

THE COLLEGE HILL INDEPENDENT

A PRIMER ON REPORTING DURING YOUR SEMESTER ABROAD

The College Hill Independent (the Indy) is a weekly publication put out by Brown and RISD students. In recent years, the Indy has provided a home for stories written by students abroad. We hope to make this a signature feature of our paper. This primer is intended to encourage you to write while you are abroad, to introduce you to the Indy, and to provide some basic tips to students who are unfamiliar with nonfiction and journalistic writing. At the very least, **PLEASE EMAIL US AND LET US KNOW WHERE YOU WILL BE!!! IT IS INVALUABLE TO US!!!**

Reporting on issues while you are abroad can bring you closer to pursuing the reasons that took you away from Brown in the first place. You are there to learn about a culture that lives beyond dormitories. In your host country, government will operate differently. Social taboos might be jarring. And there will be a time when you have more questions about something than you have answers. Every traveler seems to have this experience and these moments often make for the best jumping off points for an article. The stories provided as examples in this primer were born out of a moment like this.

Enjoy your time abroad!

The College Hill Independent

Website: theindy.org

Email: theindy@gmail.com or indyabroad@gmail.com

Basic Indy Guidelines:

- The Indy has a word limit of 9,000 characters including spaces for every story. Shorter stories, however, are welcomed and encouraged. Extremely short submissions (a few hundred words) can also be posted to the website if they are not long enough for print.
- Please include your name, your year, and a byline, which can be fun and creative (i.e. Robert Frost, B'09, wishes he took I-95).
- It goes without saying, but when using information from other newspapers, publications or any other source you must attribute. (i.e. The New York Times currently reported that the moon is closer than scientists previously thought).
- Once you have decided to write a story, email an editor BEFORE YOU START WRITING. Your first contact should be indyabroad@gmail.com, but feel free to try the following addresses:

Features: indyfeatures@gmail.com

Opinions: indyopinions@gmail.com

Literary: indyliterary@gmail.com

General: theindy@gmail.com

- **REGISTER WITH THE INDY'S ABROAD DEPARTMENT!!!** Each semester we generate and maintain a list of the different countries where Brown students are studying. PLEASE send an email to the Abroad section at indyabroad@gmail.com with your NAME and your COUNTRY. This will allow us to contact you if we hear of any stories in your country. **OIP cannot give out the names of students, so please email us even if you don't think you'll write. You never know what will come up.**

What is a Features Story?

- Unlike the “hard news” you typically find on the front page of a newspaper, feature stories have less of an expiration date and tend to be longer. They have a timeless quality about them and can be read weeks after they are published and enjoyed just the same. In this regard, they are also more in-depth than the average “hard news” story, which only intends to inform the reader about a news event. **A feature has a beginning, middle, and an end.**
- Feature stories benefit from subjects or characters whose voices are used in the story. People directly involved in your story, or most affected by the subject you are writing on, make for great characters and entry points into your story. A story about a school crisis, for instance, can start with a single student and move out to show the entire school.
- When appropriate, defer to experts to provide information, context, and clarity but be careful to not make it “a talking heads piece.” Too many experts or voices can confuse the reader, especially if the story jumps back and forth between them.

It's all about the “Nut Graph:”

- Early on, you need to answer the question that your reader will have before he or she even begins: “Why should I care about this story?” You have very little time to grab a reader’s attention and should answer this question at the start of your story. This will also help you to focus your story on a specific topic.
- Even if you start your story with a vignette or a scene that paints a picture (which is an extremely effective technique), you need to include what “the nut graph” in the FIRST THREE PARAGRAPHS to answer this and questions to orient your reader.
- The “nut graph” answers the “five Ws,” which are essentially the ABCs of journalism.
 - Who* is involved in the story?
 - What* is this story about?
 - When* is this taking place (dates could be helpful, for instance, if talking about legislation or elections)?
 - Where* is this taking place?
 - Why* should the reader care?

