

Week 1: Mapping the political

1. Political self-definition (January 11, 2006)

If I have to label myself politically I would need to call myself a liberal. However I am rather uncomfortable with the label, because it is not a perfect fit. I am a “liberal” because I support their core belief in the rights and freedom of the individual. Having grown up in communist Hungary under a regime that limited freedom of speech (and of the individual) I am painfully aware how sick this situation can make individuals and the society in general. Therefore I am all for individuals having as much freedom as possible unless they hurt others physically, verbally, or mentally.

On the other hand I recognize the importance of tradition. I believe that it plays important roles in most individual's life. It often provides a sense of community, belonging, and meaning. It is a connection to the past and as such a foundation stone for the future. Therefore I think they are valuable for the society as well. I would not want to impose any tradition by the state onto the individual, but would support the rights of the latter to preserve their tradition. In this sense I am a conservative. I don't have a generic answer what to do in a situation where some individuals' rights are conflicting with others' tradition. I know that would be the test whether my conservative side or my liberal view is stronger. Without specifics I cannot even think about a scenario like that, so I won't.

I also believe that the economy should largely based on free market. I think this system provides a good impetus for individuals to be productive and in general can run smoothly and is capable of covering the needs of most people. However a much stronger safety net than the current US one, should be present for those who for whatever reason cannot sustain themselves. I believe a society and its government should be responsible to keep its population as healthy and happy as possible. It is in their own, everybody's interest. Also, because power corrupts (and absolute power corrupts absolutely) I think more should be done in breaking the power of big business. While there are laws against monopolies, but in the U.S. in most industries four-five companies have 80% of the market share. They may not (or in some

cases may) form cartels any more, but they still practice the kind of power that is not healthy for competition. For these two reasons (safety net for the needy and too much power of the corporation) some interference from the government is needed in the economy. According to this conviction I fit the “progressive liberal” label. I would be having too hard time to define though to what extent (and in what form) the government should interfere, therefore I leave this task for economists.

I am uncertain whether the liberal definition of democracy (“leadership groups compete in elections for the chance to govern”) is the winning ticket to maximize the happiness and rights of most people in a given society. I believe that this system perpetuates the elite’s power, while doing little, or not enough for the representation of the people. On the local level it has a chance to work, but the the higher we look at, the less chance it has to be a just system. By the time we reach the presidential level, particularly in the “winner takes all system” the voter have nothing more than a chance to select one of two people (so far always white males in the US) whose views they may not even support. The problem is that I do not know a better system. I just realized that my wording and emphasis of “happiness and rights of the most people” represents a socialist ideal. From this point of view, considering the goal of the political infrastructure, I might be called a “socialist.”

Regarding political involvement I would need to call myself a “lurker”. I try to follow the news when I can, but it is not my top priority. When I have time (which is a rare occasion nowadays) I do. Part of my challenge is that I am attempting to follow politics both in Hungary, my home country, and in the US, not to mention the rest of the world. I do not belong to any political party and am not an activist in any organization. The extent of my involvement is limited to voting (mostly Democratic), reading the news, and following a few online conversations of people whose opinion I value. I rarely post my own opinion there though, that is why I called myself a lurker. (This is the term in online communities applied to people who only read, but never post messages.)

My political convictions were formed through lots of minor steps, but the main influence was what I saw around myself in my formative, teenage years. At that time I was on the edges of the semi-

legal opposition group in Hungary. This small group of people was the only ones who opposed the political system and were brave enough to do something about it, mostly writing and printing their ideas illegally. I was attracted to them more by the sense of adventure and danger, then their political notions. And I never got really involved in the group, because of the very same danger: I was afraid. They were followed by the secret police, occasionally beaten or imprisoned and in general under heavy oppression. I did not want to experience that myself, but I understood that these people's conviction were strong enough for them to risk their lives or at least liberty. This had a great impression on me and that is where my commitment to liberty is coming from. Regarding the economy I saw how the centrally planned version operated in Hungary and found it unsatisfying. That is the main reason I am for free market. Even the good features of the socialist economic system turned sour back then. E.g. the promise of full employment to everybody caused the police to harass my friends who did not have a job. Instead of ensuring the right to work, they were forced to take jobs, at least on paper that they did not want. Being unemployed was a crime punishable with imprisonment. I also kept comparing the material culture of my home country to that of the "West." While I had emotional attachment to the objects I grew up with, I looked upon the west as a somewhat magical land with almost unlimited options of purchasing things. At the time I viewed consumerism as a desirable ideal, a form of freedom of expression. Nowadays I am of the opinion that that if you do not have purchasing power then it is just as repressive (and depressive) than having no choices at all.

The most important issues for me in politics are the limitations of social safety net. In one form or another I would like to work on that in my life. To be more precise I would like to be involved in empowering people to help themselves. On the long term (and even on the short), that is a better response to society's problem than providing handouts quenching immediate needs. (which is still necessary to do so, of course.) I plan to become a librarian/information scientist to decrease the literary and digital divide in the population. Another important issue for me is the environment. It is amazingly stupid what we, the

corporations and the governments are committing against it for short term gains, for profits. The process of destroying and contaminating our water, air and land has to be reversed somehow.

2. Political socialization (January 12, 2006)

When I was born my father was in prison in Hungary. He and half a dozen other people were convicted for charges of conspiracy against the state. They were mostly playing the romantic conspiracy game, with secret meetings and codes and leaflets, but the scope of the “organization” was very limited and the intention in general was not to topple, but to improve, the government. Furthermore they were criticizing the government from the “left”, by often taking the positions of Mao Tse-tung, while the government was on the Soviet side of the Soviet-Chinese split.

The effect of this affair on me was that I never fully trusted or loved the government. Although I learned and comprehended the details of my father’s story slowly, but in my mind I knew from an early age on, that he did not do anything really wrong or dangerous, nevertheless he was punished. And by proxy so was I. Not to mention my mother, who got a lesser punishment, because she was pregnant (with me.) This was a major break in her life though, emotionally, financially, and politically too. My parents divorced soon after my father got out of prison and a few years later he was forced to leave the country. Thus my mother brought me up alone and I rarely remember her talking about politics. After having gone through the aforementioned experience she was much more cautious.

I could probably categorize my paternal grandparents as belonging to the proletariat. They were blue collar workers, although not necessarily on the assembly line. Their main focus was accumulating consumer goods and having a good time in the process. While the success of their effort depends on to whom we compare them to, I do know that they were not interested in politics and never explicitly talked about it. Whatever I learned from them was through observing and absorbing their value system.

My maternal grandparents are much harder to define. Although they both came from traditional working-class families, by the time I was born they definitely moved to a higher class my grandmother

being a journalist and my grandfather a diplomat. However they denied the existence of classes, according to the “classless society” doctrine of the Marxist-Leninist state. Again, I do not recall discussing politics openly with them, but I do remember what they valued and how they lived. (And live, in present tense, because my maternal grandmother is my only living grandparent now.)

My worldview can be explained to some extent by my background. My mother, a single parent, was working on minimum wages for most of her life, to bring me up. While we always had roof over our head and food on the table, I know that life was/is a continuous struggle for her. This, while being sheltered from it, defined my basic attitude towards life: it is a fight to stay alive, warm, and fed. It became the primary objective of my political views, ensuring for everybody these basic rights. At the same time I blamed the oppressive system for breaking my mother’s life and taking away my father’s liberty. Therefore liberty became another central issue. Religion also plays an important role in my worldview, but to expound that would require much more space and may not fit in the theme of this course. Suffice to say, that being brought up in a culture where I never even heard the word “Jewish” till I was 16-17 to become a somewhat observant Jew has implications on the development of my value system.

My paternal and maternal grandparents were at the two ends of middleclass strata. The fact that I envision my life being in the middle probably has to do with them. These are the possibilities I grew up with, these are the goals I internalized. From my maternal grandparents--who believed strongly in the ideals of communism and worked for them for most of their adult lives--I inherited the importance of believing in something and act for it, despite that our belief system is different. I also learned from them how to act in a cultured way. From my maternal grandparents I learned how to try to enjoy life and objects. Politically speaking they were both more of an indirect and exemplary influence, than part of an explicit political socialization process.

3. Comparison to student body (January 13, 2006)

I believe I am slightly more interested in politics than the average student at UCSB. I am as involved as most of them (that is to say not too heavily), and locate myself left of the relative center. Having said the above, several qualifiers have to be put in place. First of all, I don't believe there is an "average" student, and even if there would be I would not know her/his characteristics. I am a re-entry student, transferred to UCSB only for the last two years of my study. I am considerably older than my peers and an immigrant. For all of these reasons my interests probably lay elsewhere than most undergraduate students'. This may be the main reason accounting for the fact that I socialized relatively little with them. I did not build relationships with enough students to gain a feel for what the school's political atmosphere is.

I have two sources of information on the topic though. I noticed conservative and Republican organizations' presence on campus, more than liberals' or Democrats'. However I learned in the course of my sociology studies that people on average notice opposing opinions more easily than ones similar to their own. Upon closer examination I have to accede to this view. Liberal organizations are probably just as present on campus, except I barely notice them, because I tend to agree with their opinion, they don't stand out for me. I acknowledge that I cannot truly say whether I am towards the left (or not) to the hypothetical center of the student body's political views, because I do not really know where the center is.

My other source is the Facebook website. I have a few dozen "friends" linked to me on this social networking website and viewed probably a few hundred other people's profile since the website went live over a year ago. The profiles contain the optional field for political view. Based on the people I viewed I am an "average" student, by qualifying myself left of center. However I have to consider that my sample is skewed in three ways. First of all the website may not be representative of the whole UCSB student population; it is possible that conservatives would be less likely to create profiles for themselves. Furthermore I am majoring in Sociology and a lot of the people I am "connected" to is from the same, traditionally progressive field. Therefore the profiles I viewed may be skewed to the left. Finally, I am Jewish and I got to know the majority of my "friends" on Facebook through Jewish organizations. This is

an unproven assumption, but my experience is that Jews of this age are more liberal than non-Jews. (This may change as they age.) Thus my sample may be skewed again.

My political involvement is practically non-existent on campus, thus very similar to most students'. I do not belong to any overtly political organization; do not participate in the process. However I am active in two groups that indirectly related to politics. As soon as I got to Santa Barbara I sought out the Muslim-Jewish dialog and the Interfaith Students groups and joined their activities. Both of them is promoting peaceful coexistence through dialog and paying attention to people who are just like us, but of different faith. This work is important enough for me to devote time to it. I even keep a blog on the theme of the first group and redesigned and rebuilt the website for the other "pro bono". Therefore, while I may not have thought of myself politically active but through these channels I was/am.

4. Typology

The test told me something I already knew: I am a liberal, whether I like it or not. I suspect that my aversion against applying the label to myself has to do with my internalization of the derogatory connotation, stigma conservatives attached in the last two decades to the word "liberal." As it was pointed out on lecture no self-respecting president or candidate dares to call herself or himself liberal, they would rather opt for the "progressive" label. Nevertheless based on the answers I gave I neatly fall into the category, so I have to accept that's what I am now.

According to the analysis of two extensive surveys provided on the website liberals (as one of nine distinct groups) "are the most opposed to an assertive foreign policy, the most secular, and take the most liberal views on social issues such as homosexuality, abortion, and censorship... strongly pro-environment and pro-immigration". I fit this description in almost every way except I do not consider myself secular. But within my religion, Judaism, I mostly go to the "liberal Jewish" services, thus within the religious spectrum I fall in the same area as in the political one.

