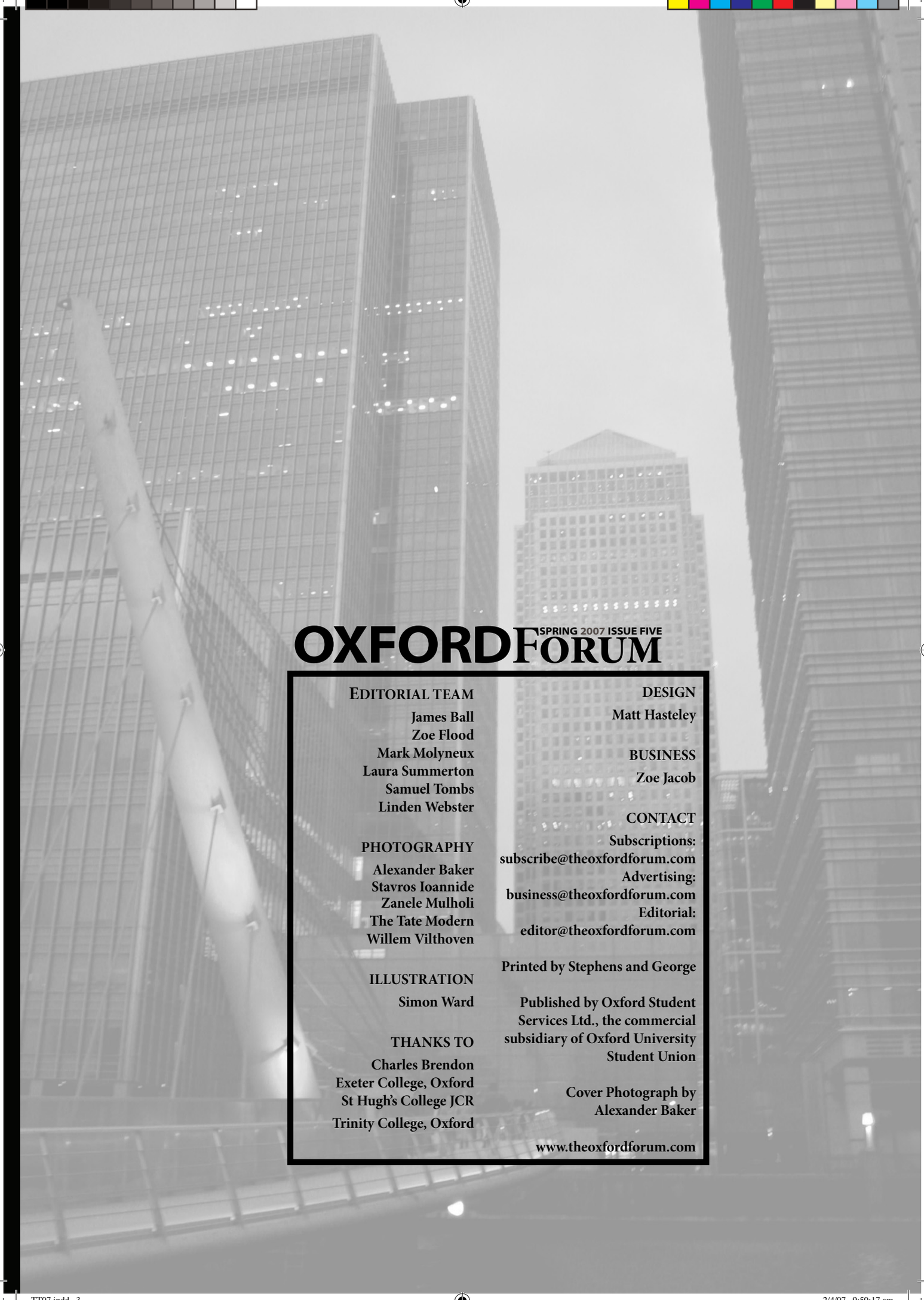

OXFORD FORUM

SPRING 2007 ISSUE FIVE

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"the best ideas...

Editorial

So, finally, another issue of the Oxford Forum has landed in your hands. It's taken a while, but we're confident you'll find it worth the wait.As ever, the Forum aims to provoke debate, and as ever a talented mix of student and professional writers have obliged, and so we'll use the opportunity provided by the editorial box to thank them all profusely for their manifold efforts. Thank you, guys.

And so to debate: kicking us off we have Sir Simon Jenkins (p18) giving us his views on the role of columnists in public discourse, and the threat the 'blogosphere' may present. Staying with this theme, Professor Martyn Percy (p42) talks to us about the public sphere, the right to offend, and the Church's changing role and approach. Christianity, of course, is not the only religion provoking heated discussion of late, and Elsa Dobler (p46) broadens our discussion with an investigation into the thorny issues around France's decision to ban headscarves from public schools.

Of course, there is more to life than discourse, and nowhere is this better illustrated than through the much-heralded dangers of climate change and deforestation. Our photostory (p24) this issue looks at the consequences of deforestation in the Amazon, while Zoe Sprigings (p44) highlights the importance of sustainable development.