Final Points on Style and Reporting:

- Paragraphs should be between 1-3 sentences. When printed in a column format, two or three sentences are as thick as a paragraph in a document like this one. Short paragraphs are appealing to the eye and make for an easier read.
- Do your own reporting. It is OK to refer to publications, but part of the advantage you have is being a “foreign correspondent.” Saying that you are writing for a publication in the US (which you are) could help to open many doors. If press passes are needed, the Managing Editors are happy to write a letter on your behalf.
- When quoting someone, include as much background information as possible (and relevant). If they are students, cite their major, their year in school, and their institution of study. If relevant include things such as age, hometown or nationality, and profession.
- Start small and go big. As mentioned, characters and vignettes are great entry points for feature stories. Do not make them too long (vignettes should not be more than three paragraphs) and to place them quickly in the broader context of your story.
- Make your stories about more than just your own journey and observations. Make them about the people and the subjects you encounter.
- Writing in the first person is fine *if* your point of view is relevant to the story (use your judgment on this). If writing a feature, omit opinionated sentences.
- If you are interviewing a subject, try to meet in a neutral setting such as a coffee shop rather than a home.

Email The College Hill Independent with any questions.

ENJOY YOUR TIME ABROAD!

RUSSIA'S SUMMER OF (MARITAL) LOVE: REVIVING RUSSIAN IDENTITY, ONE WEDDING AT A TIME

Joy Neumeyer

September 18, 2008



THEIR faces smiled from bus stops, from escalators, from sidewalks, a vision of Russian purity alongside the leggy glitz of *Sex and the City: The Movie* posters. The young groom's arms gently encircled his bride's slender white bodice, their steady gaze suggesting a secret joy known only to the young newlywed. With the historic golden needle of St. Petersburg's Admiralty spire gleaming in the background, they heralded a message more poetic than that of any dubbed popcorn flick. "We choose," their poster proclaimed, "love, family and fidelity."

Until seeing such ads, most Russians had never heard of the Day of Love, Family and Fidelity, a holiday that banners pasted above sidewalks and strung above streets informed them would take place on July 8. Celebrations from Moscow to the Pacific port of Vladivostok included such events as homily plays, pop

performances and the presentation of medals to couples married over 25 years. With such displays, the Russian government positioned the holiday's message to young people to tie the knot and start procreating as the cultural keystone of a larger sociopolitical package addressing Russia's current demographic crisis, which Prime Minister Vladimir Putin identified in 2006 as "the gravest problem facing modern Russia."

The holiday was new. But in placing responsibility for the survival of Russian population and identity in the bedrooms of young people, the Russian state was in fact retrofitting an old Soviet narrative. Typically drawn upon in times of transition or upheaval in which leaders relied on the peaceful home life of the 'ideal citizen' for the realization of a more perfect state, this concept posited private and public interests as identical and each citizen's romantic life as a matter of civil duty. But in the post-Soviet, sex-saturated society of today's Russia, the problems of marketing old narratives to a new generation multiply in a familiar disconnect between state edict and real life, as the government attempts to seduce a savvy 21st-century audience with 20th-century moves.

SO LONG, ST. VALENTINE

Organizers have noted that the holiday offers a Russian alternative to St. Valentine's Day, which the State Duma recently denounced as "inconsistent with Russian cultural values" in a proposal to outlaw its celebration in schools. Beyond its role as a response to an immediate population problem, the holiday's inspiration from the country's Russian Orthodox past places the day more broadly in the revived conservative bent of Putin's Russia, which looks to cues from the country's cultural past to fill the identity vacuum left by the Soviet Union's collapse and rebuild Russian dignity in the face of Western cultural hegemony.

For centuries, July 8 has stood as the feast-day of St. Prince Pyotr and his wife Fevroniya, a canonized couple who died on that same day in 1228 and serve as the guardians of family and sweethearts. The holiday's organizing committee (headed by President Dmitri Medvedev's wife, Svetlana) engineered the feast day's secular repackaging as a response to Russia's current demographic crisis: analysts estimate the country will lose anywhere from 20 to 50 percent of its population by 2050 due to low birth rates and high death rates (especially among working-age males) from factors like alcohol and poverty. However, the revamped holiday retains the full, vocal backing of the Orthodox Church, as seen in a statement of support on the Moscow Patriarchate's official website praising the holiday's response to the country's need for "clear indicators that determine the meaning and role of the inner life of the family."

While promoted as a stand-alone holiday that would assume a yearly place in Russian culture, the Day of Family, Love and Fidelity is part of a bigger cultural and political movement the government heralds as "The Year of the Family." This tour de force combines concrete measures such as financial incentives for mothers having two or more children with cultural coups like the new holiday. The state hopes thus to combat the demographic problems facing a troubled society with the image of a resurgent Russia leading a new generation into a more stable future.