I also fit in the demographics of the group, based on the revealed information, except for the religion part: “Predominantly white (83%), most highly educated group (49% have a college degree or more), and youngest group after Bystanders. Least religious group in typology: 43% report they seldom or never attend religious services; nearly a quarter (22%) are seculars. More than one-third never married (36%). Largest group residing in urban areas (42%) and in the western half the country (34%).” I am white, have a college degree, live in a city on the West coast. But I have been married and go to services.

The analysis identified four key beliefs of my group. I checked the “strongly agree” option for all of them, this indicated that these issues are important to me. (“Relying too much on military force to defeat terrorism creates hatred that leads to more terrorism”; “I worry the government is getting too involved in the issue of morality”; “Stricter environmental laws and regulations are worth the cost”; “Poor people have hard lives because government benefits don’t go far enough to help them live decently”.) Out of 25 questions I registered “strong” opinion on ten more questions, besides the above four. My responses to the three business related issues (“Government regulation of business is necessary to protect the public interest”; “Too much power is concentrated in the hands of a few large companies”; “Business corporations make too much profit”) would suggest that I am anti-business. I do not believe it is accurate. I recognize that one of the key driving forces in a country is the economy that is better driven by business than by the government. However I think that America overestimates the importance of economic gains. I would love to see a new kind of “American dream” that would shift the focus from owning a house, car(s) and amenities towards having a healthy body and set of healthy relationships with friends and family, being involved in a community. This is the reason I would like to curb the powers of big businesses. I believe the accumulation of wealth on their part resulted in accumulation of power, which is dangerous to the public and themselves too.

Being an immigrant myself, it is easy to discover the bias in the answers I gave to the immigration related questions. (“Immigrants today strengthen our country because of their hard work and talents”; “The growing number of newcomers from other countries strengthens American society”.) I naturally

agree with these options, because I do work hard, have some talents and believe that by these virtues I can contribute to the American society. My answers were mostly self-referential, and I extrapolated from there.

My anti-war stance got also revealed in the questionnaire when I strongly agreed with these points: "Good diplomacy is the best way to ensure peace"; "It's acceptable to refuse to fight in a war you believe is morally wrong." If there is a way to resolve issues peacefully I would always opt for that. Wars don't really solve the roots of conflicts. They only (in case of a clear victory) enforce the "truth" of one side onto the other. But the losing side may still bear grudges and reengage in a conflict at a later time. Also, if one wishes not to kill another human being s/he should be able to maintain this right. I understand the importance and roles of soldiers in maintaining a country's security, but do not believe that coercing the citizens to do so is a good way of ensuring this quota. If a person refuses to go to war and provides sufficient reason to do so s/he should be able to opt out from armed duty. Alternative means of serving one's country and proving loyalty, patriotism should be provided for them/us.

The last set of questions, I had strong views on, related to morality. ("Homosexuality is a way of life that should be accepted by society"; "It is NOT necessary to believe in God in order to be moral and have good values"; "Religion is a very important part of my life".) The fact that they were included in a poll designed to survey political views shows that they moved to the political arena. My preference would be to leave these questions out, they belong to the individual. My answers for the first two questions are naturally "yes". I even have hard time to understand people whose answer is no. Of course, that people no matter what their sexual preference or belief systems are can be good, moral citizens. What does one have to do with the other? By the same token, why was I asked about the role of religion in my life? I assume for the survey's designers intended to correlate the answers to other factors. That is fine, but most sociological surveys separate the biographical and content based questions into separate sections. I would have been more comfortable answering it in the former.

5. Republican Vs. Democratic Parties (January 16, 2006)

There is no single retorting answer to the assessment/accusation that there is little difference between the Democratic and Republican Party. The multitude of answers however can be clustered around three major areas: 1, members, supporters and voters; 2, programs and policies; and 3, their actions when in power. I believe as we move along these three parameters the difference is disappearing.

There has been a lot of changes historically in the membership and constituencies of the two major parties. The Pew report in the reader sheds some light on these shifts. Race, church attendance and income are indicators of party affiliations, in this order of strength. They contrast this finding with the historical stereotype that "Democrats are the party of the working class and Republicans are the party of the well-to-do." While it generally still stands (at the upper and lower income quintile it is truer than ever), but they also found that the middle of the income curve shifted towards the Republicans too. Besides the three traits mentioned above union membership and gender are roughly equal important indicators for party allegiance, but education is less. The biggest change seems to be that labor unions are abandoning their traditional ally the Democratic Party. They see themselves abandoned by them as the Democrats could not or did not do enough against the de-industrialization of America. Thus the labor union workers might as well vote Republicans who are more likely to support them at least in their religious belief system, even though economically they would not do much for them either.

The other relevant source in assessing who supports which party is the PEW typology report online. There they divided the populace into nine categories, where three-three supports each party and three are swing voters. This detailed report reveals each groups demographic traits, central values, and important issues. According to their assessment the left consists of (secular and antiwar) liberals (17% of the general public), (social welfare loyalists) disadvantaged democrats (10%), and (latter-day "New Dealers") conservative democrats (14%). On the right we have (staunch conservatives) enterprisers (9%), (religious, critical of business) social conservatives (11%), and (struggling social conservatives) pro-government conservatives (9%). The middle segment does not form such a coherent block, but because of

their lack of clear identification with either party they should be put in the middle, despite in the vast differences between their attitudes. They include (moderate) upbeats (11%), (working class & discouraged) disaffecteds (9%), and (democracy dropouts) bystanders (10%).

Let me say a few words about each group to show that the biggest difference between the two parties is who supports them. I believe the label tells a lot about their values so I would not detail that right here.

- *Liberals* are predominantly white, most highly educated, youngest, and least religious group in this typology
- *Disadvantaged democrats* have low average incomes, six tenths of them are female, three tenths black, and they are not very well educated.
- *Conservative democrats* are older women and blacks, and somewhat less educated and poorer than national average.
- *Enterprisers* are predominantly white, male, married, and financially well-off.
- *Social conservatives* are also predominantly white, but more than half of them are female. They are the oldest of all groups and nearly half live in the South.
- *Pro-government conservatives* are predominately female and relatively young; highest percentage of minority members of any Republican-leaning group. Most have no more than a high school diploma.
- *Upbeats* are relatively young, the wealthiest, and well-educated.
- *Disaffecteds* are less educated, predominantly male, somewhat more are from rural and suburban areas than urban.
- *Bystanders* are young, with lowest education, less religious than any group other than liberals, largely concentrated in the South and West.

I found this typology useful in delineating who votes for whom. The first three groups (Democratic voters) are clearly distinct from the second three (Republican voters), thus the two parties are quite different in this regard.

The second circle where it is worthwhile to look difference between the parties is their programs and policies. The same Pew report gives a good overview on how voters and the nine aforementioned groups divide and align themselves on issues. However this may not be the best tool to assess how the parties themselves think on these issues. The survey results do not reflect official policies but the voters political will. The two may not fully coincide.

To investigate the current difference (as opposed to the historical view from Judis and Teixeira's text) I visited democrats.org and rnc.org. The first major difference manifested itself in the list of issues they considered important enough to include in a submenu on the home page. The GOP's list in the order it appears (supposedly in the order of importance for them): social security, nominations, jobs and economy, safety and security, legal reform, tax reform, immigration reform, faith and values, and education. And the Democrats': Strength at home, strength overseas, economic growth, better education, secure retirement, affordable healthcare, honest government, election reform, protecting our environment, civil rights and justice. Comparing the two lists it is clear that Republicans are in power right now. Nomination is an important issue for them to gain more power. If we dig deeper we would see that they are pro-business, in most areas they either speak directly on how to help businesses and giving them more power/freedom or indirectly. They also have a separate point for faith/values that Democrats refrain from addressing directly, because they leave this issue up to the individuals.

Democrats on the other hand support (at least in their policies) more the individuals and their civil rights. They also attempt to differentiate themselves by breaking out the environment as a separate issue. Based on these the two parties could seem distinct enough. However there is a lot of overlap in their policies even as they try rhetorically separating themselves from the other party. They both have to address national and international security, the job market and economy in general; the public's declining

faith in government. On these issues their answers converge to the center. They perceive that there is not much playing fields in these areas, there is only one possible direction to move forward. I believe however that on these topics they are attempting to remain as close to the center as possible, due to fear of losing votes. This aspect is what makes them appear indistinguishable in some eyes.

There are numerous issues however that upon closer inspection reveals significant differences in approach. In the realm of social policy their policies considerably differ on gay marriage, abortion, stem cell research, and teaching creationism in schools. Regarding the economy they greatly disagree on universal health care, the minimum wage, tax cuts, and the budget deficit. They also have conflicted view on the military and foreign policy, particularly about the use of preemptive force, the Iraq war, the use of torture, and the Patriot Act. I don't have space and time to go into each of these topics, but these are the areas where real differences could be discovered between the two parties.

The final issue I would like to consider is the behavior when they are in power. Before going there though, it is important to note, that there are hierarchical, chronological, spatial and personal differences within each party. In other words Democrats or Republicans may differ significantly from their fellow party members when they are in different state, time period, or level of government. For simplicity's sake let me just look only at the highest, presidential level. Examining the last few presidents' records we can see spectacular differences on the surface, but at a deeper level they are not that dissimilar. Yes, President Clinton was strongly and actively pro-peace in the Middle East, but military spending was high in his time too. (Not as high though as either the senior or the junior Bush's who both conducted more and more expensive wars than Clinton did.) Yes, Clinton had a "don't ask don't tell" policy regarding gays in the military, but that's as far as he went in supporting the rights of sexual minorities. While our current president would clearly wish to curtail those rights. Regarding their fiscal policy they both supported a trickle down approach to boosting the economy, meaning directly supporting business in the hope that it will indirectly support everybody. They worked in different economic background (Clinton during the "dot-com boom", Bush during regression), thus the similarities were not as eye-popping in this regards

compared to the differences in results. Clinton paid lip service to health care reforms and social welfare, but in reality he cut the latter worse than Bush did and did very little for the former. From all of these perspectives the Democratic and the Republican presidents acted rather similarly, it is only the circumstances forcing their reactions that make them look distinct.

Week 2-3: Tuning in

2. On Mindich's *Tuned out* (February 5, 2006)

In his first chapter Mindich sets the case for his book, he proves with qualitative and quantitative methods that there is a generation shift in news consumptions. He brings numerous arguments showing that less young people is informed about politics than older ones. One of his favorite indicators is newspaper readership: 20% versus 70% in the respective age cohorts. While he makes sure not to blame the media or the young people for this, he sets out to find the reasons. The first of his five reasons include perceived isolation from the political process and discarding the common idea of complacency, because "people who have the most reason to be complacent are the very people who generally consume the most news". Next he points to the "steady decline in the public's trust of the media." While Mindich maintains that skepticism is healthy, but rejecting "all news means to reject the underpinnings of democracy." The decline of social capital is the third on his list. He credits Putnam's *Bowling Alone* book, but calls attention that is established only correlation and not causality between "dropping out of the once-fertile social fabric" and news consumption. His penultimate point calls in television that "allowed us to stay at home, to avoid the local community, to feel less connected with the news." Finally he recognizes that the rise of suburbia had a similar effect, it is "collective effort to lead a private life." Before going into the outline of the rest his book he introduces the notion of "imagined community", such as the nation. News about this imagined community can help to create a sense of unity and belonging, as we saw after 9/11.

