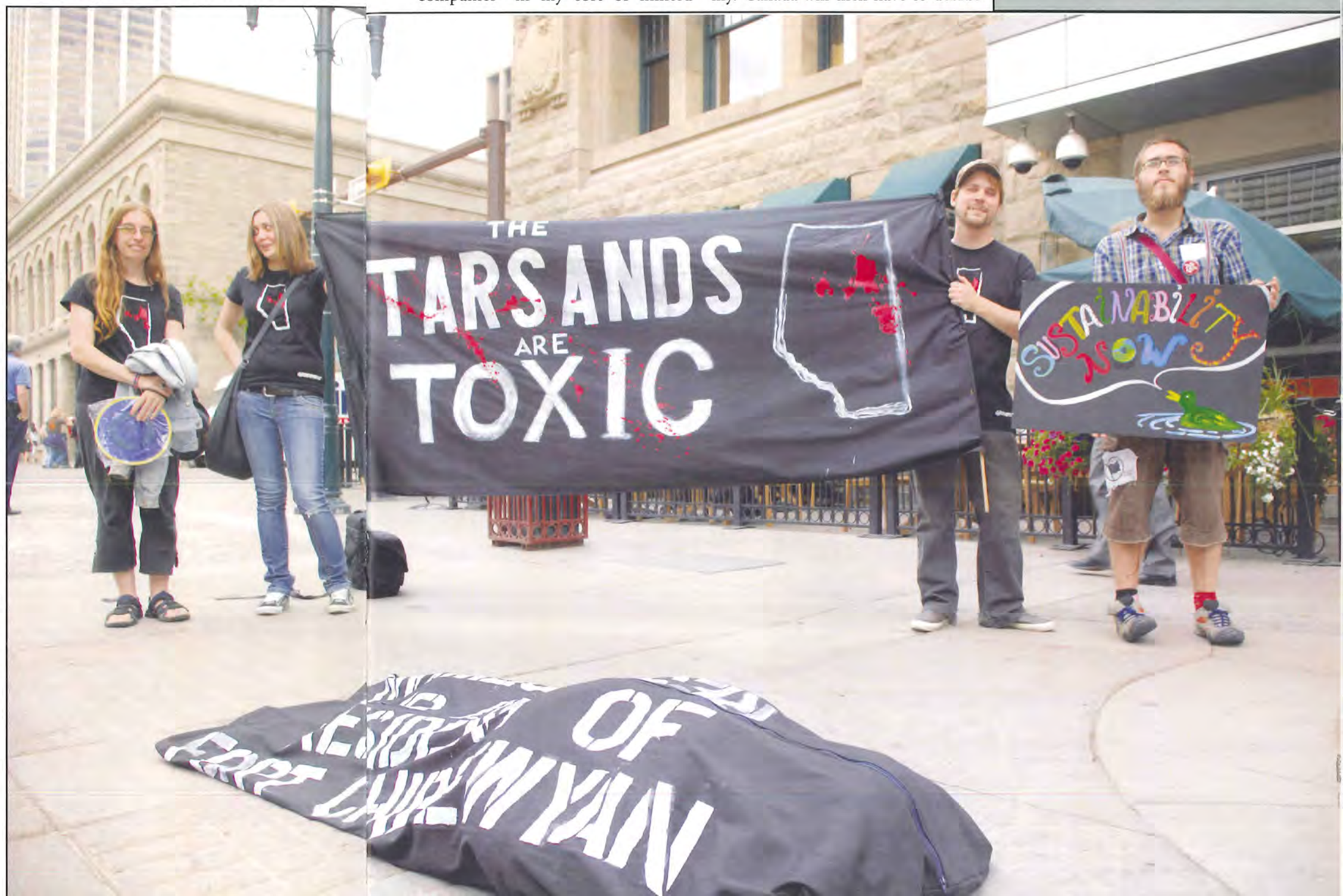
The Greens and Lougheed have called for a moratorium on new developments, and even if they get their wish, they, along with the rest of Canada, have to decide how the tarsands will operate in the long term.

"The government is a big player," Chakravorty continues. "I think the government has a major role, and the companies—in my sort of limited exposure—are willing to play, then the question of course is: Who's going to pay for all of this? You've got environmental regulation in place. How are the costs going to be shared? I've heard numbers to the tune of $2 billion that the province is willing to pay to set up a carbon market and so on."

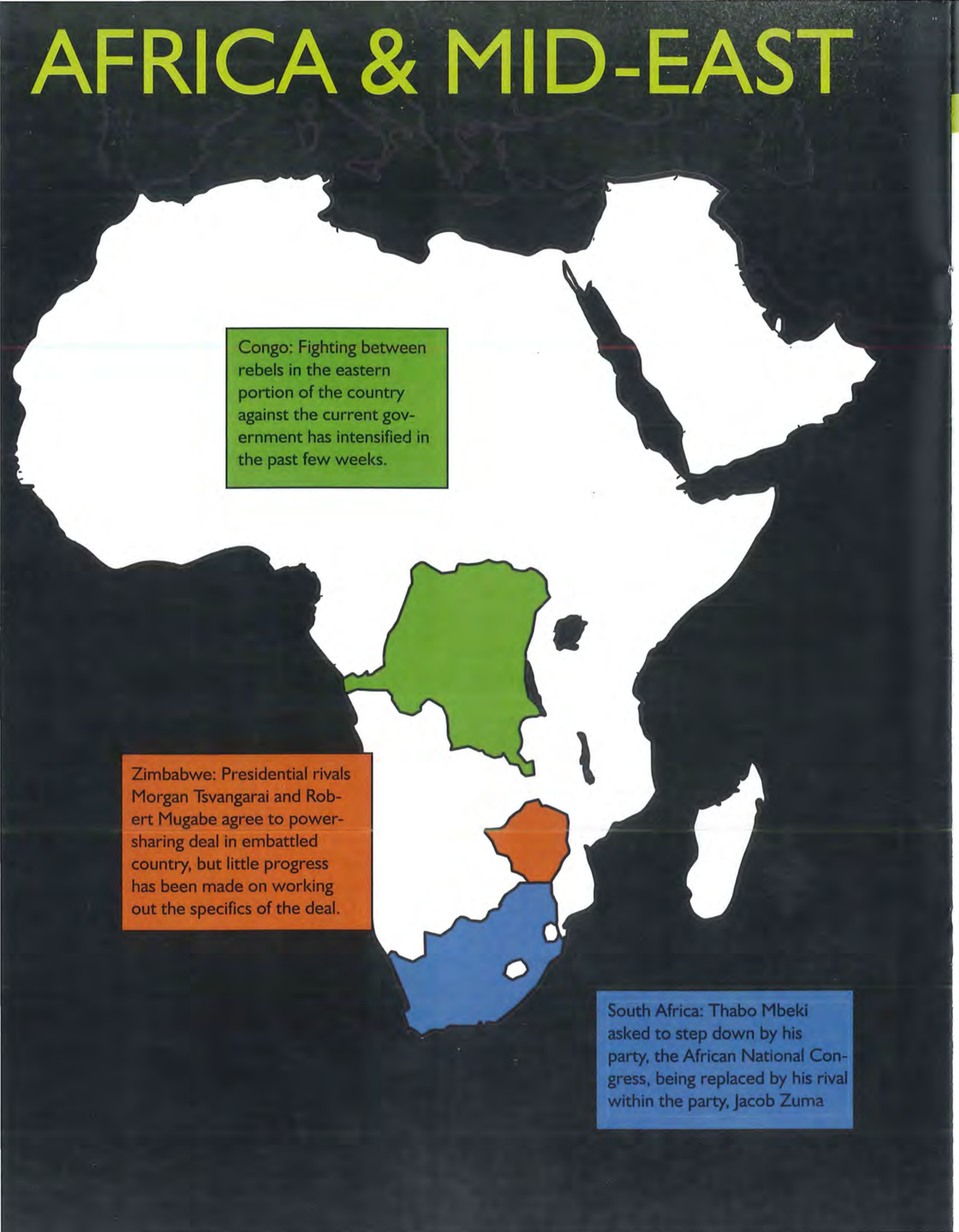
There is at this moment so much resting on the shoulders of the tarsands that to stop them right away would tear apart the Albertan economy. Canada will then have to decide how it wants to deal with what is now, in many respects, its most beneficial and destructive asset. ✳