In the shorter term, even the most casual follower of UK politics is aware that we are in the dying days of the Blair era, and almost all expect Brown to be anointed as his successor. With this in mind, we have an analysis of Brown's expected policy decisions from Mark Leonard (p8), and a more general overview of Britain's position and challenges as the Blair era ends (p14). We also highlight a much less publicised issue – the struggles faced by the UK's 3 million unpaid carers. Eleanor Slade (p12) campaigns on their behalf.

Naturally, though, we haven't just focussed on Britain. In a series of articles on issues facing women, we look at the changing role of women in Asia, as Charlotte Butler (p29) shows us that things may be much better than we'd expect. Meanwhile, Dr Ellie Lee (p34) discusses the complicated issue of late-term abortion, and Carrie Shelver (p32), of South African women's rights group POWA tackles the shocking prevalence of rape in the country.

Finally, we have revamped and expanded the culture section, with the excellent Stephen Fry (p51) sharing with us his love for Wodehouse. Will Brown(p56) looks at the egotistical portrayal of armageddon in film, and Tom McCarthy (p54) mounts a spirited campaign for Tintin to be recognised as the great literature it apparently is.

We hope we've succeeded in bringing together a range of provocative issues and viewpoints, some straight from the headlines and others less immediate. However, we're well aware that for an organ so enthusiastic about the merits of open and varied debate, this is terribly one-sided. As such, we hope to bring to you at some point this term a far more varied and interactive website, to really spark things off. We may even risk the wrath of Sir Simon and post a blog or two, and may even be so enthused by Guardian audio editor Tim Maby's review of podcasting (p20) that we give it a go ourselves. Until then, please do send us your comments and feedback to the email address below.

James Ball
Samuel Tombs
editor@theoxfordforum.com

...are common property"

BRITAIN

MEDIA

GENDER

NEW EUROPE

ETHICS

CULTURE

REGULARS

One Conflict

STEPHANIE CHARALAMBOUS reports on the mass migration into Cyprus following the Israel-Lebanon War

THE NEWS NETWORKS must have been thankful for the 32-day war. It was as if Israel and Hezbollah had timed it to provide primetime entertainment for the masses in the West, just in the midst of the dead summer news period. The evacuation provided great opportunities for camera lenses: hoards of people boarding ships - some not even passenger vessels – herded like cattle in the cargo areas. Initially it was families of tourists and expats, then Lebanese with dual-citizenship transported from Beirut's port to Cyprus.

Journalists had set up tents in the Larnaka port area in the first days of the evacuation. At seven in the morning of evacuation day five, the waiting room was mostly empty, the big networks had enough pictures and the few reporters lingered around to negotiate passage to Beirut on Indian war ships due to return later that day. A French vessel had docked a few hours earlier with a multi-ethnic passenger list. They were swiftly moved on to makeshift shelters in schools and sports centres fully equipped with sleeping and eating facilities by Cypriot authorities. Only two or three German families were occupying the former VIP rooms on the first floor of the port, now lined with orange bunk beds.

The evacuation provided great opportunities for camera lenses - hoards of people boarding ships, herded like cattle

By 10 o'clock, the Cypriot Crisis Control Team, where I was helping out, switched back on to full alert as another French-chartered ship was approaching land. Whilst the international embassy delegations made arrangements for their own citizens and the EU Commission Team ran about with no particular purpose, a fearsome group of French marines arrived and suddenly hundreds of evacuees, mainly women and children, flooded the port until they were escorted to the next assembly point. Red Cross volunteers had gathered donated foodstuff and drinks, readily available for the people setting foot on safe territory. The evacuees gladly grabbed bottles of water – necessary in July's heat – gave biscuits to sweeten up the kids and put a juice carton or two in their baggage, just in case it would come handy later.

The Cypriots readily donated their extra supplies of foodstuff – some even stocked up especially at supermarkets – piled-up the Red Cross headquarters. The island's native population had no problem identifying with the refugees' plight. Forced migration was after all nothing new to Cyprus. A third of the island's population had become a refugee in 1974 after Turkey's invasion of the North. Many had then lived in Red Cross tents for months, relying on international humanitarian relief.

Forcefully moving from your home is not a simple matter. Leaving home for college is bad enough for most students. Moving house is too much hassle for most families. Yet for some, forced migration happens more than once in a lifetime. Mohammed, aged 15, suprised me when he asked if he could charge up his mobile phone somewhere. His two younger sisters trailing behind him were amused with my attempts to insert his two-pronged charger plug in the socket – the ones in Germany aren't like that, they told me. As with most dual nationality evacuees, they were migrants of a different kind: economic migrants – Gastarbeiten – their father trying to earn a living in a factory in Berlin.

For the individuals of the region, lifetime outcomes lie beyond personal choice and religious affiliation - lives hang on the actions of foreign powers. The West must assume due responsibility and address the real wishes of the people in a just, pragmatic and holistic manner. Until then, plenty of refugees will fill the camera lenses of the news corporations, with those who can really shape people's lives – the West – watching with only mild interest from the sidelines.

Stephanie Charalambous is a former Oxford JCR President currently studying European Social Policy at the London School of Economics

[Photography: Stavros Ioannides]

t: Two Stories

JOSHUA HANTMAN explains how young Arabs and Israelis were brought together in spite of the war around them

THIS PAST SUMMER, whilst organising and running a summer tour in Israel for 16 year old Israeli Jews, Arabs and English Jews, war broke out. The Arabs and the Israelis in my group all happened to be from the North of Israel. We spent a fascinating month exploring the beauty of Israel, its landscapes, its history and of course its diverse communities. Hiking, abseiling, coexistence seminars and educational tours around Jerusalem meant that this summer was for most of the participants the best summer of their lives. However, we never ventured North of Tel Aviv.