This is the section in the whole book from where two ideas resonated strong enough with me that might spring me to action. He wrote "people who choose entertainment over news are less likely to participate in community projects." (p. 11.) I believe I consume less entertainment than most Americans, but I still am more likely to opt for watching movies, surfing the new than to go out and do something together with a group of people. Once this liminal phase of my life (I will be graduating in 7 weeks and move away) is over and establish a life for myself in anew city I decided to be more involved in the local

community. I see clearer now that it will enrich not just my own life, but the local communities too and therefore indirectly the nation.

The other sentence that found my heart was "materialism is on the rise as civic involvement declines." (p. 11.) This reverberates with the anti-materialist strand in me. Will help to refocus on what's important, which is "life, freedom, and pursuit of happiness." None of this depends or should depend on material gains, but all of them have strong ties to personal and communal relations.

Mindich's second chapter assesses to what extent and how tuned out youth is. He provides numbers from a variety of sources showing that news interest and political interest, voting participation all have been going down for over a century, with the exception of the late 1960's. He analyses in detail the last 40 year trend. He discovers a general lack of political knowledge across ages, underscoring the growing gap between the ages. He finds that young people know less about news topics in general with the exception abortion, minimum wage and sports news. Lastly he accounts for news consumption according to media types. He takes first newspaper, because that can provide the most depth, and finds that "readership of each age cohort stays relatively constant over time," (P. 28.) but each subsequent cohort since the 1920's consumes less. News magazines attract a median age of between 43 and 47. The listeners of radio news are of similar age group; e.g. NPR's media is 49. The exception are shows that comment news in a polemic nature like Rush Limbaugh's. Television is not much better of; e.g. CNN's viewers are between the age of 59 and 64. Regarding news consumption over the internet experts are divided, thus it is not possible to provide clear analysis or even statistics.

I did not find much new information in this chapter, but Mindich established his credentials for me, because of the breadth of his sources and the amount of research he must have done for this book. He reminded me of aspects I knew but forgot, such as that newspaper readership does not change much over the lifetime. If it is a habit a person picks up in one's young age it is more likely to stay with the person, than the chances of picking it up later.

The book's third chapter brings in the major dilemma of journalists and newspapers: how to balance needs and wants. Democracy needs and informed and active citizenry. But more and more citizens want to be passively entertained instead of actively participating or even tuning in. News media is business, in the hands of corporations who are looking out for their bottom line. How, based on what principles the owners of these corporations and their employees the journalist decide how much entertainment or news is too much, how to find the balance between the two functions of media (perceived as contradicting each other) to pay attention to the nation's needs or the individuals' wants. In the process he summarizes that people who follow news do it "because they are part of a community [and/or] they will use it in their lives, particularly in conversation." (p. 37) Mindich talked to a wide variety of people in the country and in this chapter he uses these conversations as examples. He likes extremes, like the lesbian activist who knows about her agenda, but not more informed about other topics than her cohort. Or the rural banker who created a work environment where news is a major part of the workspace atmosphere. Or the naked news casters. But he also provides a historical overview of the needs/wants tension and the development of sensationalism. He credits this last two three factors: 1, financial reward for larger audience, 2, pressure from level of competition, and 3, willingness to "pander to prurient tastes." (p. 43.) People shifted towards entertainment because "it speaks to their realities, their fears and dreams.", while news is stressful and less engaging. This is true for all ages, but another reason young people find news less engaging because it excludes them, the topic and the "talking heads" are rarely from their own flock.

I like concise but deep sentences. I never heard before that journalism's job is to "comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable." On the other hand I found Mindich's style repetitive by this point. He needs to say the same thing over and over, seemingly from different perspectives. He could have driven his points much faster to home. But maybe that is exactly the point of the book. On one hand young people have shorter attention span, so maybe they would read this or other books even less. On the other hand they need repetition for a point to stick in the mind, for true comprehension. Mindich is just as

guilty as the media he portrays of using sensationalism. His book is a good example for his own point "conflict sells."

The fourth chapter continues the recount of his experiences of talking with young people. Here, however his focus is on the people who are tuned in. The factors to do so include workspace culture, role and extent of conversation in one's life, childhood habits, and self-definition through news (e.g. feeling guilty by not following it.) The second part of the chapter depicts the internet as news source for youth. Mindich's numbers show that its "demographics began to resemble that of the overall U.S. population." (p. 70.) He shows how the perception of the internet's role on civic and lifestyle activity has shifted over the years from assuming a passive affect to a neutral one, where the "medium does not independently pull or push the consumer. (p. 72.)

The most personal sentence for me in this chapter said that "people are not as harried as they think they are." I continuously find myself struggling with time management issues. But upon closer analysis I find that I watch about 10-12 hours movies and shows on television (I watch only prerecorded entertainment, not cable or satellite) and spend immeasurable amount of time on the internet. All this while each week I find it hard to do all my work and school related duties and maintain a healthy relationship with my friends and family. It was a good wakeup call to re-prioritize my time. But I still feel a need to be entertained. It would be hard to unshed the product of socialization and training in consumerism, but I can try.

The fifth chapter examines the correlation between entertainment/news industry' and (local, global and virtual) communities. Most of the people Mindich interviewed found little value in local news. Local news stations and newspapers realized that 1, they can make lots of money, 2, dumbing down the product does not drive away consumers, 3, sex, celebrities. and violence sells. The cumulative effect is that "young people are not given stories that would allow them to understand the process of government." (p. 79.) In the process local news is diluted, eliminated, replaced by "central casting." Mindich's key point here is that "our communities suffer when we do not know what is going on." (p.82.) He revisits the

"bowling alone" theme of declining civic involvement and expounds the four reasons (again) from chapter one. After looking unsuccessfully for causality he settles for the statement "tuning out and dropping out are inextricably connected and probably mutually reinforcing." (p. 89.) He supports "real" communities as opposed to "internet" ones, because the former "require a level of work, sacrifice and accommodation that virtual ones do not always share." (p. 90.) Finally he is using New Orleans as a positive example of a community where people's "crossing paths" and talking create an environment in which people vote. His conclusion sounds like a true cliché: "we need our separate identities, but we are also so much richer because of our connections. (p. 94.)

What surprised me that he posits that even high schools are less social than they used to be thus "students are unused to being amidst others in public." My experience of IV, UCSB, going to music shows or sport events tell me otherwise. Young people may participate less in civic activities, but I found that they still like to "hang out" with others, be "social animals." Another surprising statement was that "daily local TV news viewers were less informed and less politically involved than those who do not watch daily." This is too telling about the local media's quality.

Before suggesting steps for possible solutions in chapter seven Mindich goes deeper in his analysis. He juxtaposes how journalism supports the right to know with its goals (information, verification and analysis) against the public's right to privacy. For him democracy and journalism requires youth to consume news, pay for it and to care deeply and elect people according. He looks into the economic consequences of declining readership ("it is easier to avoid corporate and governmental pressures if you are flush with cash.") and questions the cost of "the American right not to think about politics" notion ("poor democracy".) He reveals explicitly the driving force behind his work: the idea that "our working democracy, built on sound information and common dialogue" (p. 111.) is what makes America great. He connects this value statement to the observation that "those who are part of a wider community tend to see the need for politics and news." (p. 108.)

It is a generalization, but I can confirm his remark that "Americans are not shy about topics about which they know little or nothing." (p. 106.) But I found the repetition of his themes obscuring his points instead of clarifying them. By this time his style overshadowed his content for me.

I appreciated the book; it provided a good list of issues and points to ponder upon. I think Mindich did not emphasize enough the pressure young people's time is facing in society. I and a lot of my friends, feel that because of our active life there is indeed "no time" for tuning in and participating in the process. I resigned to the idea some time ago that there are several levels of alienation in place and there is nothing I can do about it. But this book filled with new meaning the slogan of "think global, act local" for me. This time it is personal. My own life is poorer if I keep "bowling alone." I don't think I will be much more tuned into national and world politics than I already am, but will spend more time on local news, once I settle for a specific locality. Right now I am in a transitory phase geographically, personally and worksite, in which it just would not make sense to attempt to do so.

3. Contract for daily news (January 23, 2006)

I hereby contract this quarter to follow the news in daily. The three aspects of this contract are scope/time, source, and attention. I will devote each workday at least 15 minutes, possibly half an hour exclusively to this task, not including writing my journal entry. (I will do this in addition, and not replacing my existing news consuming habits.) In this time I hope to be able to read major articles in the first, "A" section of the New York Times (to which I subscribed in the first week of the quarter.) Finally, I will not multitask while reading the newspaper; I will focus with all of my mental capacities on it. (As opposed to my existing patterns of following news online in one computer window while having lots of others are open and drawing my attention to.

So far, in the one week I have been receiving the newspaper I was more successful than not in keeping the contract as my journal can attest.

Week 2-3: Tuning in

1. Daily journal

January 11 – My news-consuming habits

I do not subscribe to cable or satellite television, because I found that when I did I was watching too much of it and did not have time to do other activities I wanted to. Therefore I do not get my news from the channel most people do. I don't listen to talk or news radio, because it is not a comfortable medium for me. Because English is a second language for me it is much harder to understand what is said if I don't see the face of the person saying it. Also radio developed its own kind of cues and language that I never managed to learn, because I was not brought up with listening to American radio broadcasting. For example I am having a hard time being able to separate what is commercial and what is programming.

The exclusion of television and radio leaves three channels (and their combinations) to get access to news: printed press, internet, and friends. I admit I do not regularly read a daily paper. I had short periods in my life when I did. For example for three months I subscribed to the San Jose Mercury News, when I was living in Santa Cruz and they had a special promotion. Also, when I had a high-tech, 9-to-5 job I did use some of the time spent at the workplace reading through the online version of the largest and most popular Hungarian daily paper. I enjoyed these periods in my life, being able to be on top of the news I was interested in, but since I started to go to school again and working 20-30 hours a week on top of that I was not able to find the time to stay current through this format. Due to this class however I subscribed to the New York Times. It should start arriving next Monday. I plan to carve out half an hour a day from my schedule to read it and reflect on it.

My main source of news for the last few years was an online community, called Brainstorms. It was founded by Howard Rheingold, author and social scientist, who originally coined the term "virtual community". It is an open community in the sense that anyone can join in, but there is a minimal screening process to get in. Members are discouraged to use pseudonyms and the fact that everybody is using their real name helps to create a sense of trust. The quality and level of conversation is much higher

than any other online open community I am familiar with. I gained a tremendous by lurking and occasionally posting there. Members of the community post and often analyze, links to stories about current events. This conversation thread is the one I monitor and learn from what is happening in the world. Even if I would not have access to any other news, this rich and varied source of information would be sufficient for me.

January 12. - Ethics of Cloning

The NYTimes wrote about a cloning issue: "Dr. Hwang Woo Suk, the South Korean researcher who claimed to have cloned human cells, fabricated evidence for all of that research, according to a report released today by a Seoul National University panel investigating his work."

There has been quite a bit of discussions about the ethics of human cloning in the past. From a religious point of view the question of soul (and for Christian salvations too) has been raised in this context. Whether a cloned human (i.e. a being created by humans and G-d) would have soul and if yes whether it can reach salvation. This boils down whether humans have the "divine right" of creating humans through "unnatural" means?

Another argument against cloning was about the potential abuse. What if bad people do it for bad purposes? We can imagine all sorts of scenarios where something can go haywire. This particular (Korean) case however raises a different kind of ethical issue. The temptation for doctors to be on the cutting edge and be the "first" in the field to do something seemed to be irresistible for this doctor. Here we are not talking about full-fledge cloning, "just" therapeutic to help a kid to regain some of his faculties. But even this would be a fantastic achievement.

I agree with the article's assessment that the damage this case caused for research in the field is unfortunate. This doctor single handedly (or with his co-conspirators) managed to lose the trust of people who potentially would have been open to ask for help via experimental cloning. Without volunteers however the development of cloning technology might slow down.