Interviewed for this story:

Mike Nagy, Green Party Environment Critic
Dennis Makar, CEO, World Oil Tools, Inc.
Anonymous Tarsands Worker
Nathan Paul Pinno, Alberta citizen
Ujjayant Chakravorty, Professor of Economics and Business at the University of Alberta
Herb Enns, Owner, Hepalta Purified Air Inc.,



AFRICA & MID-EAST



Pirates of the Red Sea

Tex Pasley, Annapolis, '11

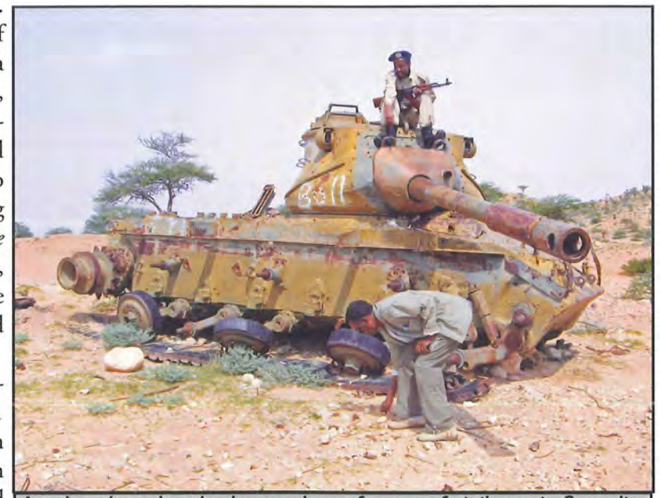
"Honestly, in Africa, it is very hard to see people putting their greed and personal motives aside," Michael Owora, a resident of Nairobi, Kenya, a country bordered by Somalia, says. "This is because a majority of the rulers or key individuals in power have this mentality of 'me, myself and I, and then my family and loyalists'."

And nowhere does this statement hold truer than in Somalia. Situated at the "Horn of Africa," where the Red Sea meets the Indian Ocean, this country of over 9 million people has, since a civil war in 1991, struggled to maintain a functioning government, leading *The Economist*, in a recent issue, to declare the country "the world's most utterly failed state."

After 17 years of division- a civil war in 1991 created a breakaway region called Somaliland, which has progressively gained international recognition, along with a few disputed regions- and a government whose legitimacy is in question, the country was in the spotlight again as a group of pirates attacked a Ukranian freighter full of military weapons.

The source of the pirates? Somalia. The capture of the Ukranian vessel was simply one of many attacks made by the pirates in the waters off Somalia over the past 10 to 15 years. The capture of the Ukranian ship has made the West stand up and demand action. And in this renewed attention, questions which never went away are now showing themselves again to be pertinent. But these are not questions that are only important to Somalia.

"Honestly, the well-being of Somalia matters a lot," Owora states. "Since there is no well-established government, there is a lot of lawlessness that leads to a large infiltration of small arms, such as hand guns, into Kenya. This causes a rise in insecurity as thugs have easy and cheap access to guns."


An abandoned tank, the product of years of civil war in Somalia.

The concern extends beyond East Africa, too. The pirates are attacking ships headed through the Suez Canal and the Red Sea, one of the world's busiest shipping lanes. The effect on global commerce is obvious.

What then, can be gleaned from the way the pirates act? They, not unexpectedly, are hard to reach, but in one of the few interviews they have given to Western journalists – to *The New York Times* – their spokesman, Sugule Ali, said they were like a "coast guard," patrolling the waters to keep illegal fishing and dumping under control, in lieu of any government regulation.

"Defending against illegal fishing, pollution of the waters, I support," says Ahmed Abdulle Buuwe, of Mogadishu, Somalia. "Getting money from it, I do not support."

The pirates, then, appear to be doing what a government would normally be responsible for, yet the pirates are acting without any legitimacy. So whatever noble aims the pirates may have, the overall response of the international community is one of fear.

"Piracy has had a major impact on the WFP's ability to get vital food supplies into Somalia," says Marcus Prior, of the United Nation's World Food Programme (UNWFP). "During a hiatus in the provision of escorts earlier this year, some shippers refused to load food for Somalia. During that period without escorts we were only able to move about 9,000 metric tons into Somalia--we now need to move something closer to 50,000 tons."

Analyzing these troubling numbers, it seems simple to say that the pirates actions are counter productive. Instead of acting as a pseudo coast guard, the pirates might focus their energy on supporting a government that is able to provide a legitimate coast guard. Support, which, according to some, is not absent from the people of Somalia. But rather, some fault lies outside of Somalia.