This trend emphasizing conservative family values has given birth to such movements as a 2005 Moscow city hall ad campaign warning that condoms don't offer complete protection and advocating monogamous relationships, and a week in the Krasnodar region when women will be encouraged to have abortions for medical reasons only. Perhaps most colorful is the "Conception Day" holiday inaugurated in 2007 by Governor Sergei Morozov in the Ulyanovsk region, which encourages couples to "give birth to a patriot on Russia Day" by having the day off to procreate on September 12, exactly nine months beforehand. Women patriotic

enough to give birth on Russia Day are honored with such material rewards as refrigerators, televisions, and (the grand prize, awarded to the mother judged most respectable by the event's committee) a UAZ Patriot, a Russian SUV model.

SVETLANA MEDVEDEVA OR SARAH JESSICA PARKER?

Introducing the "Year of the Family" at its opening ceremony, then-President Putin emphasized the inherent connection between healthy families and a healthy state. The family, he declared, is "where (the young's) eyes are opened and they learn a valuable lesson, namely one that begins with the Motherland," since "it is precisely in the family circle that the very first civil impulses... are felt." In highlighting this connection, Putin have drawn upon a Soviet narrative of appropriate romantic behavior first fashioned by Stalin and expanded by Khrushchev into "Communist morality." In this trope, the private lives of individual couples were invested with the responsibility of carrying out the goals of the ideal Soviet state, returning home from a day of hearty Soviet labor to create industrious children. Soviet leaders often drew upon this narrative in times of transition, such as the 50s and 60s, when Khrushchev sought to rely on the commitment of individual citizens rather than repressive Stalinist controls.

The emphasis Putin and the Moscow Patriarchate place on young people's responsibility to build proper romantic relationships signals a clear embrace of the Communist morality narrative that historian Deborah Field describes in her 1998 essay "Irreconcilable Differences." This concept explains that all members of society were "authorized to monitor and intervene in people's private lives," with everyone charged in enforcing harmonious relations, "eliminating the possibility of internal conflict and ambivalence." New symbols such as the Reconciliation Bench installed in honor of the Day of Love, Family and Fidelity in Moscow-- where quarreling couples are physically brought to emotional harmony in public

view by the bench's sloping sides--resound with Communist morality's old emphasis on harmony over conflict, reason over emotion, and the role of the whole watchful community in ensuring the individual couples' proper behavior.

However, the problems associated with the Communist morality narrative since the 50s multiply with the narrative's awkward retrofitting to a twenty-first century, post-Perestroika society. In an interview with the Independent, Field noted how Khrushchev's touting of "responsible love" over "irresponsible passion" resulted in "two conflicting discourses: what the state was telling people and what people were being exposed to" in popular culture. Without coercive Stalinist machinery to ensure obedience of these norms, Khrushchev's attempt to impose a reworked Communist morality ended with youth's ultimate refusal to accept its vision of state-gear'd disinterest in personal emotional life, with serious consequences for their support of Khrushchev's broader aims. In 2008, as Russian teenagers line up to watch Cynthia Nixon discuss bikini waxing on the silver screen, the alternative discourse about sex and individualism is racier and more accessible than ever before, heightening the difficulties first encountered in the Khrushchev era of imposing a heavy-handed narrative on a freethinking populace.

I SAVED THE MOTHERLAND AND ALL I GOT WAS THIS LOUSY T-SHIRT

The Day of Love, Family and Fidelity's promoters have difficulty escaping the deflated symbolism that history has shown can result from selling cultural dictates to young people from the top down. Today as in the 50s, a rift stretches between those who market the family narrative and those who consume it. The holiday's organizers expressed confidence that the audience at whom the holiday was aimed were successfully captivated. "It's totally obvious that young people support it," Lyudmila Guseva, the head of the city hall department for youth and family policy,

told the Moscow Times, citing their commitment to the holiday's stated values.

Although celebrations at St. Petersburg's Peter and Paul Fortress brimmed with squadrons of young people enlisted to pass out free buttons and t-shirts, some young people seemed less engaged with the holiday's message. Irina Korovina, a student living in Saransk, a town near Moscow, told the Independent that to her, the day was "nothing," an event which she and her peers only found out about several days beforehand and which held no special significance. Though some of her friends attended the pop concerts and other events staged in her town, she surmised that the day served more as "one more opportunity to have fun" than as a meaningful event.

