



FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

The question implicitly posed in Seyward Darby's provocative cover story *Crossing Into Genocide* challenges us to consider the inextricable ties between ethnicity, religion and politics. Putting aside for a moment the painful truth about the atrocities of Saddam Hussein the question is put to us, when is a counterinsurgency also genocide?

This question has no easy answer. So many modern clashes arise out of generational ethnic conflicts, passed down through families and communities, to the point that many of the young men who fight in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, stand watch on the border of Pakistan and India, or North and South Korea, were yet-to-be-born when the political machinations which bore the status quo were first undertaken. Yet they have been taught to hate and mistrust and to fight the 'enemy.' If that enemy happens to all bear a self-same ethnicity, will the global community really act against the 'genocide'?

No one can doubt the global desire to avoid such considerations. While nation builders have finally come to conclude that democracy must be promoted at all costs, even when they despise the officials that the people choose to elect, these same political architects have concluded that when it comes to liberty for minority ethnic groups, these

fledgling democracies cannot bear the responsibility. So the prescription is to balkanize: to keep people with ingrained racial and ethnic hatreds apart. And knowing what we do of the ethnic conflicts which persist, can they be blamed?

That fundamental question, "Where should solutions come from?" underpins many of the controversies in public affairs today. The articles in this issue reflect the rising tension between social policies imposed from the top-down and those built from the bottom-up, exposing their strengths and weaknesses when addressing very different problems.

Jane Zhu tackles the tug-of-war between the state of South Africa and its grassroots NGOs over how best to address the AIDS crisis.

Karen Schroeder's article on policies regarding obesity makes the compelling point that the government needs to do more to help to fight the fast-spreading epidemic. Stephanie Dreifuss sees a similar role for the government when it comes to limiting damage awards for malpractice lawsuits, noting how they reduce the cases of frivolous claims and thereby reduce costs for malpractice insurance for doctors.

The other articles in this issue show situations where top-down approaches fail. In his article on the principle-agent problem in aid, Torren Lewis argues compellingly that

only through approaches which engage the community in ownership can it truly be effective. Jonathan Fox similarly sees a renewed focus on integrating prisoners into the community as a key to reducing recidivism and alleviating the pressure of overcrowding on US prisons. Tyson Barker looks at how French citizens influenced the French government to rededicate itself to its principles of liberty and freedom of expression in the wake of the law of February 23, 2005. Finally, Sally Ong travels to Liberia and reports first hand on how the efforts of NGOs can fill the gaps left when government fails to care for its citizens.

All of these articles make plain the need to think critically about the interplay between citizens and their governments as new questions arise, about how best to aid other countries, and how best to live in our own. Each of these articles is valuable because it challenges our simplified political understandings with facts and theories which might at first seem counterintuitive, but once explained are the only perspectives which make sense. Perhaps most important of all, like every issue of the Duke Journal of Public Affairs, they were written by undergraduates.

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