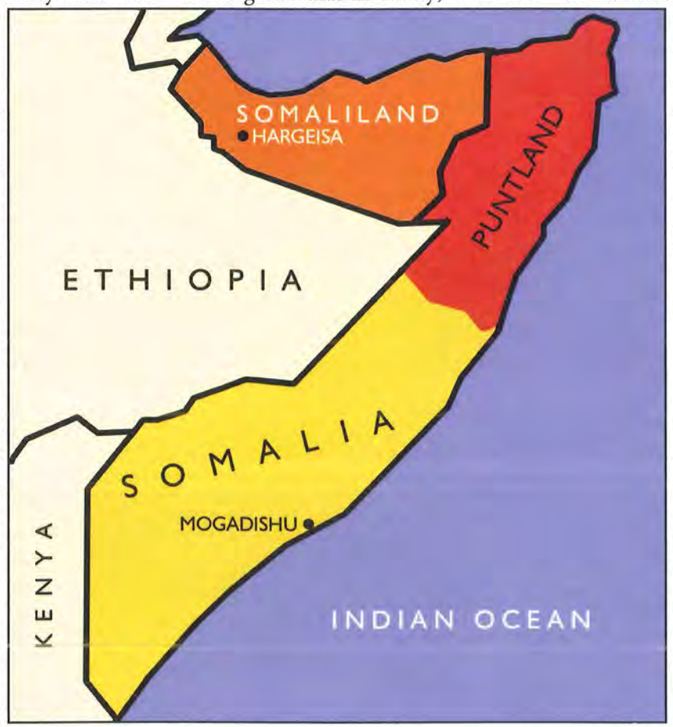
"The government lacks "positive" support from the international community," Buuwe says. "They tried their best given the circumstances. The current transitional government is capable of establishing order if given the positive support they require. Support was there in the early 90s, and it is there now."

The transitional government that Buuwe refers to is the internationally-backed government put in place in the past few years to give Somalia a base to work from and help it catch up with its African neighbors along with the entire international community. It is difficult to determine the success of the government at this moment, but without change on the part of citizens, such success would seem impossible.

"They say that the pirates are basically trying to etch a living because money is hard to come by," Owora says. "They say that there is a lot of lawlessness, but if people could put their greed and personal motives aside then they would all move forward. Once the transitional government can harmonize everyone and allow everyone to benefit, then we shall see peace in the country."

But this harmony might not be enough to overcome the difficulties that Somalia faces and has been facing. Multinational organizations such as the African Union and East African Community exist, but like the government of Somalia itself, one wonders how much positive effect is coming from these coalitions.

"The East African Community only exists on paper," Peter Ja Mbeka, of Mombasa, Kenya, states. "There is nothing like that in reality; there is a lot of mistrust, especially on economic issues. To us it doesn't exist."



And even with more established organizations like the United Nations, and richer, more powerful Western nations, there is a belief amongst people within the region that the efforts of these groups have little effect, or are in some way hurtful towards the progress of the region, and Somalia specifically.

"They [the West] are biased on religious issues, always partisan on Somali issues, and not ready to see Somalia get to its resources like uranium and oil," Buuwe says. "They stole, are stealing, and fear peace in Somalia."

It may be helpful to answer a basic question: What do we mean when speaking of the country of Somalia? This question is neither inane nor irrelevant. The present-day country of Somalia became an independent, sovereign state in 1960, combining the former colonies of British Somaliland and Italian Somaliland. In the wake of a civil war in 1991, the former British Somaliland (which now simply calls itself Somaliland) broke away from Somalia, declaring itself an independent state. Another smaller region called Puntland has declared itself an autonomous region from Somalia, although it does not seek independence like Somaliland. Puntland is home base of the pirates.

As Abdirashiid Mohed Adam, a resident of Somaliland – who describes himself as "ethnically, pure Somalilander – puts it: "I want to distance Somaliland from all other Somalis. In 1960, when Italian Somaliland won its independence, we thought we were all Somalis, and we wanted to unite with them. We united, and then misunderstandings happened, and wars happened."

So, unity could not be the sum of the answer, if it is even possible- which Adam, at least, does not believe to be the case. Perhaps in analyzing the state of the country, one must gain the proper perspective. The pirates say that they're trying to feed their families and protect their homeland- something which doesn't seem foreign to a citizen of any country.

Whether the forces bringing Somalia down come from within or without, it can be concluded that the pirates are symptomatic of a flaw in the system, a flaw in the decision-making process of people somewhere, that makes Somalia the perpetually failed state that it is.

"If we look at it realistically the people in power (even here in Kenya) sit in plush houses, eat good food, and have security details," Owora says. "But yet the real citizen is dying of hunger and in Somalia especially, if you don't die of hunger you'll most probably be shot down or blown up."

Yet in the face of "realism," somehow a wellspring of optimism lies at the root of any analysis of the country, however depressing it might be.

"Once the greedy power-brokers leave and people who want to see change come in, then the country shall take off. If politicians can forget about the me factor and focus on the grassroots where the real Somalis are, then I'm sure it can happen. It may not be today or tomorrow but who wouldn't want to see Somalia where America is in 50 years?" ✳

Somalia: A History of Division

July 1, 1960
Country of Somalia formed from the unification of British Somaliland and Italian Somaliland.