I, personally am ambivalent yet where I stand on the issue of cloning humans. Without very strong ethical guidelines I would oppose it. However I acknowledge that even with it, once the technology has been developed there is no way it can be kept secret and limited to authenticated users or institutions. Thus I might oppose it.

However I fully support therapeutic cloning. I see nothing wrong healing people. O the contrary.

Source:

Human Cloning Was All Faked, Koreans Report

<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/10/science/10clone.html>

January 16. - Women as presidents and victims

The paper (New York Times) started to arrive today. I spent about 15 minutes, first thing in the morning to read it. It was fun, but I did need a full kitchen table to be able to read it. I got to write about the experience only till much later though. There were two news items that grabbed my attention enough to linger on even after finishing the paper.

One of them is the report that Chile elected a Socialist woman as its president. Since a good friend of mine moved to live to that country I follow slightly more what's happening there. I was surprised to hear even in the first round two or three weeks ago that the most likely candidate is Ms. Bachelet. Now that she won I have to change my thinking about Chile. I thought of it as a conservative, Catholic country, dominated by a somewhat "macho" attitude of the male population. But they elected an openly agnostic woman to the highest position. I find it encouraging. I am happy to see women breaking glass ceilings. I wonder when American politics will reach the level of maturity that a woman can successfully run for the position. I will not hold for my breath for that, pessimistic whether it can happen in the next 20 years. The USA, in this regard is more conservative than the supposedly repressed Latin American country. I liked the bits of Ms. Bachelet's platform that the NYTimes shared, including "I have dedicated my life to reversing that [the one she was a victim of] hatred" and "social inclusion" of women and the poor.

The other story I read through was about an anti-abortion group I could respect. I am strongly pro-choice, I believe it should be the women's right to decide what happens to her, her body, and her fetus. On the other hand I respect the right to disagree with my view. I also value the sanctity of life and believe it should be protected. But I do not necessarily define the beginning of human life from the moment of conception. There are other circumstances for a mother to consider whether to abort or not. At the same time I strongly oppose radical, aggressive pro-life groups.

The paper wrote about an anti-abortion group that is much quieter, personal and apolitical if one can say in the context of the issue. It is a service group "providing direct aid to women so they would not abort." I really like the approach of trying to help the mothers. As long as they are not making the decisions for them, but help the mothers in whatever they choose I see great value of this kind of organization. The article suggests that there is a wide network of such groups in the U.S., often in the form of Bible study or therapy groups. I liked the description of their quiet, persuasive method, particularly compared to the loud groups protesting at abortion clinics. I agree with the member of the quite group, who said that the "pro-life movement wants to demonize the mother." I am against any kind of demonization.

Sources:

A leader making peace with Chile's past

<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/16/international/americas/16winner.html>

Some abortion foes forgo politics for quiet talk

<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/16/national/16abortion.html>

January 17 – Mixed news

This is the second day of having the paper and I am already falling behind. Only had time to read it at night when I got home. There were a number of articles that poked my interest.

I had mixed feelings about the article on Mr. Ney. He got linked to the expanding Jack Abramoff scandal. On one hand I am gleefully about the whole issue. I have been expecting Republicans going under the weight of this issue. Basically I believe they have too much power in the current administration and house. The "checks and balances" system is hard to maintain under these circumstances. They are living proof that power corrupts. ON the other hand he seems to be a "small fish", almost like a scapegoat. The NYTimes wrote that "even his political opponents say that Mr. Ney has worked hard for his constituents." I got the feeling that we will never know ("they" will never get down to the bottom of) the really big financial issues.

Another story that I noticed was no the bottom left side of the front page. It was about a car that was stolen thirtysome years ago, now found and returned to the previous owner. I felt ambivalent about this too. It was an interesting little story, but I felt it was blown out of proportions. To have a simply little story like this on the cover page of a prestigious newspaper feels like selling out. I am used to being treated in other media channels by distractions. By talking about such a single individual, who is unimportant is to create an instant celebrity. To give him the 15 minutes of fame Andy Warhol predicted. But it does not do anything in the public sphere. The reason it made the top of the news, I feel is that it is about a flashy car. That is such an important American symbol of mobility, freedom and consumerism at the same time that it makes exciting reading for a lot of people here.

The biggest picture on the cover was about Liberia's newly elected president. It is hard not to see a trend, after my yesterday's log, in having another woman as a head of state. I hope the trend will keep going. I also have to admit that I know nothing about Liberia's politics. I had a vague sense that they were in a constant state of civil war for a few decades. The movie "Interpreter" was about them. I hope I am wrong. Unfortunately I did not learn much about the real situation form the article. But it had a positive tone that I appreciate.

The last piece I read from beginning to end was on the "reports" page, about James Frey and his book "A million little pieces." I never heard about either of them, but form this article I surmised the

details of a forming mini-scandal. Mr. Frey lied in his book, when he said he was in prison for three months. I agree with the article's opinion, written by Clyde Haberman, that action was dishonest. I also understand his disappointment about the way Mr. Frey handled the accusation, by calling it "essentially true." However it seems that Haberman wrote an article about a book he did not read. Furthermore his tone was so spiteful, that after reading it I disliked him more than Frey. His language is insulting when he inserts segments like this "if he has brains addled by booze and drugs." Haberman's style is designed to incite emotions. It did, but probably the opposite he was shooting for.

It took me about 10 minutes to read all of the above, and another 15 to write this up.

Sources:

Spotlight on Lobbying Swings to Little-Known Congressman

<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/17/politics/17ney.html>

A Stolen Love Is Found, 37 Years Down the Road

<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/17/nyregion/17corvette.html>

Liberia's Harvard-Trained 'Queen' Is Sworn in as Leader

<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/17/international/africa/17liberia.html>

Getting Rich by Making Stuff Up

<http://select.nytimes.com/2006/01/17/nyregion/17nyc.html>

January 18 – Court decisions

Today the first news I consumed was the Nexus. That's where I read first about the Supreme Court deciding in 6-3 ruling to keep euthanasia legal in Oregon. I was pleased with the decision, although somewhat surprised. I think people should have the right to end their lives if they wish to do so. At the

same time everything should be done to keep people alive and make them want to stay alive by giving good reasons and good care. Previously I was not really interested in the internal working of the Supreme Court. From this short piece and then from the longer article on the same topic from the NYTimes in the evening I started to learn more about the individuals making up this forum and their reputations, history. It is fascinating in a way. This 9 person body has such a huge direct influence on the lives of 280 million people. And if we consider the 2000 elections, how they selected the winner, indirectly to the rest of the world. How different world history would have been in the last 5 years if we'd had Gore as president. We'll never know.

The other bit I picked up from the Nexus was about the settlement between a high school and concerned parents in Fresno. The school agreed never again to teach "Intelligent Design" course. It is a touchy subject and I have not figured out my opinion yet. Basically I think, I agree with the principle that ID should not be taught. It should not be taught as an only theory or as one of many accounting for the existence of the universe and humankind. However I do believe that it should be taught in a social science class, along with religion. Students need to be sensitized to people with different belief systems. They need to be able to understand the other person, have empathy for them. For that the first step is to make them aware, and teach what the other believes in.

In the evening I got the NYTimes, where in addition to the above I read an article about how Hamas in Israel is trying to soften its image and another one on how Israel is ready to talk to Palestinians about peace if they disarm Hamas. The two articles side by side was disheartening. I am concerned what the Palestinian election will bring.

Sources:

Justices Reject U.S. Bid to Block Assisted Suicide

<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/18/politics/politicsspecial1/18scotus.html>

Warm and Fuzzy TV, Brought to You by Hamas

January 19 – Muslim drivers discriminated against?

The main reason I cannot read the paper in the morning is because if I wake up early enough I like to go to the gym. If I don't get up early enough then I usually have to go to school or work, before I could sit down and read the paper. That's why it is left for the evening.

On the other hand today in the gym I was watching the local news on TV, while I was running on the treadmill. There was one story that I remembered till now, in the evening. Muslim cab drivers say the police targeted them and they get way many more citations than non-Muslim drivers. Apparently they had city licenses, but not county. They were not even aware that they need one. But they kept getting these citations. I am especially sensitive for tracking discrimination against Muslims. It is important for me, as a Jew, that nobody should be punished for their religion or ethnicity. However this case seemed a bit muddy. I have the feeling that the brief report on TV did not share all the background information, details on the case. If the drivers' allegations are true it is quite outrageous. However it is possible that they tried to save some money or hassle by not getting the extra license. Either way this is one of those cases I would love to follow and get all the information in, but find that it is not high priority enough for me, to devote the time. But I feel guilty about it, because "if not me, who" will stand up for them? I turned off the TV on the running machine and mused about it for the rest of my 28 minute routine.

Looks like Supreme Court decisions come in pairs. Today they reaffirmed that teenagers can have access to it, in case of medical emergency. This sits well with me, because the life of the mother should be protected. I understand that this is not an overall, blanket policy. They just decided not to change the verdict of two lower case courts. I learned a bit about the nuances and history of the cases from Roe vs. Wade.

Source:

Muslim cabbies say they're being targeted

<http://www.montereyherald.com/mld/montereyherald/news/13652588.htm>

Justices Reaffirm Emergency Access to Abortion

<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/19/politics/politicsspecial1/19scotus.html>

January 20 – Self reflection

I am noticing that I don't exactly answer the questions I am supposed to for this journal. While I do mention what news sources I use, how I followed it, how much time I spent with it and what caught my attention but not so thorough with the second set of questions. Every once in a while I did refer to emotional reactions, but my posts read more like personal analysis and less than emotional diary. I guess that is my way of showing emotions. Only a limited, restrained way. But I still think that my reactions transpire through my writing.

I am also supposed to write about "interaction with others about news happenings." I have a very simple reason not to address this issue: I had none. I don't really talk politics with my classmates or friends. Indeed I rarely talk to people around me. I do talk to my girlfriend who shared this morning her nightmare inspired by terrifying international news. That's what prompted this entry. The realization that besides her I barely communicate with people face to face. Therefore politics does not have a chance to become a talking point.

I am also supposed to indicate what activity was new for me because of the class. The only item I can enlist there is reading the New York Times. But this is a big one for me. I spend about 15 minutes with it most day. With my crazy schedule that is a big difference. The impact reading the paper has on me is limited to what goes on in my head: I think about the items I read, they keep popping up in my head. But as far as actions go I do not notice much change in my routine.

The most interesting piece for me in today's paper was from the Nexus: UCSB Library has put online music from the first few decades of the 10th century transferred from cylinders to digital format. I

know that this is not politics, but the newspaper is also a source for cultural news for me. I am much more interested in culture than in politics. Not necessary current pop culture though.

I just glanced through the New York Times today. The top right article of the cover page dealt with bin Laden's latest message of truce and warning. This reminded me of professor Juergensmeyer opinion from the course I took with him (Global Conflict), according to which the US (government) pays too much attention to bin Laden. He was a little rogue terrorist. Although he managed to cause havoc with his 9/11 attack, but we should still treat him based on what he is: a hiding refugee. Him and his resources are not even comparable of the United States and its might. By focusing on him so much, by transmitting his messages, we elevate him to the same level. This is what he wants, he played us. By now he became an important figure, because the Bush administration made him so. They share the common black and white picture with eschatological overtones. Having seen reference to his latest message on the spot reserved for the most important news on the page reminded me all of this.