As we landed at Ben Gurion airport, we were informed that Israeli soldiers had been kidnapped by Hizbollah from the Israeli side of the border and Israel was on the verge of declaring war. In the following month, over 2000 Hizbollah rockets fell in Israel destroying whole cities up North. I was amazed to hear that none of this was being reported in the British media. The Israeli Jews and Arabs in my group were constantly phoning home to check that their families were safe. Most of them could not afford to leave their homes and the government was slow in reacting to the vast number of refugees fleeing the North (well over a million).

For the English kids this was a real eye opener. Whilst their parents were at home in North West London watching this conflict unfold, the parents of the Israelis (both Jews and Arabs) were stuck in bomb shelters for days at a time. The main theme of our tour was 'coexistence'. I had never imagined that it would have been a war that would bring the Jews and Arabs on my tour group together. What was so unfathomable was how in the last five years Hizbollah had managed to rearm to such an extent under the supposedly watchful eye of the UN? Within the first week of the war the highly politicised and opinionated electorate within Israel were criticizing the government heavily for not stopping these rockets landing on their homes. On the other hand the world media were condemning any action Israel took to defend themselves. I was confused, what would I do if I was in the 'hotseat'? Any government's foreign policy must put its citizens' safety first. Then why were they sending soldiers in on foot? These were suicide missions. My kids were even more confused but it was my job to educate them. They had to understand this was not Israel versus Lebanon, neither Jews versus Muslims nor Arabs versus Jews.

"Josh, why did they start this war?"

"Josh, why do they hate us?"

"Josh, why does that bearded man [Hassan Nasrallah] want all the Jews in Israel to kill us all, what did we ever to do him?"

"Josh, I hate Arabs"

"Josh, he hates me, I haven't done anything wrong"

I had to vacate my 'Oxford' intellectual answers and contextualise everything

These questions pushed youth leadership to the extreme but having both Jews and Arabs on my tour whose parents were still in the North meant I had to vacate my 'Oxford' intellectual answers and contextualise everything. This was no essay on the Arab-Israeli conflict, this was a genuine attempt to increase understanding between youth whose families were under indiscriminate attack from an internationally recognised terrorist organisation. Things went from bad to worse when our co-leaders were called up for emergency reserve duty. All of a sudden the English participants who had felt relatively detached from the conflict were now intrinsically involved as their Israeli leaders were forced to leave their jobs and go to risk their lives for the safety of their country.

Whilst it had been an emotional month for all involved, I had been forced to be the strong youth leader to support the participants in every way possible. However, on the day we left, I could no longer hold it in. We were leaving with the war still raging. I was taking the English participants back to their comfortable middle class homes in London whilst my Israeli Jewish and Arab kids were returning to their *Kibbutzim* and Arab villages up North. More precisely these participants who had been my kids for the last month were going back to their bomb shelters. My heart sunk as I said goodbye to them. Luckily within the week the ceasefire had been called and I could breathe a sigh of relief.

Joshua Hantman is an Oriental Studies undergraduate at St Hugh's College

Gordon's world

British foreign policy with Gordon Brown as Prime Minister will be radically different says MARK LEONARD

IMAGINE THE SCENE. It is 2007. The pale November sun is slowly melting the frosted roofs of Camp David. A throng of journalists — bristling with cameras, arc lamps and microphones — jostle for position around two podiums. Suddenly the doors of a log cabin swing open, and President Bush and Prime Minister Brown walk out for their first joint press conference. They ignore the battery of predictable questions — 'Does Prime Minister Brown — like Blair and Bush — use Colgate toothpaste?'; 'Have the two leaders prayed together?'; 'Will they use military strikes against Iran?' After the obligatory platitudes about the importance of the special relationship, Brown drops his bomb-shell: the British mission in Iraq has been accomplished; our boys are coming home.

Though none of the ministers, MPs or advisers to whom I talked in preparing this piece has suggested this is likely to happen, it is the fantasy that is inspiring sections of the Left who are gunning for a Brown premiership. Some commentators — such as the Times's Anatole Kaletsky — have argued that withdrawing from Iraq could provide a 'Bank of England moment' for the new Prime Minister. In the same way that the shock decision to grant independence to the Bank of England signalled that a new Labour government had broken free from its legacy of inflation and currency devaluations, a decision to withdraw troops could allow it to move out of the shadow of Iraq. But are they right to think that a Brown foreign policy would be so different from Blair's?

Would Gordon have handled Lebanon differently if he had been running British diplomacy rather than bonding with his new-born baby son? A recent article by Ed Balls — the Chancellor's closest political confidant — in the left-wing Fabian Review has been seen by some as evidence that Brown would be less loyal to Washington than the incumbent. Its emphasis on economic development rather than 'draining the swamp' of Islamic terrorism is seen as a vital clue to Brown's vision for peace in the Middle East. But the truth is that Gordon — as he has done in each of the international crises to afflict New Labour — is keeping his own counsel.