1969
Mohammed Siad Barre installs authoritarian socialist rule, bringing stability until 1991.

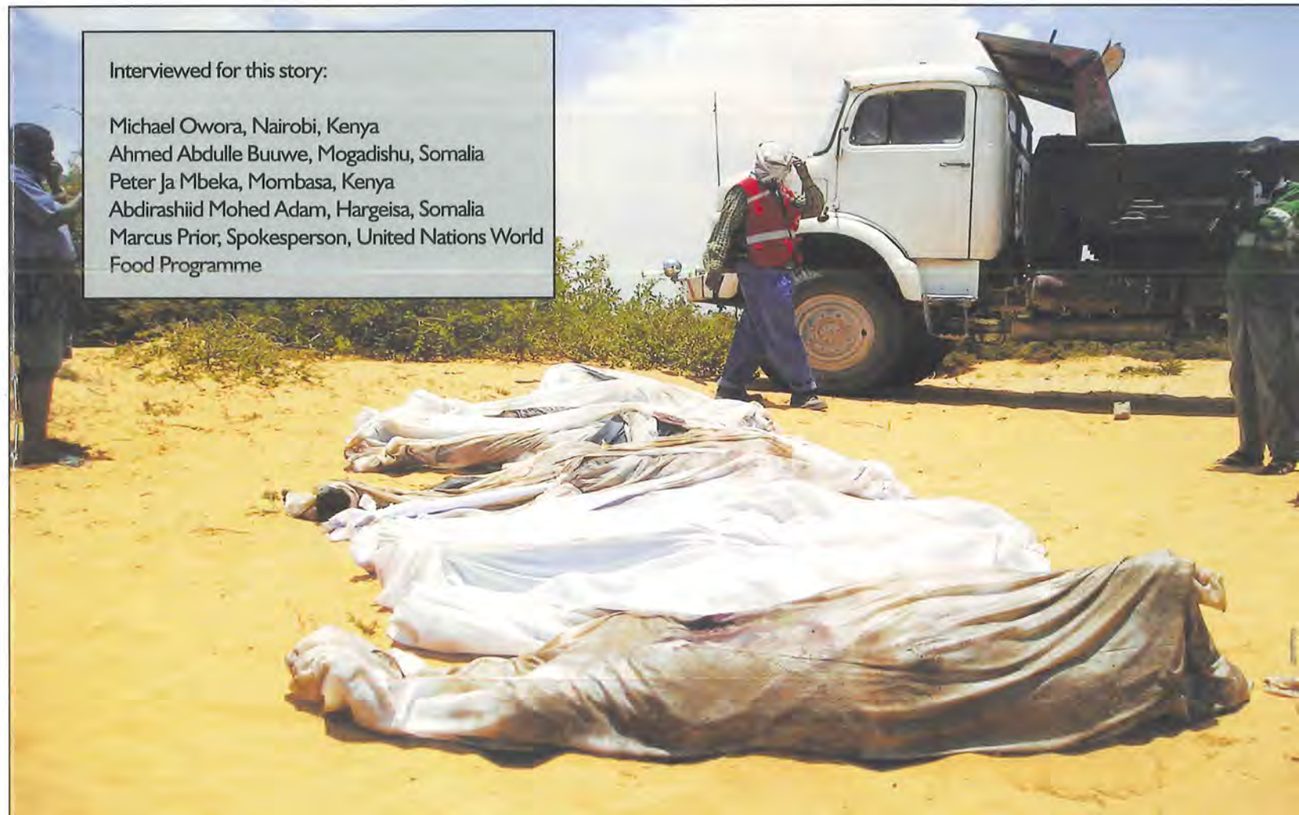
May 18, 1991
The country of Somaliland breaks away and forms a state separate from Somalia; no international recognition is given to the breakaway. This action coincides with a civil war between the two sections of the country. At this point, the government of Somalia ceases to function.

February 2006
The Parliament of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) meets for the first time on Somali soil. The TFG currently acts as the recognized governmental body in Somalia. The government was formed in October of 2004, and met in Kenya for the first year and a half of its existence.

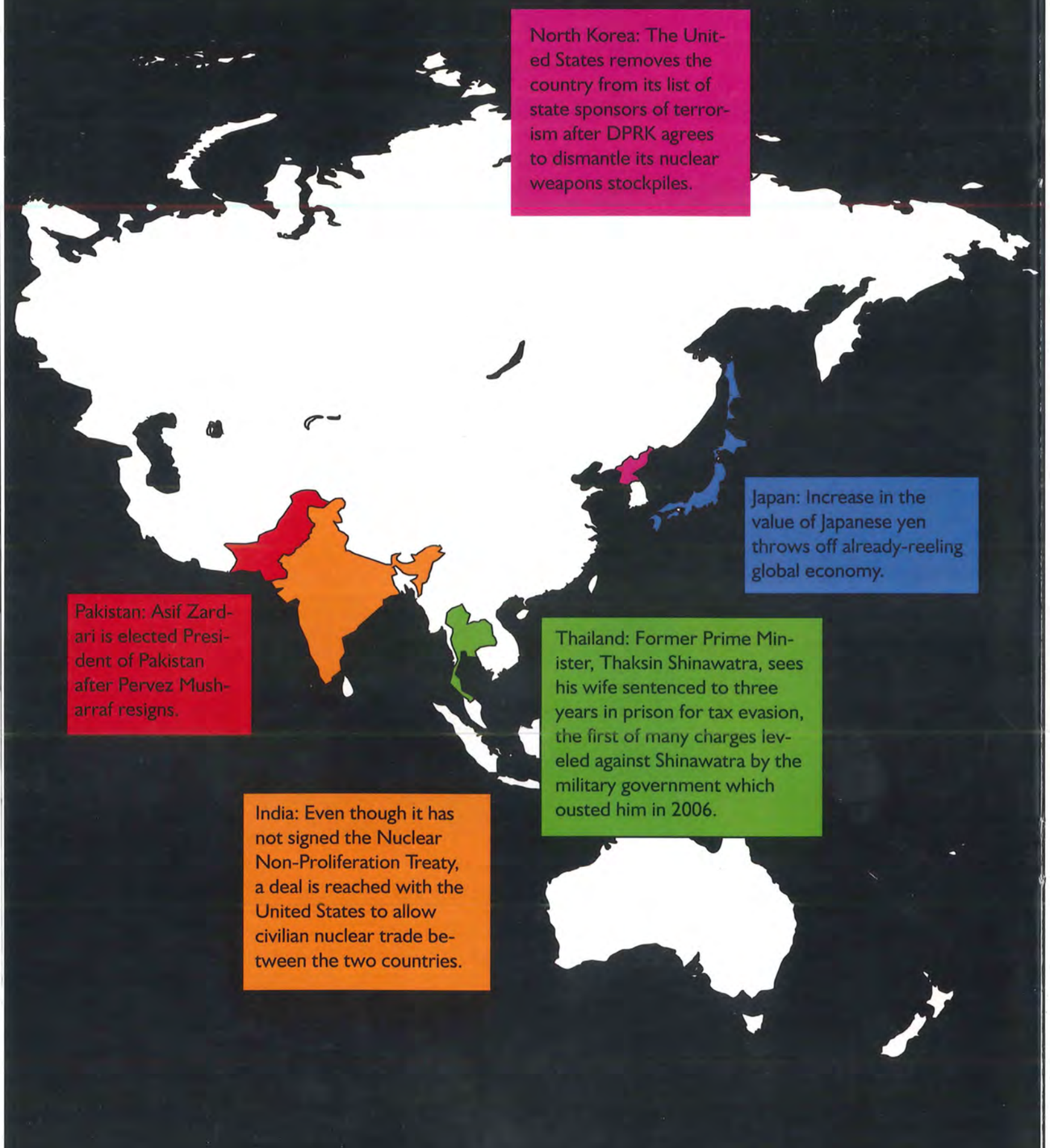
1960 — 2007

Interviewed for this story:

Michael Owora, Nairobi, Kenya
Ahmed Abdulle Buuwe, Mogadishu, Somalia
Peter Ja Mbeka, Mombasa, Kenya
Abdirashiid Mohed Adam, Hargeisa, Somalia
Marcus Prior, Spokesperson, United Nations World Food Programme



ASIA & OCEANIA



North Korea: The United States removes the country from its list of state sponsors of terrorism after DPRK agrees to dismantle its nuclear weapons stockpiles.