Source:

Library Offers Early Recordings Online

<http://www.dailynexus.com/news/2006/10682.html>

January 23 – AIR survey

As I mentioned my main news source usually is from Brainstorms, a virtual community. Recently however I did not have time to follow up there the discussions. Today I ventured back again and stumbled upon a report. The results of a survey done by the American Institutes for Research, funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts were published recently. The press release of the report starts this, "twenty percent of U.S. college students completing 4-year degrees – and 30 percent of students earning 2-year degrees – have only basic quantitative literacy skills."

This got me thinking on several tracks. I was curious whether UCSB was one of the schools they did the survey, but I couldn't find the answer, despite reading the whole report. All I found was that they

"collected data from a sample of 1,827 graduating students at 80 randomly selected 2-year and 4-year colleges and universities (68 public and 12 private) from across the United States."

The other interesting factoid was that 4 year college students did worse than 2 year college students. I wonder why. It seems to me that people who go to junior colleges are closer to "real life" than those who can spend four years to get a degree. But this is just a guess.

However what I spent the most time thinking about was the connection between Mindich's book and this survey. He is lamenting and trying to find the sources why youth is "tuning out" from the political process. This survey shows that youth might be tuning out of other things as well. I wonder whether we as a country or even on a global scale passed the peak of literacy, measured by the percentage of the population. For most of humankind most people could not read and write and they got by somehow. Then literacy started to spread and not just limited to aristocracy or clergy. The last decade has been called by some the age of the information revolution. This notion would assume that in this modern age to be able to get by one would need to be able to handle information more than industrial products (the basis of the previous, industrial age.) However the survey and Mindich books proves that youth is less capable and interested in handling complex issues, with lots of information than the previous generation. This is not the space and time to go into the details for the reason of the phenomena, but I suspect that it is complex too. My "conspiracy theory" favoring side would blame it on those who are in power. Government and big corporations may not be interested in having a populace that is capable of being critical of them, or make more informed decision on what (not) to consume. My pessimist side would prefer to blame it all on the media that is dumbing down us. Either way the trend is terrifying.

I did not get to read the paper today. My time available for this kind of activity was spent in Brainstorms and reading the AIR survey.

Source:

American Institutes for Research survey

<http://www.air.org/news/documents/Release200601pew.htm>

January 24 – More news sources

I just realized that I have not been noting three important aspects of my news consuming habits. I do browse through almost automatically every day a Hungarian news webportal. I usually spend about 10-15 minute with it, but divided into 2-3 sessions. Basically I check several times a day what is going on in my home country. On average I would say I read 5-6 articles a day. Most of them are just 4-5 paragraphs and I read them only in a cursory fashion. But this way I can maintain a sense of still being familiar with Hungary's zeitgeist, despite having moved away from there a decade ago. Once a week, usually the weekend I also check a Hungarian' weekly's online edition. It is called "Life and Literature" and half of it is devoted to local politics. They have excellent in depth analysis, but I only read through those that attract my attention for one reason or another. I guess it is part of political socialization, but it is so distinct from my every day life over here, that it did not occur to me to mention or even consider it. There I don't read international news, for those I rely on English language sources.

One of those sources is the five headlines on my email page. I use Yahoo's mail service and on its fronts page there are the last five major headlines. Sometimes they don't change those for days, other times they do it several times a day. It is not reliable in this sense. But I check my email half a dozen times a day and my eyes always wander to the middle of the screen to check out what is new. And every once in a while I click on the headlines and read the full news themselves. Four out of the five items there are coming from Associated Press, while the last one varies.

Finally, the four days of the week when I work in an office (Monday through Thursday, five hours a day) my internet browser's "homepage" is set for Google. There I have news on my screen all the time, and several times a day I scroll through them. I customized the news, so it does not include sports or entertainment, but includes more world news and a bit of business as by default. I rarely ever click on a link there, because just scrolling down through the whole screen gives me an overview of what is going on. It seems to be that I am more interested in being aware of a wider scale of events, than following

everything in depth. I get more satisfaction out about knowing a little bit of a lot of topic, than attempting to know a lot about a lot. I know that the latter is impossible therefore I limit myself to those topics that I really care for, or for some reason find interesting enough to dive into.

The reason I realized that I was missing from this journal the Hungarian sources was an article on the fourth page of the New York Times. It shed some light on the dispute between Russia and Georgia regards to gas. Saboteurs blew up the pipes in which the gas flew to Georgia. It took a day to repair the damage, but the country was basically without heat and electricity for two days. This is parallel, but different story of what is happening with Russian gas in Ukraine and in Europe. All of these are major headlines in Hungary. Here they deserved the fourth page. Proximity makes a big difference. These countries are closer to Hungary, than to the US, thus Hungarians feel their pains harder. Ukraine is one of Hungary's neighboring countries; therefore its stability is crucial for Hungary's security. Meanwhile here, the article is more informative, but less invested in the outcome of the event.

Sources:

Index.hu (Hungarian news webportal)

<http://index.hu/>

Elet es Irodalom ("Life and Literature")

<http://www.es.hu/>

Georgia Reopens Old Gas Line to Ease Post-Blast Shortage

<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/24/international/europe/24georgia.html>

January 25 – The Nation

I used to have a subscription to the weekly magazine The Nation. With my several moves in the last year the paper stopped coming. Finally today (after I told them last week my current address) the

paper arrived again. I practically read cover to cover in one day, in the little snippets of time I have, when riding the bus, or waiting for a class or meal. It probably took me over an hour. It would be too much to comment on all the items I read there and created emotional resonance in me. Let me just say that it was reassuring to read opinions and analysis that I agree with in general. When I read The Nation I often feel like I am treated in an intelligent way. The authors think and reason in a similar pattern I would. On the other hand they go overboard for my taste. This serves as good reminder to be tolerant and respectful to the other side. While I agree with the writers' opinion some of them are not showing respect. Although they might have good reason for that (based on past actions), but I still believe it is more beneficial for the outcome and enriching for our own sake to remain calm and refrain from slur. I understand that facing the topics they uncover it is a hard thing to do. But more of them should try.

So without delving into the specifics, here are the articles I enjoyed reading for their content, though not necessary for their style: comparing Supreme Court candidate Alito's opinion to the opinion of US population and congress, how hunger in the worlds is "caused by scarcity of living democracy", a call against "radical orthodoxy of any stripe", analysis of ABC corporation's actions and reactions around the topic of the secret CIA prisons in Eastern Europe, (I skipped the long article about Bolivia's elections,) a "top ten list of bold ideas" with long term effects for the Democratic Party to work on as a away of standing up against the accusation that they don't know what they want, an analysis of Russia's gas situation, and a review of Egon Schiele's exhibit. This was a very rich issue for me. I missed this kind of intellectual stimulus.

Source:

The Nation

<http://www.thenation.com/>

January 26 – Palestinians and Google

The major news of the day was the Palestinians elections yesterday. The NYTimes I got in the morning did not have a chance yet to be sure of Hamas victory, but by the end of the day I learned from other sources that it is the case. Not good news for me or for Israelis. I have complex relationship to Israel, but one thing is certain I care a lot about it. I fear that this election result will not help peace. I also care about Palestinian public and I fear that on the long term this will not benefit them. On the other hand it is such a complex situation and I do not have an easy, good, simple answer how to unlock the cycle of violence. Maybe this change will shift something and it may end up better. I am hoping, but not hopeful. You asked for emotional reactions, I had plenty today: fear. But I appreciated the Times fair article, that attempted to show not just the big picture and the numbers, but also the process from the ground up.

On the other hand I am glad I read the article on Google vs. Justice Department. I thought of the case as a privacy issue. (Briefly: The Justice Department asked Google to hand over a week's worth of logs for analysis so they could find out about search patterns. Although they said that no individuals would be able to be identified or targeted, but Google denied complying the request.) I thought Google had a good argument based on privacy concern. The article shed some light that they may even have a stronger case based on trade secrets and civil procedure. Usually I am trying to follow news where politics is interfering with technology. In this case it also seemed from the beginning that it might be another erosion of civil liberty. But the NYTimes' experts helped me to understand the issue from a point of view I did not even consider.

Sources:

Hamas Presses Fatah in Palestinian Vote, Surveys Say

<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/26/international/middleeast/26mideast.html>

In Case About Google's Secrets, Yours Are Safe

<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/26/technology/26privacy.html>

January 27 – News to depress about

Today's NYtimes was filled with articles about reactions to the Hamas victory. I read what the Europeans, what the Israelis, and what Bush thinks of it. I still see no end of it. Depressing.

But there were a number of smaller items I could relate to on a more personal level. That seems to be to my political interest, what affects me and/or my beloveds. For example the president has been pushing the privatization of health care and social security. This can cut deep into my pockets, and can affect my body directly. Just as I suspected there is business interest behind this suggestion. Today's article showed how Wall St. reacted to the idea: with enthusiasm for new business opportunities. I think one's physical health should not depend on financial health.

I was also surprised to read the poll results suggesting that 28% agrees with wiretaping ordinary Americans for the sake of "reducing the threat of terrorism." I found that number too high. I was equally surprised by the 68% who agreed to wiretapping those who the government is suspicious of. Is there this much trust in the government? We trust them enough to wiretap who they deem suspicious. I certainly don't trust any government to that extent. With due process maybe, but without that it is and should remain illegal.

I questioned the value of human life when I read about the 2400 feet tunnel connecting Tijuana and the US. It was used for drug smuggling. Apparently that pays better than smuggling people. And these people operated for years, using their high-tech and professional tunnel. I keep reading how desperately Mexicans attempt to enter the US. But looks like the smugglers considered non-human cargo a higher profit margin, or more secure.

The last little curious item was about how California "declared secondhand smoke a toxic air pollutant." This ruling was based on a medical survey, which is contested by the tobacco companies of course. But "the most significant new finding is that young women exposed to secondhand smoke increased their risk of developing breast cancer by 68 percent to 120 percent." That is a large enough number to warrant such a measure. However I wonder sometimes whether we are taking it too far. I don't

smoke and can't stand rooms with smoke in it. But I do respect the right of the people who are smoking. They should be able to do it, but without risking others' health. How to accomplish that I do not know, but I am not sure that strict enforcement is the best method. Also I do not know from this article what does this new ruling mean in practical terms, how does it affect day-to-day regulation..

Sources:

Saving Accounts For Health Costs Attract Wall Street

<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/27/business/27health.html>

New Poll Finds Mixed Support for Wiretaps

<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/27/politics/27poll.html>

Officials Find Drug Tunnel With Surprising Amenities

<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/27/national/27tunnel.html>

California Puts Passive Smoke on Toxic List

<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/27/national/27smoke.html>

January 29 – Weekend roundup

The NYTimes delivery people made a mistake. I only subscribed for Monday through Friday but this first weekend I also got both the Saturday and Sunday paper. I spent slightly more time with them, as they are thicker anyway, half an hour each day.

Both issues were still dominated by Hamas' victory. Let me revisit this statement. This was my recollection, but now that I looked into the paper I have to acknowledge that my memory was incorrect. On both days there were only three articles related to the topic, covering one and a half page of each issue. Nevertheless it felt so pressing on me that my memory got thwarted.

The articles I read from beginning to end in the Saturday issue were about slow economic growth (It is still amazing me that if the market only grows 1.1% in a quarter that is basis for worry; for me growth is good), public school students are just as good at math as their private school mates (according to a large scale survey that adjusted for income and other circumstances. I wonder how they did the adjustment; either way this is something to ponder upon as a future father), the Republican director of the House committee investigating the government's response to the Hurricane found a "disturbing inability by the White House to de-conflict and analyze information" (if a Republican says this how bad was it? Also what does it predict for future crisis situation?)