A recent blizzard of Brownite media stunts — posing with foreign leaders, sitting in fighter-planes, embracing Trident — tells us more about Brown the politician than Brown the statesman. It has more to do with projecting gravitas — and highlighting David Cameron's lack of it — than mapping out a coherent approach to the world. Indeed, for a politician whose political philosophy has shaped every nook and cranny of domestic policy, Brown's foreign policy remains a conspicuous black hole. Even his closest advisers admit that they have very little idea what Brown the prime minister will do when he (finally) gets the keys to No. 10.

Brown's silence on foreign policy is partly a consequence of the so-called 'Granita deal', which divided policy between the two founders of 'New Labour', giving Brown unprecedented sway over domestic issues, but no say on international ones. It is also because a prime minister's foreign policy — a combustible mixture of instincts and events — is notoriously hard to predict. No one thought that Tony Blair — who allegedly used his first meeting with Nelson Mandela to ask for an autograph for his children — would lead his country to war six times in seven years.

Even closest advisers admit they have very little idea what Brown will do when he gets the keys to No. 10

Tony Blair's foreign policy in 1997 was defined in opposition to the legacy of the Tory years: moving from 'little Englandism' to 'rules-based multilateralism'; from beef wars in Europe to 'leading in Europe'; and from a narrow focus on the 'special relationship' to building a British 'bridge' between Europe and America. The war in Iraq left each of those pillars in disrepair, and Brown will have to define his own foreign policy as much against Blair as against Cameron. Brown is likely to rebalance all three of Blair's strategies: restating the importance of British interests and British values; developing a more pragmatic policy of engagement with the European Union; and a more hard-headed brand of Atlanticism.

Instead of seeing Britain as a 'bridge between Europe and America', Brown will try to bridge the pursuit of the British national interest with a moral focus on the world's poor. Above all, his intimates suggest that Brown will break with Blair's adventurism: 'Tony is a creature of fashion. His Europeanism is a fashion of his teen years, when getting into Europe was the ultimate symbol of modernity. More recently he was driven by the messianic interventionism of the neocons. Gordon's approach to foreign policy will be more pragmatic, like his domestic politics. Very thoughtful and cautious.' The yin and yang of Brown's international outlook — morality and economic interests — will build on his impressive record at the Treasury. No Brown speech these days is complete without a litany of challenges that arise from globalisation, and his forthcoming spending review is organised into five international themes: globalisation; demographics; technology; global insecurity; and climate change. Brown will want a foreign policy that promotes open markets — engaging China, India and Russia — but at the same time putting pressure on them to obey international trade rules.

As Brown first showed in his 1999 'economics of hope' speech to the Church of Scotland, his economic and moral agendas are intertwined. One of his friends says, 'Gordon, more than anyone else, recognises the extraordinary impact that trade can have in places like Africa. That comes both from his experience as a finance minister but also from the impact of trade on the poor in Kirkcaldy.' Over the years Brown has applied his formidable political skills and obsession with policy detail to changing the nature of the debate on international development: spearheading the campaign to drop debt, inventing the 'International Financing Facility' to boost development aid with money from bond markets, and playing a lead role in the 2005 campaign to 'Make Poverty History'. As one Brownite puts it, 'You always know where Gordon's priorities are by looking at how much money he gives to different departments. When he came to power the Department for International Development was a small backwater in the FCO — now it has a budget three times the size.'

But just as important has been Brown's alliance with charities and churches to turn public opinion around on development (a former adviser to the Catholic Church talks about cardinals in the Vatican 'eating out of his hand'). The success of the coalition to 'Make Poverty History' points to a different way of doing politics and foreign policy, which Ed Balls believes could be replicated with broad-based campaigns on climate change and globalisation. Brown will argue that development spending is a policy for countering terrorism as well as a moral imperative. His friends explain that he compares the scale of today's terrorist challenge with the Cold War — where military strategies went hand in hand with appeals to hearts and minds.

The moral and economic strands of Brown's foreign policy will be linked by the 'golden thread' of Britishness which increasingly frames all his policy pronouncements — about globalisation, terrorism or Third World poverty — in terms of distinctive British values and interests. Brown's recent speech on security — where he used this approach to talk of a 'British way' of tackling terrorism — was seen by critics as a reversion to 'Little Englandism'. One Foreign Office official, noting that he barely mentioned the Middle East, Iran, Iraq or Afghanistan, said, 'Brown doesn't have a foreign policy. His agenda on terror is about protecting ourselves at home by promoting Britishness, sharing intelligence and fighting money-laundering. He wants to engage the outside world through trade and aid, not diplomacy.'

But for Brown, Britishness serves as a platform for engaging with Europe and the world — not a pretext for isolationism. Speaking on the Today programme recently he said, 'I think being more explicit as a country about what we value about being British is a very essential element of how we are part of the modern world. You can be part of the global economy and benefit from it but have a huge pride and patriotism that you feel about your own country.' In other words, Labour prime ministers can't win the trust to engage with the EU and the world until they have proved that they will doggedly defend British interests. Brown's allies suggest that his brand of 'British exceptionalism' could lead to a foreign policy that is both less Atlanticist and less pro-European.