Japan: Increase in the value of Japanese yen throws off already-reeling global economy.

Pakistan: Asif Zardari is elected President of Pakistan after Pervez Musharraf resigns.

Thailand: Former Prime Minister, Thaksin Shinawatra, sees his wife sentenced to three years in prison for tax evasion, the first of many charges leveled against Shinawatra by the military government which ousted him in 2006.

India: Even though it has not signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, a deal is reached with the United States to allow civilian nuclear trade between the two countries.

Black Butterfly

Andrew Davenport, Annapolis, '10

Andrew Davenport explores the cultures of Indonesia and traditions associated with the dead, uncovering his own personal mortality.

A woman sells fresh fruit on the streets in Indonesia.

The sky is a blue I have not seen before, and for the first time in three weeks the air I am breathing is clean and cool. Immediately on all sides are rice paddies; I stand on a strip of earth between two trenches, and on either side the land falls away into channels carrying water into the fields. I have crossed oceans, spent hours on trains and days on boats, traversed mountains by bus. If I am traveling, why do I feel that I have arrived? This is Londa.

I would guess him to be in his mid to late-twenties. His skin is smooth and clean. His eyes are large and almond shaped; I cannot see the line where his iris ends and the pupil begins. His hair is black to match his dark eyes, and it is long and slightly wavy, thick and loosely bound. It looks shiny and smooth like his skin. He has a slight frame, a measured gait, and melodious, quiet speech. My guide is a man named Jolong.

One of the few unshakable truths haunting us all is our own mortality. We will all die. Strangely, we know absolutely nothing concerning what happens after death. The people of Tana Toraja have homes with roofs in the form of a half crescent. If you ask, they will tell you that man descended from the stars, and that his stay here is but a passing motion before finally ascending back to the heavens.

Londa is in Toraja; Toraja is in the Republic of Indonesia; I am in all of these places, and Jolong is talking to me about life and death. "When a family member dies, we keep the body in the house for a while before the funeral, sometimes for a year." I am more startled than anything else, unsure of how to fathom such proximity.

It is amazing how quickly a few men can kill, skin, and butcher a large animal. They use a sharp knife, half-way to being a sword; the blade worked from scrap metal salvaged from an old Land Rover; the wooden handle formed in the likeness of a parrot. Water buffalo are the largest, most expensive, and most prized of the sacrificial animals. The wealthiest families will slaughter up to one hundred, sometimes more. This is a small funeral by Torajan standards, as they have only five. A single quick stroke to the underside of the neck will within minutes bleed the animal out. After they have removed the skin, they disembowel and dismember the buffalo. In the end

all that is left in the mud is a horned head with glazed eyes staring blankly, and two large piles of partly digested grass emptied from its stomachs.

The Torajans believe that the deceased will ride on the back of the water buffalo back up to heaven from whence we all came. The slaughters take place in the muddy clearing in front of the family's main house. Surrounding the clearing are rough open-air pavilions made from bamboo. The men and women sit separately, but surprisingly, for a funeral, there is laughter and boisterous conversation all around. Clouds of smoke waft away from the men as they puff kretek (unfiltered clove cigarettes) and quaff palm wine out of tall pieces of bamboo cut from the surrounding forest. Visitors and people from surrounding villages have all come together here with the family of the deceased not to mourn but to celebrate. Everyone brings a gift, typically a carton of cigarettes, which are presented to the patriarch of the family. In return, the family feeds the community. Today there are perhaps 400 people gathered.

Indonesians prepare for an animal sacrifice in Toraja.

The scream of a terrified pig is ugly. Nobody else seems to take much notice, though, as several men carry out a pig tied down onto a bamboo litter. There is foam on its mouth; it shrieks and struggles in vain to escape. In Toraja, one doesn't kill buffalo and pigs in the same fashion. The man doing the slaughter is brawny, and looks to be in his forties. He smiles at me as I stand by him, and he encourages me to take photos of everything. No one here speaks English, and my Indonesian is rather limited, so our conversation is one mostly of comic facial expressions and head nods. As I look on, the man takes a small thin knife and sticks it into the pig's arm pit, severing a major artery. He steps on the pig and pumps his foot regularly to expedite its death. As the pig's screams turn to barely audible wheezes, its breathing labored, I feel a moment of terror as I recognize my own heart beating inside of me. We are all going to die. My Torajan friend looks up from his work and smiles again; his arms are shining and red up to the elbows as he lets go organ meat into bamboo tubes and lays them against hot coals to bake. In my reverie I missed the moment of death. Several people pick up the carcass and toss it onto an open fire. They bring down another pig, and the man readies his knife.

As I round a bend, the place to which Jolong has been leading me comes into view. It is a sheer cliff face, and carved into it are recesses holding effigies of the dead. At the base of this rock edifice is a cave entrance: "This is where the dead from my village are buried." On the left side of the cave entrance are several human skulls. There are cigarettes and pictures and coins scattered around the skulls; tokens for the dead. Inside the cave it is pitch black. Jolong lights a lantern and we begin our journey through the labyrinth of caskets, skulls, and other miscellaneous bones arranged haphazardly wherever the family of the dead can find a place. Jolong informs me that families of the dead come to visit the remains regularly, and to maintain the resting place. There are many dead here, and Jolong tells the story of many of them. "The two here, their families had already arranged marriages for them, so they killed themselves." I have no way to know whether or not Jolong is telling me the truth, or telling me what he thinks I, as an American, would like to hear. Walking through this cavernous gravesite with Jolong, I wonder suddenly if he has any family entombed here.

There is a part of me that wants to stay in these caves alone, in the dark, with the dead people from Jolong's village. I certainly don't want to die, but I also don't think I have an active fear of death. More than anything, I simply don't have to think about or encounter death at home in the United States all that often. My family is a small one, and in my lifetime I've had three members of it die. Yet I've never returned to visit any of their gravesites even once. I wonder if there is something the people of Toraja know about death that I as an American have somehow missed.