I started the Sunday issue by reading the long article on how US politics helped to create chaos in Haiti, but I ran out of steam and did not read the whole thing. I did read through how NASA tried to silence a global warming expert from its own flock. It scarily reminded me of the respective scene from "The Day After Tomorrow" movie, also related to global warming. It is simply disgusting how twisted the government can behave in its perceived interest. It is particularly sad, that it is only their "perceived" but not real interest they see, because of their short term focus. I also read with interest the call for accountability on how charities are spending the money they raised in poor countries. The article covertly suggested that some governments are asking for tighter controls. In general though I tended to side with the charities' spokespeople, whose explanation on their spending strategies seemed to be more grounded than their attackers' accusation. I suspect that the center of the issue is corrupt governments whom these charities may not have bribed (enough.)

I still did not talk about politics, so not much to report about that.

Sources:

Public-School Students Score Well in Math in Large-Scale

<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/28/education/28tests.html>

Hurricane Investigators See 'Fog of War' at White House

<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/28/national/nationalspecial/28katrina.html>

Mixed US Signals Helped Tilt Haiti Toward Chaos

<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/29/international/americas/29haiti.html>

Climate Expert Says NASA Tried to Silence Him

<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/29/science/earth/29climate.html>

Poor Nations Say Much Charity Fails to Reach Victims

<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/29/international/29charity.html>

January 30 – Bad news, good ideas

Today's paper was depressing again. Hamas; victory is still causing turmoil on all sides. It seems even they themselves were surprised by their victory. Ms. Rice also acknowledged that she did not see it coming. The second major article I was interested in enough to read through was about the relatively new Iranian leadership. Earlier only the president's threats against Israel, Jews, and Zionism generally reached me. From this article I learned the kind of populism he is playing with his people. He is promising and indeed spending money on the Iranian people's welfare. It is unsure from what sources and for how long he can keep it up. I find it unfortunate that at the same time when he might improve quality of life for Iranians he is talking against the west and Israel in such threatening voice. I am afraid the two themes will be even more connected in the Iranians' mind: they can get better only at the expense of the West. I wish they would see through the game their president is playing with them. I also glimpsed through the report on Saddam Hussein's trial. I don't believe that there is an impartial way or country he could be judged, therefore I consider this trial a showcase. So did he, so he walked out. I believe he and his team is just playing for time. They are doing it well though.

In other negative news "millions of low-income people would have to pay more for health care under budget bill worked out by Congress." My empathy lies with them, hell with us. I am always having a hard time understanding how lawmakers can sympathize so much more with (big) business that they are willing to sacrifice millions of people's lives or health. But they do. On the same page I read through how FEMA did not utilize the interior departments' resources. Again, because of incompetence or self-interest thousands of lives were harmed or endangered. I ask with the words of the musical Hair "how can people be so cruel?"

The final straw came from the op-ed pages. There I learned "nationally just two thirds of all students—and only half of all blacks and Latinos—who enter ninth grade actually graduate with regular diplomas four years later." This, at a time "when a college education is virtually prerequisite for achieving or maintaining a middle-class lifestyle." Only one in 12 and one in 6 black kids are getting college degrees. This is another aspect of the landscape of political involvement Mindich talks about. It is exceedingly hard to participate in the civic process if you have to struggle to survive.

I also spent some time on researching Yitzhak Kaduri. He was a Kabbalist rabbi whose death was mentioned in a short article on page 6. His name rang a bell, but the article did not seem informative enough, particularly to satisfy my interest in his Kabbalist side. Sure enough from other online sources I learned what the NYTimes decided to omit. Besides being a mystic he had major political influence. Through his curses and blessings and personal followers he probably influenced enough swing voters to get Netanyahu in the chair. He seemed like an interesting, controversial, and respectable character, but in my book politics and religion should not be mixed the way he did.

I spent this time half an hour reading the paper. I also spent another 20 minutes reading through the ideas in The Nation it was a special issue, consisting of a list of short pieces assessing the state of the union, providing "alternative paths to renewal." That was great, because I learned about lots of positive initiatives by 20 members of Congress. They are working on ensuring the right to vote for everybody, fighting diseases in Africa, supporting US industry through "patriotic corporations," extending MediCare

to children and people over 55, reducing the consolidation of monopolies in the media, security and international issues and so on. It was invigorating to read about all these ideas from the pen (word processor) of people who are interested in doing something good on large scale and may even have the means to do so.

Sources:

Rice Admits US Underestimated Hamas Strength

<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/30/international/middleeast/30diplo.html>

A New Face in Iran Resurrects an Old Defiance

<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/30/international/middleeast/30iran.html>

Budget to Hurt Poor People on Medicaid, Report Says

<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/30/politics/30budget.html>

Interior Dept. Report Describes FEMA's Scant Use of Its Help

<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/30/politics/30fema.html>

The Lost Children

<http://select.nytimes.com/2006/01/30/opinion/30herbert.html>

Tens of Thousands Attend Funeral of Kabbalist Rabbi

<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/30/international/middleeast/30rabbi.html>

Rabbi Yitzhak Kaduri

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/obituaries/story/0,,1698412,00.html>

January 31 – Mixed bag

The first news hit me when my fiancée told me—after listening to the local radio news early morning—what happened last night in Goleta: shooting resulting in 7 dead bodies. Things closer to home are always more shocking, literally hitting home too close. I feel fortunate that I knew none of the people involved, but I realize how little control I or anyone has over events like this.

Other news I read with interest: "Americans savings rate sinks to lowest level since Depression" (from the Nexus, telling how convincing Bush's trickle down economic policy was: we spend more than we make and this is supposed to be good for the economy); the Federal Reserve has its new chairman, Mr. Ben S. Bernanke (the selection of possibly the second most influential person in the world went by with nobody noticing it); Exxon Mobil's profit was record high (\$36Billion, I just cannot control myself when I hear numbers like that it and long for re-regulation of the industry. I would prefer to pay less for gas even at the cost of cutting into their profit); and a medium length article on page 3 about the consequences of anti-Muhammad caricatures in a Danish paper. I found this last bit worrying, because it fits too nicely into Samuel Huntington's "Clash of Civilizations" theory. I hope he is wrong, but this incident is showing insensitivity and disregard on the newspaper side and may provide an excuse to exercise some Muslims' anger. I hope it won't lead to further trouble.

I admit I didn't watch or listen to the president's State of the Union speech. I prefer to read it, because his mannerism and voice annoys me too much. I can also follow better what he said in writing. So I will check it out tomorrow.

Sources:

And in This Corner, Fed Choice Is Blip on Some Senators' Radar

<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/31/business/31bernanke.html>

Exxon Mobil Sets a Profit Record, With \$36 Billion

<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/31/business/31exxon.html>

Caricature of Muhammad Leads to Boycott of Danish Goods

<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/31/international/middleeast/31danish.html>

February 1 – State of the Union

First thing in the morning I read the president's speech on the Whitehouse's website. Then I read Think Progress' point by point analysis of where the president lied or simply contradicted his past actions with his fresh words. It was disheartening to find that we have a president who can get away with almost anything. Issues lik public trust, Katrina cleanup, renewable energy, dependence on foreign oil, budget deficit, unemployment, due process ... no matter what he touched the truth was not on his side. I did not have the necessary focus or time to read all the analysis the Times provided on the speech I just looked at the chart showing the number of words the president used in his SOTU addresses in the last 7 years. This year's winners are Freedom and Terrorists (with 17 mention each) and close behind them Economy and Iraq. Compared to last year the biggest drop was Social Security and Retirement. Compared to 2001 he spoke much less of taxes, Medicare or health care. This shows the shift he is taking.

I also read about how Iran is covering its tracks and not sharing information about its nuclear plans, suggesting that it is not entirely peaceful; half of the Chilean cabinet is women; the Goleta shooting's claim to fame by covering half a page.

State of the Union related readings took 40 minutes of my time, leaving only about 10 minutes for the rest. I still did not converse about politics with anybody, but I did listen to my fiancée's unabashedly negative opinion about the president's address. She watched it with friends.

Sources:

State of the Union address by the president

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/stateoftheunion/2006/index.html>

Think Progress State of the Union analysis

<http://thinkprogress.org/?tag=State%20of%20the%20Union>

Atomic Agency Sees Possible Link of Military to Iran Nuclear Work

<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/02/01/international/middleeast/01iran.html>

February 2 – Continuing stories

Today I only spent 20 minutes with reading the paper. Most of the news were (or felt like) continuation of past stories, with minor variations. It reminded me of my father's lamentations over "the tyranny of recency over relevancy." But the news on the cover page were new, including the violent confrontation between illegal settlers in Israel and the evacuating forces (Jews fighting Jews always saddens me); the White House refusing to sharing documents with investigators who want to learn about US spying, and the budget cuts. But inside the newspaper wrote still mostly about Iran, hamas, and cartoons on Muhammed. At least these are the topics I read about, while skipping only the headlines of other news. I read one more story, because its topic fits my blog on religion and film: a new evangelical film ("End of the Spear") about a missionary, played by a gay actor. If the filmmakers' wish was to create controversy, thus free publicity for their movie it worked. However it may backfire to them, because a segment of the core target audience may reject to view the film because of the openly homosexual (but Christian) actor.

Sources:

Settlers in West Bank Outpost Battle Police Who Came to Raze Houses

<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/02/02/international/middleeast/02mideast.html>

Senate Panel Rebuffed on Documents on US Spying

<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/02/02/politics/02nsa.html>

Evangelical Filmmakers Criticized for Hiring Gay Actor

<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/02/02/national/02spear.html>

February 3 – Are you on the bus?

Fridays I have slightly more time than other days. Therefore besides reading the NYTimes and the Nexus I also spent some time with The Nation, altogether maybe an hour, but divided into 3-4 segments.

The Nexus had a photo on the cover on which a student steps onto the bus at the UCSB bus circle. I was on that bus last night when the picture was taken. There was a conflict between the student and the bus driver, because the latter did not accept the former's sticker on his student ID as valid. I tried to help the student by showing the driver that I have the same kind of sticker on my card, but it did not work, because my sticker had two blue stripes and this student's had one. The whole discussion lasted for about 3 minutes, the student getting angry and protesting, and the bus driver insisting that he cannot take the student on. Meanwhile the photographer was making lots of pictures of both sides. My fiancée, who was with me on the bus, believed that it was a setup to frame/test the driver. She was ready to bet with me that the story would be in the Nexus next day. She was half right, because the picture was there, but connected to a more generic story about a forum addressing problems in transport funding. Because my personal association with the picture I read the whole article, that otherwise I probably would not have read.

Instead of mentioning the dozen articles I read in the New York Times I would focus on today on the Nation. The cover story is about "The New Face of The Campus Left." The corresponding article acknowledges that there is a rightist student movement, but only a fragmented and disorganized left on the nation's campi. But they point to new developments they consider hopeful. I don't see them as hopeful and certainly did not encounter them on UCSB. Maybe I am not looking at the right place, but if they

exist here, they are miniscule. I read a few other articles there, but I am too tired to list them. Overall sense is still that I get refreshed by reading the Nation

Sources:

Forum To Address Problems in Public Transport Funding

<http://www.dailynexus.com/news/2006/10834.html>

Notes on my daily journal:

I noticed that I practically wrote nothing about party politics. While Republican and Democratic party and their actions may be the very essence of US politics I found myself less interested in that than in international news or specific issues. See more about the topic in my separate journal entry on the difference between the two parties.

I included the titled (and links to) stories I mentioned for my own sake. So if I want to return to them in the future I would have an easy access to them. But with few exceptions I read these articles on paper and not online. I just sought them out when writing the journal entry.