Brown's instinctive Atlanticism — expressed

through his holidays in Cape Cod and an affinity for the work hard/play hard ethic of American society — is much reported but little understood. It is true that he has better connections in Washington than any incumbent prime minister since Churchill, boasting a circle of friends that includes left-wing democrats such as Ted Kennedy and Republicans such as Alan Greenspan. He was part of the crowd — along with Blair and Philip Gould — that made the crusade to the Clinton war room to see how modern elections are won. But Brownites suggest that Brown's obsession with American public policy has faded with the decline of the Democrats, and the rightward drift of US politics to arguments about guns, gays and abortion: 'From 1994 to 1997, there was a lot of thinking going on there which was useful to us. Since then there has been not very much thinking going on.'

He doesn't read European novels or listen to Beethoven. His reference points are American and Scottish

One senior Brownite implies that Brown will be less susceptible to pressure from Washington than the current Prime Minister. 'Blair's policy of "public support, private criticism" has reduced Britain to part of the inter-agency process in Washington. It is an extraordinary position for a sovereign country to find itself in.' This would suggest that Brown's style might be more similar to the German Chancellor Angela Merkel's than Blair's: positioning himself as an unambiguous Atlanticist — but reserving the right to be critical of American policy in public. Reports of Brown's first meeting with the American Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, in 2005 suggest that he has already put this philosophy into practice: the meeting soured when Brown lectured his American interlocutor about the importance of increasing aid.

So would a cautious Brown be willing to risk withdrawing from Iraq? It is the sort of decision that new prime ministers can make: José Luis Zapatero did it for Spain, Romano Prodi for Italy. And now even Junichiro Koizumi of Japan, one of Bush's staunchest allies, has announced that his troops will go home. Withdrawing from Iraq would certainly put David Cameron and Sir Menzies Campbell on the defensive: the Liberal Democrats have called for it themselves, and the Tories would find it hard to oppose. Brown would also have the comfort of knowing that — for all the sound and fury unleashed in Washington — the dwindling President Bush would be out of office within a year. But there would be a lot of pressure on a newly appointed Labour prime minister — without a foreign policy track record — not to risk the perception that he was cutting himself off from Washington. Much would depend on the situation on the ground in Iraq and Brown's ability to claim that the British mission had been accomplished.

Would Prime Minister Brown be willing to send British troops abroad? Iraq and Afghanistan were wars of choice rather than necessity, and their legacy will probably be a decline in American interventionism (not least because so many troops are still committed in these countries). In recent years the West has decided to sit out major conflicts, preferring to support existing peace operations (such as the African Union on Darfur or the United Nations in Congo) or provide civilian support through policing missions. The one exception could be Iran, which might come to a head shortly after Brown takes office. Many Americans agree with the presidential frontrunner, John McCain, that the only thing worse than military strikes is a nuclear Iran. Most Europeans would prefer to contain and deter Iran than to attack it. If diplomacy fails to halt Tehran's nuclear programme, Brown might have to take sides. It is impossible to know which way he would go, but having seen the destructive effect of the Iraq war on the Labour party and on Tony Blair's authority, it seems unlikely that he would involve Britain in any attack — even if his American friends asked for moral support.

Paradoxically, Brown might find it easier to build political relationships across the Channel than across the Atlantic. Much has been made of his doubts about the euro, his frustration with the 'Ecofin' meetings of European finance ministers, his opposition to the agricultural protectionism and restrictive practices of what he refers to as 'trade bloc Europe'. One Labour adviser even suggests that his Euroscepticism has cultural roots: 'He doesn't read European novels or listen to Beethoven. His reference points are American and Scottish.'

'He's not comfortable brokering coalitions and building networks. He is much less of an extrovert than Blair'

But Brown is above all a practical politician. With the European constitution in remission and the euro off the political agenda in this country, he is unlikely to have to slay any European dragons in his first few months. As well as Britain's economic interest in reforming Europe's economy, there are compelling political reasons for Brown to emphasise Europe's importance. David Cameron's pledge to withdraw Conservative MEPs from the centre-right European People's Party laid him open to attacks about taking Britain to the sidelines, and not being a credible prime minister in waiting.

It is no coincidence that Brown was quick to strike up a relationship with Angela Merkel (who, to his delight, welcomed him to the Chancellery in Berlin, while denying an audience to Cameron). By the time Brown becomes prime minister there will also be a new President in France — either Nicolas Sarkozy or Segolene Royal — who both speak Brown's language on 'reform'. These ambitious new leaders are very compatible with Brown. Unlike François Mitterrand and Helmut Kohl, they are soft nationalists who are pragmatic in their engagement with the European Union, and more interested in domestic reform than European federalism — much like Gordon Brown himself.

Brown's rhetoric suggests he will abandon the Foreign Office view that Britain needs to take part in European projects — even if they are flawed — in order to influence them from the inside. At the Treasury he has often relied more on the brute force of his ideas and the threat of a veto to influence his European partners (although this approach is less effective in policy areas that are decided by majority voting). One famous battle over a Commission proposal for a 'withholding tax' saw Brown argue his way from being in a minority of one in 1999, to securing majority support for his approach in 2003. Brown's allies expect him to use similar tactics to reform the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). One explains, 'There was incandescence in the Treasury when Blair settled on the EU budget in 2005 without sorting out the CAP. Total incomprehension. The damage it did to public finances; to world trade talks and the chances of France and Germany shifting in the Doha round.' One concession that Blair did win was an agreement that the European budget will be reviewed in 2008 or 2009. A Labour adviser predicts that Brown will use the opportunity for a showdown with the French: 'Brown has more appetite for a fight than Blair. Blair wants to be liked and have other leaders on the phone. Gordon would be much more comfortable being isolated in Brussels, lapping up the praise from the press back home.'