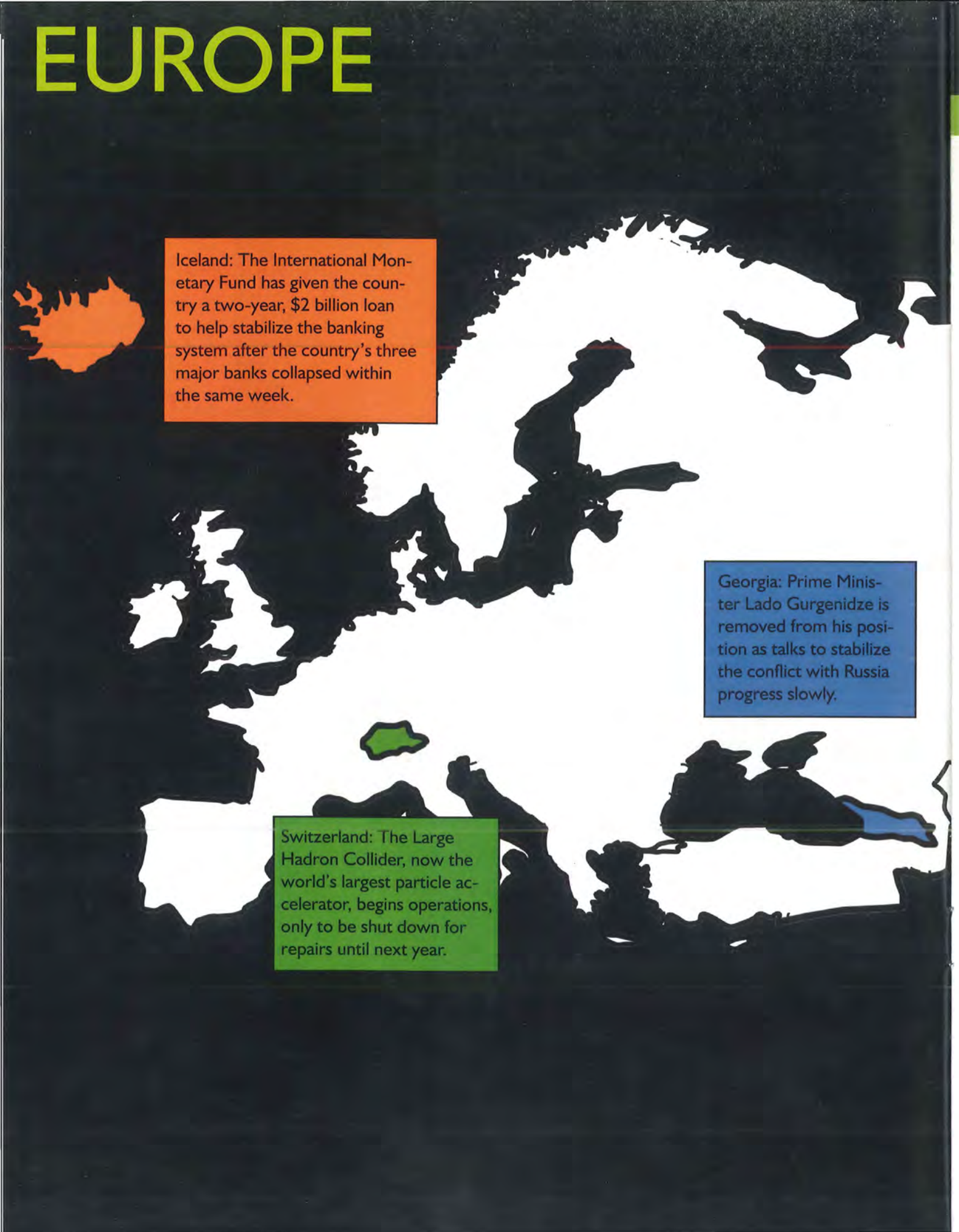
A pig roasting over a fire during a traditional ceremony in Indonesia.

As we come out of the cave the vigor of life feels like an assault. The blue of the sky, the verdant green of the flora, the gurgle and sparkle of the water moving in the rice paddies: they feel like a force unified against the muffled silence and darkness of my thoughts residing back in the cave. With the gift of life comes death; by being born our death is ensured. It occurs to me that the fact of our death is what allows us to enjoy this life. For without it, there would be nothing to fear, we would all have all the time in the world, and nothing would ever really be at stake. By involving themselves so much with death are the Torajan people thereby enriching their lives, making life more meaningful?

In the 2007 Lonely Planet guidebook to Indonesia, Tana Toraja is described as being "Macabre," which according to the Oxford English Dictionary is an adjective meaning "grim" or "gruesome." This description does not accord with my experience. There is nothing scary or ugly about the life of the Torajan people. The bounty of the land is abundant, yielding up cocoa, rice in plenty, some of the best coffee in the world, and strange, delicious fruit found nowhere else. The great majority of people are involved in the cultivation of the necessities of life, but they do not want for food. The sense of community is one of the strongest I have ever encountered. Spirituality and the everyday mundane are inseparable. The beauty and harmony of life here is a result of the honesty with which the people consider death. For if one was to truly understand how transient their life was, how could they spend it in frivolous pursuits? The simplest pleasures seem to be everywhere cherished in this land, whether it is a passing conversation on the road, a warm cup of coffee, or the beauty of the landscape.

Jolong and I reach the top of the small incline from which we had originally descended. I hand him a 50,000 Rupiah note, roughly five US Dollars, which was his asking price for guiding me. All of my senses feel acutely awake, but my head feels strangely empty and I am very tired. As I survey the landscape I have just left behind, I struggle to articulate to myself what it is I am feeling. With my peripheral vision, I catch sight of a large black butterfly moving by. It strikes me that this is the perfect synthesis of the problem I have been struggling with. A butterfly is delicate, short lived and beautiful, it is the embodiment of innocence; the color black is associated with death, evil, and mourning. The incongruity of a black butterfly is the incongruity of human life. Born to die, our lives transient but full of beauty: we are black butterflies. ✳

EUROPE



Iceland: The International Monetary Fund has given the country a two-year, $2 billion loan to help stabilize the banking system after the country's three major banks collapsed within the same week.

Georgia: Prime Minister Lado Gurgenidze is removed from his position as talks to stabilize the conflict with Russia progress slowly.

Switzerland: The Large Hadron Collider, now the world's largest particle accelerator, begins operations, only to be shut down for repairs until next year.

Enduring Invasion: Georgia's Fight for Unification

Erin Shadowens, Annapolis '12

"No one would imagine Russia would occupy your country," Mariam Aduashvili, a St. John's freshman from Tbilisi, Georgia explains, reclining on a bench outside of Francis Scott Key auditorium. "It's unbelievable. People were really scared."

Aduashvili smiles easily as she reminisces, describing the Georgia she knew before the August invasion.

"Beautiful, it's so beautiful."

A lot changed, fast.

"You wake up one morning and there's a war."

Overnight, Georgia transformed from a growing economy and prospective member of NATO into a war zone. The war became an inescapable reality. The Georgian government took over television stations and devoted coverage to either the ongoing battles or played war-themed movies like Braveheart or Troy.

"It made you feel like you were in the war. I wouldn't watch TV," Aduashvili says.

Surrounded by fear, citizens prepared for the worst.