I liked the exercise of reading the paper every day. It was hard to get into it, but now it became routine. I hope I can keep up with it on the longer term. I would say that this is a significant and positive change in my news consuming habits.

Week 8: Mass media / Public Opinion / Tuning In (March 12, 2006)

Mindich has four set of suggestions to encourage young people to tune in. When he talks about “taking back the airwaves” he refers to the fact and consequences that “airwaves are owned by us and leased to the TV networks.” (Mindich 115) He suggests including news programming directed to kids, change legislation to protect against monopolies of the news industry, and mandate computer manufacturers to set internet browser to show news sites by default. His second set of suggestions

(Mindich 118) focuses on the college-age population, by requiring a civics portion for both college aptitude tests and honorary society memberships. Third, he wants to make politics meaningful again (Mindich 119) by forcing the announcement of party affiliations in TV ads, having more debates on TV as a requirement for federal funding of candidates, freeing airtime for political advertisements, and reinvigorating public life through “multiplicity picnics.” (Mindich 121) His final set asks the journalist community, (Mindich 122) to do quality and accessible journalism and follow the ideas, topics, and attitudes of young people; and asks the public to demand and pay for good quality journalism.

I agree with most of Mindich’s ideas, but would place the emphasis elsewhere. For the college population TV as a news source may be less relevant than the internet. On the net though, the most popular sites or methods of communication is the social networking type. I believe that by focusing on the tools they already use political activism can be more effective. For example if Facebook would have more detailed options of political self-profiling users would have a chance to create a more nuanced image of themselves. (Currently users can place themselves in one of five categories.) If these profiling tools would be connected to more in-depth surveys, discussion boards, ability to seek out people with similar beliefs (or opposite for that matter), local and national news stories related to the points they are addressing, options to organize issue based groups right there in Facebook... then students could be more engaged. The same applies to other software students use, such as IM (Instant Messaging). The same set of links/ideas could be integrated in any of the software tools students use for several hours a day, or even in their cellphone’s interface. Manufacturers would need incentive to do so though. Tax breaks for implementing socially conscious and responsible software should be provided, because companies understand the language of business. Ad space on these online tools should be provided cheaper for non-profit, civic and/or political organizations than for commercial ones. This morning I saw an ad (size of a third page) in the New York Times for “Teach for America,” donated to them by the paper for free. The same could happen online and the cost should be tax-deductible for the provider.

The three key words in the area of making politics “meaningful” is being relevant, personal, and fun. Mindich showed that young people politics is irrelevant to their lives. As the local living wage example we followed this perception is incorrect. As long as politics have a negative connotation, something that is way over students’ heads it will be uninteresting. But if we show how the local relates to the national--or even international--then it has a chance to become relevant and personal. The activists of current organizations should focus on showing students how politics is much more than the national elections every fourth year. There are students who are asking “what’s in it for me.” It is the activists’ responsibility to answer this question.

Most young people want to have fun, so the way to engage them should be by providing fun. Political activities are considered by many as boring or nerdy. I am an active member of Hillel, a quasi-religious organization whose programs shared the same reputation. In response the board worked on drawing in “cool”--dare I say “hot”--people. Their efforts were successful and Hillel by now provides an alternative to the party scene. Similarly, politically interested organizations should be able to combine fun elements with educational ones. People started to come to Hillel to eat, dance, watch movies, and socialize and as a side effect they came to services as well, that was a primary objective. If politically minded groups want to see more activity they should organize more activities that will make them attractive.

I believe the political culture also needs to be changed to be closer to the heart of young people. Specifically, I speak of the elected officials’ behavior and the focus on voting. Some--and I do not say all—leaders can not be considered role models because of their less than exemplary behavior. Others are not considered legitimate enough because they were (s)elected or selected under ambiguous circumstances. As long as people like these are in key positions young (and not-so-young) people might legitimately question the honesty of the political system. Who would want to venture into muddy waters? Therefore the election system needs to be simpler and more transparent. The existing laws, both written and moral, should be strictly enforced on people who are supposed to govern by the consent of the

governed. In other words, people who proved not to be worthy of political positions should be removed and new ones should be elected by the people. This would gain the trust and interest of young people.

Finally, the focus on the infrequent (every 2-4 years) elections makes politics a distant activity, that does not concern people on a regular basis. By transforming our democracy into a more direct one, youth would be able to see how politics affect them and how they can affect it. Local decision-making process should be based on extensive debates to which the cost of entry (in terms of time and involvement) is minimal. I am talking about city-wide, online, asynchronous council meetings. If people would have a chance not just going to the occasional public meeting at the city hall, but could log on any time from the convenience of their home to follow the matters they would do it.

I found myself more tuned in this quarter than in previous one, but not to the extent I thought I would be. For one, the New York Times arrived on my doorsteps regularly, but I did not get to read it every day. On the other hand even if I managed to read it only every second day that is already more than previously, i.e. never. On the long term this did not change my, largely web based, news-consuming patterns. The local living wage debate had a big impact on me. Seeing it from the activist's (Daraka's) perspective, reading about it from the conservative NewPress point of view, comparing it to the national level while looking for a job in the county made it clear what is at stake: my income level. Also, while previous sociology and history classes made me aware of race, class, and power issues, but they were disconnected from my everyday reality. Domhoff, the readings, and the lectures helped me to see these issues in a more systemic way and gave new lenses to read the news. I may not read more news (as I was already spending on average an hour a day on it) than before, but I have different understanding on how to read, comprehend, and analyze the news. I feel I can see deeper behind and between the lines now.

Week 9-10: The US and the world (March 21, 2006)

A. The Bush administration and the war on terrorism, the Iraq war

US presidents like to declare war on and against issues they consider harmful to America. We had Johnson's "war on poverty" from 1964 and Nixon's "war on drugs" from 1971 (restarted by Reagan in

1988), neither causing significant long term, positive effects. After 9/11 the current president declared a “war on terrorism.” He and his administration believed that this is the most important threat against the American public, warranting the use of military language, action, and spending. He introduced the new doctrine for the right of preemptive attack, also known as the “Bush doctrine.” This replaced previous doctrines such as the cold war era’s containment doctrine that was supposed to contain the communist countries to a limited area, stopping the assumed domino effect of its spreading it to new countries.

The “preemptive strike” doctrine was developed by the New American Century think tank. The organization’s name refers to the Henry Luce's “The American Century” article from 1941, in which the author asserted the necessity of the US' world leadership, along with being "first among equals." The policy, as adopted by the Bush administration, is outlined in the September 2002 document titled “The National Security Strategy of the USA.” This document contains the contradiction that on hand “the US possesses unprecedented—and unequaled—strength and influence in the world,” and on the other hand to “defeat this [terrorist] threat we must make use of every tool in our arsenal.” (Reader 243) The new element is signified in the word “before” in the following sentence, “[the US] must be prepared to stop rogue states and their terrorist clients before they are able to threaten or use weapons of mass destruction against the United States.” The president believes that the US not only has the right to strike anywhere in the world where an attack against the US might be prepared, but also that it has the obligation to do so. Accordingly, preemptive attack or war is justified if “imminent threat” is perceived to exist. The concept of “imminent threat” had to be widened and used as justification for “preemptive war” because “rogue states and terrorists do not seek to attack us using conventional means.” As discussed in class, a preemptive war is one when we attack if it looks like they would attack us, while a preventive war is conducted to prevent the possibility of any future war. The UN charter does not allow either. But the administration considers terrorism a new kind of war that requires new kind of answers.

Since 9/11 the US started two wars, only one of them under this pretense. The first one, the invasion of Afghanistan, was justified with the country harboring the mastermind of the 9/11 attacks--

Osama bin Laden and his organization the Al-Quada--and by the promise of bringing democracy to the Afghan people (suffering under the radical Islamic leadership, the Taliban). This second justification replaced the original three--used by the president Bush's reasoning for the war against Iraq--when they came up empty. This war was(is) the first conducted under the new right to preemptive war doctrine. The three stated reasons for the war was Iraq's assumed existing weapons of mass destruction, links to terrorists organizations and potential weapons of mass destruction. Taken together, or even on their own, these provided the "imminent threat" in the eyes of the administration to go at war against Iraq.

An important element of the current administration's policy is the extension of presidential powers. As Shane notes, Congress passed a resolution 3 days after 9/11 "authorizing the president to 'use all necessary and appropriate force' against those responsible for Sept. 11." (Reader 287) Two weeks later a memorandum was issued, that in essence stated that Congress cannot "place any limits on the president's determinations as to any terrorist threats." (Shane 287) These decisions were understood by the president that he can authorize anything, including domestic wiretapping and holding foreign prisoners indefinitely without due process, without following the Geneva Conventions rules. The president and the administration believe that they are morally and legally allowed to do these and more in order to protect the nation.

B. My take on the US Policy toward Iraq

My position regarding the war on Iraq and terrorism consists of three interdependent points. I believe the 'war on terrorism' as we know it is counterproductive, I believe it was a mistake to attack Iraq as the US did it, and I believe the US should leave Iraq as soon as possible. I fundamentally disagree with the current government's actions.

Initiating the "war on terrorism" was a misguided reaction to the 9/11 attacks. A better response would have been to negotiate with the governments of the countries where the terrorists came from. The purpose would have been to entice them to search, prosecute, and take the potential future attackers out of circulation. We should have convinced them that it is in their best interest to do so. This way we would

have built alliances. Our reputation in the region would have increased and we would have been less likely to be looked upon as intruders. On the other hand we had to assess the reliability of our potential allies in preparation. In case of government changes our social capital, connections would have to be rebuilt. In exchange for their help we should have given them concessions in the military and economic areas. With declaring war on terrorism, by directly engaging with terrorists, we elevated small, insignificant rogue groups to the level of the strongest country in the world. By “insignificant” I don’t mean unimportant, but comparatively speaking even the 3000, the death toll of 9/11 is a small number compared to the reaction it caused in the government.

I outlined above a reaction that I believe would have been more beneficial for 9/11 than the one we had, that eventually included the war with Iraq. One of the justifications for the Iraq war was the possible connection to Osama bin Laden. That has been disproved. Just today UN inspectors released a report and minutes, videotapes and other documents of Saddam Hussein’s government from 1992 till 2003. These prove that by 1997 Iraq had no weapons of mass destruction and their main diplomatic efforts were directed to prove it to the UN and later US inspectors. Considering that everybody who followed the news at the time, including myself, believed that Saddam might have weapons we have to question the role of the intelligence agencies, the administration and the media in instigating and maintaining this belief. The concern about Saddam’s weapon stockpile seemed legitimate until it has been systematically disproved. Powers was arguing that the administration systemically “cherry picked” the intelligence reports so they could build up the justification for the war. This might be true, but “connecting the dots” is exactly what these agencies are supposed to do, but in a more responsible and independent way than they did. I disagree with Powers’ insinuation that “connecting the dot” is a practice we should abandon. On the contrary, it should be done more proactively and under less influence from decision makers. The results of the war so far include 2,300 Americans killed, more than 16,000 wounded or maimed; about 30,000 direct Iraqi deaths and more than 100,000 attributable to the war; upward of \$300 billion in direct war expenditures and close to \$1 trillion in estimated total costs.” (The Nation

editorial, page 3, March 27, 2006 issue) I believe that none of the reasons the US attacked war stands scrutiny, there were other alternatives to do, and the costs of the war (listed) were too high therefore it was the wrong decision to make.