This showdown might turn into a double-struggle, because EU leaders have also agreed to negotiate a new treaty to replace the failed constitution by 2009. The German government, which holds the rotating presidency of the European Union in the first half of 2007, would like to start a process of picking through the entrails of the rejected constitution next year, to craft a new treaty. By calling the new text a 'treaty' rather than a 'constitution', Berlin hopes

GORDON BROWN ON...

COWS
"Agricultural protectionism is so expensive that we spend more on subsidising a cow every day than half the world's people have to live on live on." (2005)

THAT SMILE
"I was actually smiling, talking to one of my colleagues about my new baby... It was nothing to do with politics." (2006)

FAMILY VALUES
"I don't romanticise my upbringing. But my parents were more than an influence, they were - and still are - my inspiration. The reason I am in politics." (2006)

TRIDENT
"In an insecure would we must and we will always have the strength to take all necessary long term decisions to ensure both stability and security." (2006)

GLOBAL POVERTY
"I thing people recognise that we must not only fight a war against terrorism but against the causes of poverty. There are 120 million children around the world - 75 million in the British Commonwealth - who will never go to school who will never get any primary education unless we take action." (2002)

that it can be ratified with parliamentary votes rather than referendums. When I met Merkel's advisers — on the eve of Brown's visit to Berlin — one even speculated about a 'grand bargain' where sceptical leaders such as Brown might agree to an ambitious treaty — in exchange for substantial reform of the CAP. Brown will need to decide if he is willing to ratify the new treaty with a parliamentary vote, or if he — like Blair — will succumb to press demands for a referendum. This will be a real conundrum. He won't want to risk a referendum defeat so early in his premiership. But, at the same time, he will not want to pilot a European treaty through parliament before he has been blessed by the public in a general election.

A former No. 10 official argues that the biggest difference between Blair's and Brown's foreign policy will be in style rather than substance: 'Blair's ideal day is spent on the phone to ten foreign leaders trying to broker some deal through charm. Gordon is much more of a one-on-one man — he is not as comfortable brokering coalitions and building networks. He is much less of an extrovert than Blair.' According to a Brown ally, this shyness leads the Chancellor to find solutions in the realm of policy: 'His approach to the Middle East was immediately to go for the economics, working with [former World Bank President] James Wolfensohn to look at the underlying problems. It was very technocratic. Tony would have called a big summit and tried to charm everyone into submission. Gordon starts with a concrete solution.'

Brown's allies are increasingly anxious to break with the Blair era. Their attempt to heal the wounds of Iraq in the Labour party will take them into the realm of foreign policy. So who might Brown look to as a role model for his progressive foreign policy? There was a clue at a recent seminar that the Chancellor hosted with Bill Clinton which began with a joke about the former Swedish prime minister Olof Palme going to see Ronald Reagan in Washington: 'Reagan said, "Isn't he a communist?" And his advisers said, "No Mr President, he is an anti-communist." And President Reagan said, "I don't care what kind of communist he is!"'

Palme remains an iconic figure for centre-left politicians. He had a strong moral core and was the first leader to take international development seriously. But he combined his internationalism with a strong sense of Swedish independence, pursuing friendly but semi-detached relations with the European Union and the United States, and standing aside from military adventurism in Vietnam. What's more, his principled Moralpolitik provided the legitimacy for Sweden's aggressive pursuit of its national economic interest. Of course Britain — as a member of the UN Security Council, the fifth biggest economy in the world, and a former imperial power — is very different from Sweden. But the image of Gordon Brown as Olof Palme with nuclear weapons could be a telling one.

Mark Leonard is director of foreign policy at the Centre for European Reform and author of *Why Europe will run the 21st Century*

cost of caring

ELEANOR SLADE campaigns for a higher profile for the UK's six million carers

LET'S FACE IT, one of the few things we have in common with each other is the certainty that we all getting older and there is nothing we can do about it. So what? Why should we care, if we are all getting older together?

What it does mean quite simply, is that with an ageing population, more people are going to have to face up to the challenge of caring. We are all living longer, but not necessarily healthier lives. The demographic make-up of Britain is set to change so quickly and radically over the next 30 years that we will see an extra three million people become carers, bringing the total number of carers in the population up to nine million.

There are currently six million carers in the UK. We all must know someone who is a

[Photography courtesy of the Princess Royal Trust for Carers]

carer or have already experienced first-hand the responsibilities and pressures of caring for a loved one. The good news is that there is an increasing awareness and respect about the role of carers in our society. People in the public eye, from high profile politicians, celebrities in the sporting and entertainment worlds to those eager competitors in the TV talent shows show little restraint in using the media spotlight to identify with "their public" and will happily talk about their role (past or current) as a carer.

Should organisations that have spent years supporting carers be pleased with the increased recognition about the role of unpaid carers? Why has the media spotlight has started to shine more brightly on carers – is caring becoming the new kind of giving? What will happen if the public and the media become fed up of hearing about the plight of carers – it's not even Christmas yet! And after all, carers are not the ones who are directly affected with an illness or disability. With so many good causes and worthy charities competing for our attention and money could carers suffer from a backlash? Do caring organisations run the risk of being accused of being yet another charity (among thousands) trying to create awareness for their own particular cause?