Without the life-encompassing strength of old Soviet organizations like the Young Pioneers and the Komsomol, where constant activities filled and defined the young citizen's daily life from earliest childhood, the conservative state messages of the new holiday become lofty ideals that may fail to secure active involvement. Youth movements such as Nashi espouse many of the same ideals of patriotic morality as those the Day of Family, Love and Fidelity promote. Their popularity indicates a willingness on the part of young Russians to engage with the Kremlin's bid at cultural identity through nationalism under the banner of conservative family values. But without offering young people ways to engage with their nation's revamped self-identity that are stronger than a recycled narrative packaged in holiday wrapping, Russia's quest to build a new generation of patriots might leave the state standing at the altar.

**YOU'RE INVITED TO RING IN CONCEPTION DAY '09 WITH
JOY NEUMEYER B '10.**

KENYA'S POST-ELECTION STORM

Michael Gonda

April 3, 2008



IN THE VILLAGE in Western Province, Kenya where I lived and taught English for four months, everyone had a method for predicting the afternoon rains. Some would focus on the wind blowing off Lake Victoria. If it ever blew east, people would say we're in for it. My host father relied on the clouds that gathered in the west; he cancelled any plans for farm work if they were teeming when he woke up.

After a storm, people gathered to discuss the signs they'd missed, and brainstorm some new approaches. Those on a winning side seemed to say, in zealous gestures: if only you would look at nature through my eyes, you would never be taken by surprise again.

I think of this attention to environmental subtleties in terms of the post-election violence that stunned Kenya into paralysis during January and February. It was an unforeseen storm like no other before. More than 1,000 Kenyans were killed, and 350,000 were displaced after the contentious and unquestionably rigged elections.

SIGNS

On the eve of the primary elections in November, Michael Mwimahli, a poet turned English teacher, was standing with me as I watched a group of mothers collect bribes at the school gates.

Since I had arrived in September, men in pickup trucks had been passing through Sidikho, the village where I lived, outfitted with signs for the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM), the dominant party of Western Province. They would stop for a few minutes outside the school, shout through megaphones and throw a few thousand-shilling bills to the crowd before moving to their next stop. Most of the men were drunk, their orange t-shirts soaked in a heady mix of sweat and changa, the local brew made from anything that ferments.

I heard these gatherings were ending fatally in other villages. One person would dash away with the bills before someone could bring the change, and the crowd would hunt him down, stoning him or beating him to death. With the general elections two months away, tales of these periodic killings were already commonplace.

These stories were little more than fodder for lunchtime conversation in the teachers' lounge--brought up nonchalantly, as though expected during election season. If anyone believed that this was a sign of larger tensions brewing, nobody admitted it.

In my apartment in Providence is a February issue of *The Economist*. The headline reads "Kenya Descends into Hell." When I look at it, Michael's voice rings in my ear: "This will settle down," he told me. The men in the pickup truck were rounding the last hillock. "You will see. Kenyans are a peaceful people."

THE ETHNIC MAKINGS OF A STORM

Politics, like a great deal in Kenya, falls along ethnic lines. Among the 42 distinct ethnic groups or 'tribes' in the country, the Kikuyu are the largest and most powerful. They have dominated the highest echelons of economic and political circles since the country's independence 45 years ago. Two of Kenya's three presidents have been Kikuyu.

The second dominant tribe is the Luo, which has held few major offices in government, and never the presidency. Many attribute this to the poverty that afflicts Western Province, an area known as Luo country. All this seemed on the verge of change with Raila Odinga, a Luo who was poised to clutch the presidency last December.

Dr. Richard Lobban, director of African and Afro-American studies at Rhode Island College, believed an Odinga victory was all but certain in the days before the election. "Everyone was expecting the Luos to win," he said. "They thought they'd win, and they probably did win."

HELL BREAKS LOOSE

On December 29, 2007, despite Odinga's 18-point lead the previous day, the Election Commission of Kenya (ECK) announced that President Mwai Kibaki was the victor, with 1.5 million votes that had appeared overnight.

In Luo-dense regions, particularly Western Province, people took to the streets. For a year, they had been depending on Odinga to storm Harambee House--the Kenyan equivalent of the White House--and anoint them with all the favors that had been given to Kikuyus under Kibaki.

On the morning of December 29, after the mysterious 1.5 million votes, the ECK extinguished any chances of an Odinga, or Luo, victory. They promptly declared Kibaki the victor, and he was sworn in one hour later. It was strategic in closing off any chances for a recount. According to Kenyan law, once the president takes the oath, the only outlet for appeal is the court--a circuit in Kenya that is known for its loyalty to the government.