"[There were] rumors that Russian forces would occupy Tbilisi."

Aduashvili recounts Georgians flooding and emptying markets, afraid their country would again succumb to the belligerence that dominated their politics for almost a decade. At the same time, the hostilities provoked a nationalist response from young Georgians. Following the Russian invasion,

"18, 19 year old guys volunteered to go to war. They didn't know how to shoot or anything, but that's what their father's did," Aduashvili says.

A reinvigorated separatist movement in the semi-autonomous Georgian regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia exacerbated an already strained relationship with the Georgian government. On August 1, Georgian forces engaged South Ossetia following accusations of violence against Georgian nationals. Russia initially employed only peacekeeping troops to support South Ossetia, however, by August 9, military forces were dispatched and the conflict expanded to the disputed province of Abkhazia.

"They [Russia] just want to take these regions for themselves," Sophie Kikava of Tbilisi, Georgia says. "Yes, maybe they want [independence]. But Georgian citizens also live in these two regions and they want to be a part of Georgia."

Despite popular support for independence in these regions, Kikava still objects to any sort of secession. "They [South Ossetia and Abkhazia] are Georgian territories and they have always been ours."

Well, not quite. After the fall of the Soviet Union, an independent Georgia claimed sovereignty over South Ossetia and Abkhazia--both of which contain a minority of ethnic Georgians. However, bloody hostilities governed relations between the provinces and Georgia. Cease-fire agreements in the mid-nineties provided for de facto independence, even though both South Ossetia and Abkhazia were still internationally considered part of Georgia.

"I am afraid we will lose Abkhazia and South Ossetia," Kikava admits. "They [the international community] will not fight with Russia for Georgia for two small Georgian territories. No one will do that."

French President Nicolas Sarkozy negotiated an EU-supervised cease-fire

agreement between Russia and Georgia. The deal required both countries to retreat to pre-war borders, excepting Russian peacekeeping forces. However, Russia officially recognized South Ossetian and Abkhazian independence on August 25 despite warnings from Western leaders and organizations, such as President George W. Bush and NATO.

"This aid is just money and humanitarian help," Kikava says. "We don't need money, we need political and military support. The Russian government knows that [the] West will confine itself with condemnation and small sanctions and with just words, not actions."

The issue at hand is then not of sovereignty, but leverage and power. For example, to see Georgia on a map is to see a geographic illustration of its primary difficulty. A small country nestled between Turkey, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Russia, it's hard to overlook how Russia towers above Georgia. This begs the question: why should Russia concern itself with a comparatively modest, independent Georgia?

"If they [Russia] will let go of Georgia, other regions [such as] Armenia and Chechnya...will try to break away too from Russian control," Kikava vehemently states, living in a city that has become a refugee camp.

It's easy to draw the comparison between the modern Kremlin government in Russia and the former Soviet Union. Russia's intervention in a sovereign nation's political affairs evokes the era of satellite countries, an era that tends to offend Western sensibilities. John McCain went as far as to say, "In the twenty-first century, nations don't invade other nations."

Political considerations aside, the Georgian people themselves have shouldered the burden of this war. Villages, especially those surrounding Gori-Variani, suffered the most damage due to Russian shelling. Aduashvili calls Gori, "beautiful, now it doesn't exist."

Refugees poured into Tbilisi from bombed villages, an experience Aduashvili regards as the most difficult. She recalls a lost five-year-old boy: "People wouldn't know where their parents were."

"Some school and children gardens [playgrounds] are occupied by refugees, [as well as] a few schools," Giga Khatiashvili describes downtown Tbilisi. "It's a problem for our nation, for all of us. Poor people, we are trying to help and support them. We see how people came to our city just with the stuff they could carry by [with their] hands or bodies...Me and my wife collected all [the] stuff we can share with [people] together in three big bags and gave it to the support center."

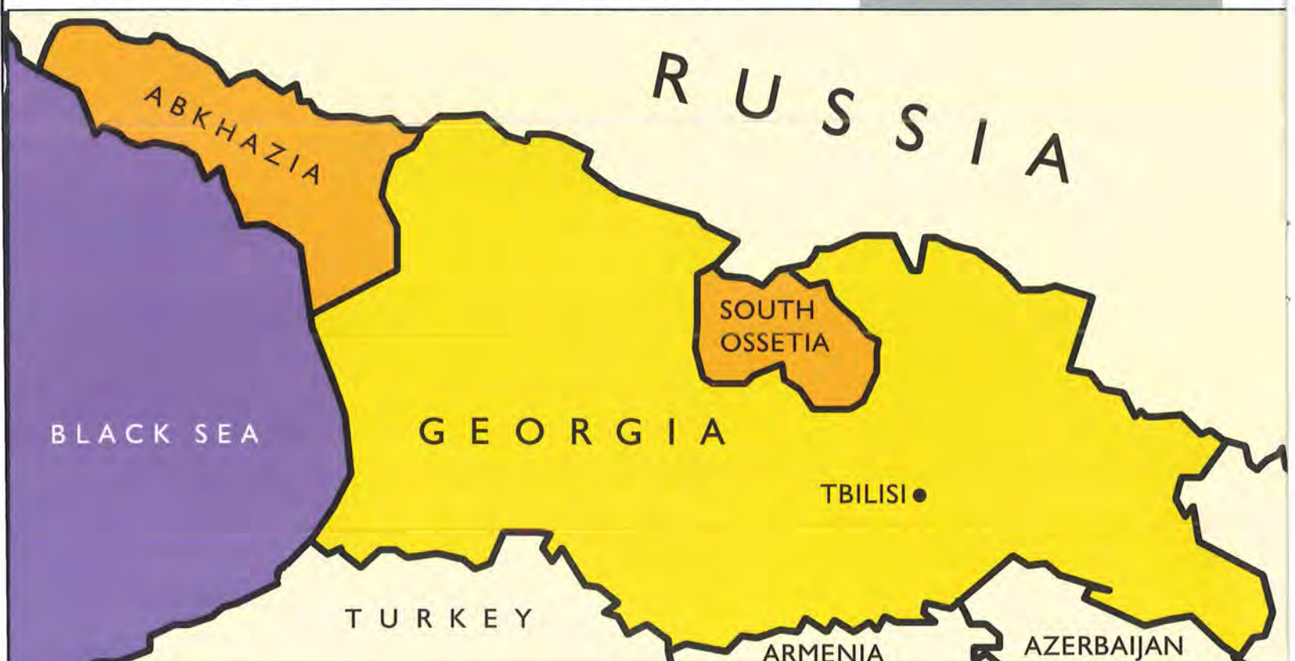
According to the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees, approximately twenty-thousand refugees have returned home. Although a positive development, Georgia must begin rebuilding their heavily damaged infrastructure.