Lets go back to the hard facts of caring. It is really important we are clear about who we mean when we talk about carers. Simply put, a carer is someone, who, without payment, provides help and support to a partner, child, relative, friend or neighbour, who could not manage without help. This could be due to age, physical or mental illness, addiction or disability. One in ten of the UK population are unpaid carers. It's more than a day job. Over a million of those carers care for more than 50 hours a week, every week.

And this is where it could affect you. What is going to happen to your family members as they get older and more dependent on the help of others? This could be why more and more people are beginning to identify with those who are caring right now.

The truth is anyone can become a carer; carers come from all walks of life, all cultures and can be of any age. Carers are all individuals and come from diverse groups facing a range of caring situations. Some of these develop slowly, for example as parents become gradually more dependent in old age. Others arise suddenly and unexpectedly, for instance as the result of an accident. Some caring roles last for only a few weeks or months. Others last for years, for example parents of children with a disability often care from the birth of the child until their own death. Many carers do not consider themselves to be a carer; they are just looking after their mother, son, or best friend, just getting on with it and doing what anyone else would in the same situation.

The numbers of carers in the UK are significant, they are at levels approaching in scale the number of staff employed by the NHS. The NHS could not cope without the contribution of unpaid carers. Unpaid carers help the NHS understand the needs of the person they care for as well as providing the vital care that many patients rely on.

Taking on a caring role can mean facing a life of poverty, isolation, frustration, ill health and depression. Many carers give up an income, future employment prospects and pension rights to become a carer. Many carers also work outside the home and are trying to juggle jobs with their caring responsibilities. The majority of carers struggle on alone and do not know that there is help available to them.

The numbers of carers in the UK are significant: they are at levels approaching in scale the number of staff employed by the NHS.

Caring doesn't end when someone moves into residential care. Its nature changes with many carers still looking after a loved ones' finances, visiting regularly and dealing with the emotional and physical impact of caring.

Monica Clarke's story is typical of the situation many carers find themselves in - having no choice but to assume the role of carer to a loved one. Monica is the Carer Lead within the NHS Clinical Governance Support Team and a carer herself.

Monica was born in Cape Town, South Africa in the 1940's, at the very beginning of the apartheid era. During the 1960's she qualified as a nurse and midwife, subsequently studying law as the political situation intensified in the region. Politically very closely involved with the ANC's struggle against the apartheid regime, in 1984 she was pressure into leaving the country and moving to London.

Once settled in her new life in Britain, she secured work as a commercial lawyer and met and fell in love with John, whom she married. After six happy years of marriage, John was suddenly struck down by a massive stroke. From a position in which the couple were both earning very respectable salaries, within only two years they were on benefits. Monica had to stop work immediately as John spent a year in acute care and then, when he returned home, she took on the full caring responsibilities.

It is not just individual carers or families that are going to be affected by their role as an unpaid carer. Businesses across the UK are going to have to recognize the caring commitments of their employees.

Employment Relations Minister Jim Fitzpatrick recently announced the definition of carer that will be used in the Work and Families Act and will give carers the right to request flexible working from their employer, and will come into effect in April 2007.

The definition of carer will be an employee who is or expects to be caring for an adult who is married to, or the partner or civil partner of the employee; or is a near relative of the employee; or falls into neither category but lives at the same address as the employee.

The "near relative" definition includes parents, parent-in-law, adult child, adopted adult child, siblings (including those who are in-laws), uncles, aunts or grandparents and step-relatives.

So are carers good value for money? Perhaps this may be why the role of carers is gaining greater respect from both the Government and the general public. The cost of caring should not be underestimated. Calculations of the value of carer support estimate it at around the same as the total of UK spending on health – around £57 billion in 2001 -02.

This is not a fair deal for carers. Three quarters of carers are worse off financially because of their caring role. The main state benefit that carers can claim is Carer's Allowance and is currently set at £46.95 a week, which is by far the lowest income replacement benefit.

It is easy to see why so many carers suffer financial hardship. To qualify for a Carer's Allowance a carer must meet fall into tight eligibility criteria including looking after someone for at least 35 hours a week, and the person being cared for must receive a qualifying disability benefit. A Carer must also not be a full-time student (this is defined as supervised studying for over 21 hours a week). So with all the hard facts established about the hardships that carers in the UK face why do the media choose to promote one type of carer above all others? The national census tells us there are millions of carers in England and Wales and within those figures there is an estimated 175, 000 carers under the age of 18 in the UK.

Children's charities are always guaranteed to grab the headlines. The current fundraising campaigns by the leading charities prove this point without a doubt. Helping children is great motivator and can unite people from all walks of life. Whenever there is a publicity campaign by a leading charity from the "supporting and caring charities" the focus can very quickly move onto young carers. It is not surprising – the stories are very powerful. However, is the media being lazy or are they themselves being exploited by the charities who know how to push the right buttons with the general public in fundraising and compassion terms?