Machete-wielding mobs took to the streets and began burning Kikuyu businesses and homes. Kikuyus in Western Province were forced to seek refuge in police camps, as many were unable to afford a flight to a different part of the country. In a matter of days, the mobs overtook the country's understaffed civil structure, a mixture of its army and police.

Last week, I spoke with Jeremiah Korungani, a friend I met in Kenya who has homes in Kakamega and Kisumu, two hubs in Western Province. On the second day of violence he had to fly his wife, a Kikuyu, and their newborn child to Nairobi. I asked whether the headlines like those from The Economist were accurate or sensational. "It was real," he told me. "In Kakamega, nobody could get food. People were looting and nobody was willing to open their shops. Everything was at a standstill. We had to stay indoors and in the distance you could hear the gunshots, people screaming and being maimed. It was bad. It was really, really bad."

The prices of simple necessities tripled and quadrupled overnight--and have yet to

go down--and movement between cities became impossible once mobs took hold of the highways. For two months this was the status quo while Kibaki and Raila were locked in bitter negotiations for a power-sharing deal. Finally, Kofi Annan was brought in.

"If Kofi Annan hadn't come," Jeremiah said, "people could still be dying." On February 28, Odinga and Kibaki signed the National Reconciliation Accord. It decreed a 50-50 power-sharing deal between the President's "Party of National Unity" (PNU) and Raila's party, ODM. The most notable outcome of the accord was the creation of the office of prime minister, the position Odinga will now hold.

The accord put an end to the majority of violence across the country, and Kenya receded from the world stage as an African country plummeting into chaos. The country's peace now hangs on two opposing parties sharing the levers of government equally. Everyone, meanwhile, is waiting to see how the two will play together, taking brief glances at the bloody wake left after two months of violence.

CAUSES OF THE STORM

On the surface, it's easy to blame the violence on the rigged election. It left a throng of Luo, as well as members of other tribes, feeling hopeless about a day when Kikuyu no longer dominate the government. But the truth is that the elections were just a spark. The underlying problems were present long before the polling stations opened in December.

Dr. Lobban of Rhode Island College shudders at the use of the word 'tribalism' to explain the post-election mayhem. He vehemently denies that this violence can be boiled down to simple 'ethnic clashing.'

"If you see ethnicity as the primordial factor," he said, "you overlook class."

According to Lobban, economic disparities, which transcend ethnic divisions, were the driving force behind Kenya's violence. Instead of Luo versus Kikuyu, Lobban sees a war between the elite and the impoverished.

"If the ruling class, or the ruling tribe, practices nepotism, then people start realizing things along ethnic lines. But it begins with lack of access, not some inherent disdain between groups," he said. Lobban didn't expect this to incite the sort of killings that were reported in January and February, but he was not surprised that it did.

"The system is hanging together with chicken wire and chewing gum," he said. "You have one incident like the election and it all goes into free-fall."

Mark Barrah, a fourth-generation white Kenyan who has served in the British Royal Navy and now runs security and safari operations out of Nairobi, sees another reason for the violence. For him, the root of it lies in land struggles begun after independence.

Jomo Kenyatta, Kenya's first president, gave large plots of land that previously belonged to other tribes to his fellow Kikuyu in the mid-1960s. When Kenyatta gave this land away, there was little resistance from the tribes that owned it. The country had a population of 7.5 million, and land was not a huge issue. But four decades later, the population is conservatively estimated at 39 million.

"This makes land a hugely significant issue," Barrah said, "especially in places like Eldoret where land is good and fertile."

He believes that these issues of land, and ideas of ancestral ownership to plots, bred jealousy and hatred between Kikuyu and neighboring tribes. This began with the country's independence, and "the election provided the perfect trigger," Barrah

said.

LOOKING FORWARD

There is no consensus on where Kenya is heading. It is still dangerous for Kikuyus in Kakamega and Kisumu, and most have lost their shops to owners of other tribes. The government has assembled committees to help with reconciliation efforts and relocate families, but most in Nairobi are waiting for Odinga and Kibaki to successfully assemble a cabinet before they embark on a cleanup. Dr. Lobban, a proclaimed "Afri-optimist," said it best when he invoked the Chinese characters for crisis: "disaster" and "opportunity."

"That's where we are in Kenya. We're in crisis. But if they respond adequately, and they begin to reverse the injustices of class, land and favoritism that have existed since the days of independence, this could produce great things."

MICHAEL GONDA B'09 is listening to Circle of Life.