Finally, I need to address the current state of the war. Bush emphasizes that he does not wish to abandon the Iraqi people and intends to “finish the job.” These are insufficient and non-pragmatic reasons to stay there. At the same time when the human and financial costs rising every day for the US (and for Iraq) our reputation in the region and the world is diminishing. I believe that we should get out and save further damage to ourselves. Some says that the US created the situation that brought Iraq to the edge of civil war and therefore is responsible for calming it. While the first part of the statement is true, but I believe it is in the best interest of the US to get out now. Our presence does not help to calm the tensions between the fractions who are fighting each other (Sunnis and Shi’ites mostly), but aggravates most Iraqis. It would have been better not to go to Iraq, but now that we are there and see that the chances of creating a western democracy (the ideal Bush wished for) are slim, we should leave and let the country develop on its own route. This may lead to a full-fledged civil war, but at that point our responsibility for that country would be much more limited than it is now, being the de facto occupiers of Iraq. Some of the lines/ideas in this paragraph may have come from Seymour M. Hersh’s article. I read that some time ago, and agreed to his points to such an extent that it is difficult for me to separate now, what I thought of on my own before reading it and what I internalized from his words.

I also believe that Bush is too focused on appearances and it seems to be faith driven, both hurting and driving his foreign policy. “Keeping up appearances,” such as the macho concept of “finishing the job” is more important than pragmatic consideration of what the US gains and loses by this policy. He also seems to have a messianistic kind of belief that the US should be an active ruling force of the world, in this “New American Century.” While he may have a long-term vision and sense of duty, but his faith blinds him towards practical and sensible solutions. His faith is similar to Osama bin Laden’s, in the sense that he sees a global war, even where/when previously it did not exist.

C. Globalization

Globalization refers to the process and consequences of the spreading/expanding of ideas, markets, services, people around the globe, helped by explosion of technological progress and the concept of free markets. While the original (and some current) proponents of globalization believe that it is advantageous for everybody, opponents can point to numerous counterexamples that disproves the previous claim. According to Brecher and Costello explains the positions of the supporters of globalization based on how the free market system could and should work on a global scale. By being able to move products and services freely around the globe each country would produce what they are best and most suitable at. Thus the globalization process would help to break down such artificial boundaries as the borders of nation states and the tariffs and customs those state would impose on exported/imported products.

Those who see globalization as a more negative process base on their arguments not exclusively in financial terms. They consider such non-tangibles as the environment, labor conditions, and standard of living. Furthermore they point out that more and more products can be done anywhere in the world, that do not require or take advantage of special local skills. This addressees the proponents' aforementioned "specialization" argument.

There are three kinds of advantages of globalization. Products' prices can be brought down. Wal-Mart is the best example for this process. As they move their manufacturing facilities (or select their suppliers) around the world they are always striving to find the most inexpensive solution. Then they pass on their savings to the consumers. This is the partial explanation for why "supercenter prices are typically 20% lower than union markets." (Reader 351) The second advantage is that products are available globally. Pepsi sells beverages to more countries and territories that the UN has; you can get the same McDonalds hamburger virtually anywhere in the world. Finally globalization brings jobs to areas where otherwise there might be less opportunity. For example Wal-Mart "bought 14% of the \$1.9 billion in apparel that Bangladesh shipped to the US" (Reader 342) in 2002. By being present in the Bangladesh job market they provide wages to numerous workers there.

These very same points can be used as arguments against globalization. As the “High cost of Low Prices” documentary and the LA Times article series show the other reason (besides finding the cheapest supplier on a global scale) Wal-Mart has such low prices is that they pay their worker much less “\$19 versus \$9” (Reader 348) in case of grocery shop workers. The company’s successfully resisted all unionization attempts so far. This, not having communal bargaining power, means that individual workers are easily dismissed, threatened, and/or fired when they ask for more money or other benefits. Thus, the prices being lower can not be advantageous if consumers (including Wal-Mart’s own employees) don’t have enough money to buy them. Wal-Mart’s business philosophy is exactly the opposite of the early Ford car making company. They paid an unprecedented \$5/hour wage then and this way created a market (of workers) who could afford to buy their cars and they did. Wal-Mart on the other hand lowers wages way below living wage level. They acknowledge that “if you are a sole provider for your family... maybe it [Wal-Mart] is not the right place for you.”(Reader 334)

Some, including myself, considers the second point--of products universal availability—a negative aspect of globalization. It homogenizes humanity. We have been worried and keeping track for decades how many species of plants and animals die out every day. Linguists are aware that the same process is happening to languages, the number is drastically decreasing every year. This is a pattern of cultural impoverishment. Cultures are losing their identity, unique characteristics as the ubiquitous global companies push their products, be it food, clothing, television programming and every part of (non-)material culture. I consider this particularly dangerous, because the strength of living systems resides in the variety of their constituencies. In other words a network (e.g. a gene pool) is stronger if it has lots of different elements (people.) By reducing the diversity we are endangering the human species.

Providing jobs in areas where there is none or little sounds good only until we realize the dependency and devastation it causes. To look at dependency we can see how frightened Bangladeshi government and business people are at the prospect of Wal-Mart moving on to China, where they can get their products done even cheaper. Economically Bangladesh is not self-sufficient, when it depends to such

high extent on a single foreign company. When the factories move on they leave devastation behind.

Michael Moore's "Roger and Me" showed the wasteland of Flint, Michigan after the local automaking company closed shop. The US de-industrialization process of the 1970's and 1980's (when manufacturing jobs moved to Mexico and other countries) created a huge "Rust Belt" with high unemployment rate.

Brecher and Costello in the support of their "globalization-from-below" initiative systematically summarized the disadvantages of globalization in seven points. By the first "race to the bottom" one they referred to the "reduction in labor, social and environmental conditions." (Brecher 22) This includes the disappearances of job security and unions. Companies prefer to move their polluting manufacturing facilities to countries with lax or nonexistent environmental legislation, because it is cheaper for them. However this leaves to the destruction of the local environment, which in exchange on the short term harms the indigenous population, but on the long term everybody. The second, downward spiral point is about the decreased ability to spending (due to ever decreasing wages), leading to stagnation, recession, unemployment. (Brecher 25) They quote a number that can personally affect me, "about 20 percent of the college graduates end up in a non-college level jobs." (Brecher 26) While globalization proponents believe it is good for everybody but "every country confirms the deterioration of living standards." (Brecher 27)

The third negative aspect of globalization is the polarization of haves and have-nots, the increasing gap between rich and poor. I would not mind if the rich would get richer as long as the poor would not get poorer, but the reality that they both move towards the extreme end so the economic ladder. The fourth lamentation is about the loss of democratic control. This is particularly strong in third world countries that are typically debtors and are subjected to structural adjustment programs by the lenders. This is one of the most sensitive points for anti-globalization forces, because it disallows countries, communities, and individuals to set goals for or even influence their own future. At the same time, there is no effective regulation over global corporations that would protect their victims. (This was the fifth danger of globalization.) They can and sometimes run havoc, destroying lives, properties, resources, and the

environment. There are global institutions (e.g. IMF, World Bank, and GATT) that are just as unaccountable as global corporations, but whose decisions have the same or even larger worldwide effect on the ecology. (This was the sixth point.) Finally globalization can lead to global conflict. For example Harvey suggest that the real reason for the US' Iraq war is that "whoever controls the Middle East controls the global oil spigot and whoever controls the oil spigot can control the global economy." (Harvey 19)

Within the globalization debate the "free trade" argument is misleading. It used to be about competitive advantage of countries, but that is less relevant today. It used to be about goods and services, but today it has extended to the movement of capital, investments, that have inherently different rules. The free traders defined the old notion even under changed meanings and circumstances as if nothing has changed (Brecher 70), or celebrate the changes as freedom for the players, or point to global institution that supposed to govern the process. On the other end of the spectrum nationalists want to maintain their nation state and its perceived interest in a global era, by active trade policies, increasing competitiveness, militarism or politics. Brecher on the other hand suggests taking into consideration a wider perspective in the form of "globalization from below." This would entail the recognition of the "need for transnational rules and institutions which may limit national sovereignty," (Brecher 78) but they would be "democratic, transparent, accountable and accessible to the public." This system would protect labor and environmental rights and standards." They hope that such a system, based on international cooperation would create an upward spiral, compared to the current downward one.

Domhoff taught us to ask "who benefits", or more traditionally "follow the money." The answer in the area of globalization is the global corporation, or to be more specific the elite directing and owning them. Bakan's chapter shows that corporations and economists do recognize that globalization created problems and "if global capitalism's flaws aren't addressed, the backlash could grow more severe [then the recent demonstrations at IMF/WTO/G8 meetings]." (Bakan 141). He points to some socially responsible leaders, who have good intentions, but are limited by the mandate of the corporations they

work for. Bakan's solution for the problems of globalization is fourfold. First he would improve the regulatory system, including legislations and their enforcement to bring corporations under democratic control and make them more accountable. (Bakan 161) Second, he would strengthen political democracy, by phasing out corporate political donations and bringing in new voices into the political system. (Bakan 162) Third, he would create a more robust public sphere, and finally would challenge international neoliberalism. I believe the combined approach of Brecher/Costello and Bakan has merits and chances to work, but it is hard to imagine a process of implementing their suggestion, in the current economic systems, where corporations' powers are great and there is no political leadership who would be interested in challenging it, because of the "revolving interlock system of moving back and forth between government and corporate positions. (Domhoff 171)

D. Personal reflections

I suspect that my living standards in terms of obtaining material goods, job security might not reach that of my parents. I acknowledge that being a white, college-educated male in the USA I am the member of a privileged minority, to whom other people have less life chances. I am hoping that the gap between the haves and have-nots will stop increasing. While I hope that I will belong more to the former category, but I am willing to give up some of my advantages in order to create greater equality. I believe this is in my best interest to do so. If women, non-whites, poorer people see me as their allies in the struggle for life, if they see that they can count on me, there is a chance I can count on them when/if needed.

I plan to lead a simple life, do not wish to hoard lots of property, own lots of objects. The keyword for my approach is sustainability: I hope to use less of the earth's resources than I can help to regenerate. I believe the only alternative to do that is to live in a rural area, striving for self-sufficiency as much as possible, including growing most of our (organic) food and getting off the electric grid with the help of solar panels. I plan to have as much influence as I can in maintaining a healthy ecology through the aforementioned practices and advocate others to do so too.

I am not an escapist though, I plan to work (and generate income for my family) in a library or non-profit organization to decrease the digital divide. I believe whether one belongs to the haves or have-nots in this key area will have a greater influence on one's life chances in the future. I also plan to stay politically active. Once I settle in an area I would like to be involved in the local political process and work for greater self-governance. Until I found the geographic area I want to live in I will keep being informed about politics in a more generic way.

My thinking about the state of the world is slightly more positive than it was before the beginning of this class. Just as before, I still think that there are major social, economic, and political institutions that often govern processes towards directions that are--beneficial only to them and only on the short term--negative on a large scale, but now I have a better understanding of what they are and how they work. More importantly I read some articles that attest exciting thinking for alternative directions. Previously I saw no way out, now I do, just don't exactly know how to get there. That is the question that remained unanswered for me, how to change the stagnant, two-party political system into a more dynamic and democratic one; how to empower (or help to self-empower) workers, women, minorities; how to utilize Powers' and Shane's critical view on foreign policy to create a better one; how to translate the vision of Brecher and Bakan about changing the global corporate rule to a more humane and ecological one ... I know that the answer is to do it in small steps, changing personal practices, showing good example, but it seems like an arduous process. I hope I can do it. Thank you for creating a systematized view that I can use to integrate the many pieces of information I was already aware of.