"Well at this stage nothing much is done, just restoring some buildings and schools and building shelters for refugees," Kikava says.

Georgia's situation remains precarious, their future a maze of political and economic challenges. Although citizens show little faith in international support for a sovereign Georgia, Georgians like Khatiashvilli speak with a pride necessitated by their current circumstances.

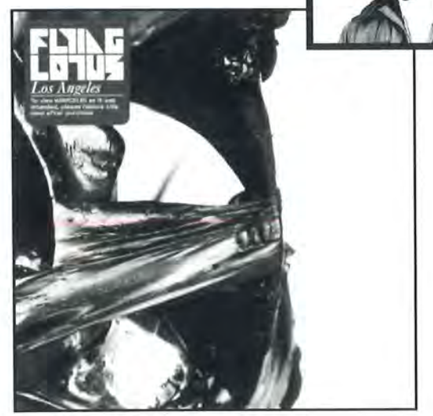
"I'm very thankful to Putin and Medvedev because...[they] unified all Georgians. Thank Americans! Thank Europe! Thank all you guys." ✳

Interviewed for this story:
Sophia Kikava, Tbilisi, Georgia
Giga Khatiashvili, Tbilisi, Georgia
Mariam Aduashvili, Tbilisi, Georgia
Merab Pachulia, Tbilisi, Georgia



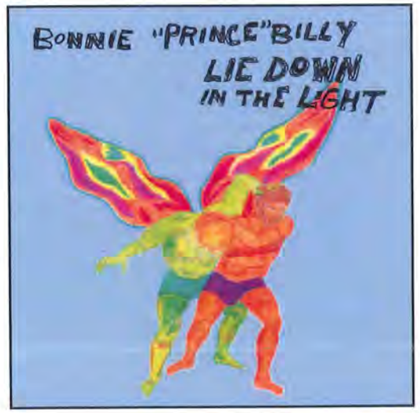
Cameron's Corner: Summer Albums

by Cameron Coates



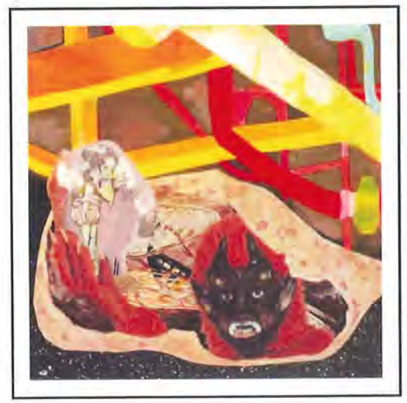
Flying Lotus – *Los Angeles*
June 10th 2008
I wish there was a better word than "electronica" to describe Flying Lotus. All those genres – techno, industrial, trance – imply a kind of sterile artificiality in their production and in their sound. Trashy Euro techno is always boring because it's souless. Heavy bass rhythm isn't music, it's just repetitive ad nauseam. Flying Lotus' music is just the opposite. *Los Angeles* feels organic and disheveled – layers of melody and sound are piled almost haphazardly over syncopated beats. Clapping and clanking, tribal drums and splashing water replace a lot of the traditional, manufactured beats of slick-production mainstream electronica. Sometimes Los Angeles leans a little too heavily on the wierd-for-the-sake-of-wierd aestetic, though, and the result is a few duds. Songs like "Melt!" and "GNG BNG," with droning drums and gratingly obnoxious sitar samples sound more like a headache than music. But over all, *Los Angeles* feels natural, chaotic, and beautiful – a soundtrack to chemical reactions.

Bonnie 'Prince' Billy – *Lie Down In The Light*
May 20th, 2008
Will Oldham has averaged about an album a year for the past fifteen years, not including countless EPs, live albums, and collaborations. He's worked his way into a comfortable, folky groove that suits him well. But it's suprising that he's been able to keep it up for this long and with such persistent regularity. Doesn't it get boring to make the same music over and over again? *Lie Down In The Light* is the kind of gentle, meandering folk that doesn't work particularly hard at anything. At best, songs like "Easy Does It" are plesantly unoffensive. At worst, you get a track like "So Everyone," the first two minutes of which is just Oldham hitting the same chord again and again. This is not the kind of music that compliments a shaky, wavering voice like Oldham's. It's a shame, because the track picks up towards the middle, but it gets skipped every time I listen to the record. I can't stand songs that demand waiting around for "when it gets good." Similarly, I'm not particularly fond of records that don't have the balls to be more than just easy listening.

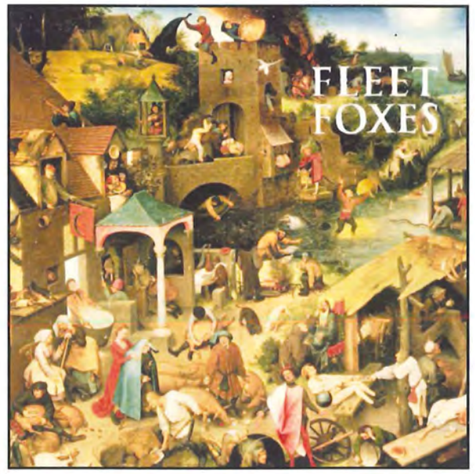


Wolf Parade – *At Mount Zoomer*
June 17th, 2008

Sophmore-album syndrome strikes again. It might be good, but in comparison to 2006's *Apology to the Queen Mary* it just falls flat. Where's the raw excitement and emotion that made every song on that album feel like the end of the world? Dan Boeckner and Spencer Krug sound bored, and even the good stuff suffers from it.



Fleet Foxes – *Fleet Foxes*
June 3rd, 2008



Fleet Foxes' self-titled debut is so refreshingly confident and well-executed, I think this one might be my favorite of the bunch. They've described their music as "baroque harmonic pop jams." That seems a little excessive. It feels more folk than "pop jam," but there is an element of the orchestral to the choral harmonies between Robin Pecknold and his bandmates. Pecknold's angelic vocals are the real force behind Fleet Foxes. While the choral pieces swell and fall majestically, Pecknold's solo songs have in contrast an eerie sense of enormous, empty space. The album sounds like it was recorded in a cathedral, and you can hear Pecknold's voice filling the entire room, echoing in every direction. The man puts it best himself on closing track "Oliver James": "Back we go to your brother's house emptier, my dear / The sound of ancient voices ringing soft upon your ear."

Through the Lens

Georgia and Russia once celebrated the 200th anniversary of the Treaty of Georgievsk, a treaty which in 1783 established Georgia as a protectorate of Russia. This memorial to that treaty, which was constructed in 1983, lies in the Caucasus Mountains.

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