Eleanor Slade is PR and Media Manager for The Princess Royal Trust for Carers. The Princess Royal Trust for Carers is a national charity that provides services to carers through a national network of Carers' Centres. The centres provide, either by telephone, drop-in or outreach surgeries, practical information and advice, emotional support, a way for carers' voices to be heard and a link to support services. The charity also runs two websites, www.carers.org and www.youngcarers.net giving adult and young carers the opportunity to access information and meet others in similar situations through discussion boards and a chat room.

New Britain?

In the midst of globalisation and rising superpowers in the East, a new country has emerged to face yet harder challenges writes PHILIP STEPHENS

A NICE STORY HAS it that when Queen Victoria made the short rail journey from Birmingham to Wolverhampton a century and more ago, the royal train was fitted with heavy curtains. The monarch, her courtiers decreed, must be spared the sight of the soot-drenched smokestacks and glowing furnaces that spoke to Britain's place as the workshop of the world.

England's Black Country was a crucible for the 19th-century explosion in international trade that followed the industrial revolution. Victoria, Empress of India as well as Queen of Britain and Ireland, owed her dominion to this industrial sprawl. No need to offend her, though, with its blackened ugliness.

Follow the same route today and there is little to recall this former industrial might. You can trace some of the intricate networks of canals, bridges and railway branch lines that served the vast red-brick factories. In places, broken buildings and abandoned sidings offer a depressing vista of dereliction. Mostly, though, the furnaces have made way for housing and for the shed-like distribution depots that serve a nation of shoppers. Boys fish in the canals that once heaved with barges carrying coke and ore.

Today's Britain is being shaped by another period of tumultuous global change. This second age of globalisation had first an American and now an Asian face. The contours are drawn in the computer campuses of west-coast America, in the factories of China and the call centres of India. In Britain, the modern counterpart of the smokestacks of Wolverhampton are the gleaming steel and glass towers of the international investment banks in London's Canary Wharf.

Nearly a decade after Tony Blair's triumphant march into 10 Downing Street, Britain does feel like another country. There has not been any great leap. Nor a wave of any magic wand by Mr?Blair's New Labour government. But the change has been measurable and consistent. The prime minister and his government may not get the credit – and are due only some of it – but the nation has a different mood and texture. It feels like a place confident in its embrace of the world; by and large, although not always, at ease with the rainbow of ethnicities in its big cities; and happily indifferent to individual preferences and differences.

Fifty years after Suez, Britain still finds it hard to talk simultaneously across the Atlantic and the Channel

The strains, of course, are also manifest: this week's detailed analyses by Financial Times writers have shown sharp economic inequalities and social tensions in many parts of Britain. While the cappuccino bars of Canary Wharf hum with the talk of seven-figure bonuses, in Wolverhampton people still lament the loss of the local steel plant. It closed some 20 years ago. The stresses of globalisation are apparent in widening income differentials, sharpening regional divides and the isolation and disaffection of some immigrant communities. The Islamist extremists who bombed London's transport network in July 2005 were British-born.

A rising inflow of migrants during the Blair years has brought social dislocation as well as economic advantage. There is a suspicion that too much of the nation's prosperity rests on the shifting sands of rising house prices and buoyant consumer spending.

Britain still has plenty of confusions, too, about its relationship with the rest of the world – witness the prime minister's fealty to Washington and an enduring popular suspicion of most things European. Fifty years after the Suez crisis put the final seal on empire, Britain still finds it hard to talk simultaneously across the Atlantic and the Channel. The political skies have been darkened by the war in Iraq, by terrorism from within and by the government's careless disregard for public trust. Mr Blair has paid the price for joining President George W.?Bush's war. Once the most popular politician the nation had seen in modern times, he is being hustled from office by his own party, testimony perhaps to Enoch Powell's celebrated adage that all political

careers end in failure.

But everything is relative. For all the leeching of the euphoria that bathed the country in 1997, Britain has been comfortable in its skin this past decade. The Union has survived the devolution of power to a Scottish parliament and a Welsh assembly. Although politics in Northern Ireland is still rooted in sectarianism, the terrorist war between Protestants and Catholics has ended.

Gordon Brown can boast of Britain's economic performance. The chancellor of the exchequer has presided over the longest period of uninterrupted growth in recent memory. By luck or good judgment, and it is probably both, employment and incomes have risen steadily. The contrast with the stasis in most other big European economies is telling. Dry statistics about gross domestic product, productivity and the rest, though, tell only part of the story of the past decade. Visitors to the Edinburgh arts festival, to the Cheltenham literary festival or to the Tate Modern gallery on the banks of the Thames in London might prefer to point to Britain's flourishing cultural life; the capital's citizens to the cacophony of languages heard on every corner, eloquent testimony to London's place as a global city.

Take a step back from the anxieties of modern societies and the picture that emerges is of a country that has come to terms with two decisive moments in its postwar history: with the economic revolution of the 1980s under Margaret (now Baroness) Thatcher and with the social liberalism rooted in the upheavals of the 1960s. On the left, the market has ceased to be a swear word; on the right, legal blessing for gay partnerships goes unremarked.

As good a way as any to gauge the change in the nation's temper is to take a look at David Cameron's Conservative party. After Mr Blair's victory in 1997, the Tories concluded that the success of New Labour was an aberration, an interlude before a return to the natural order of Conservative rule. The party continued to sing from the political hymn books of the 1980s and 1990s. Mr Cameron, made leader after the third general election defeat, has understood the electorate's message. His party must be remade in the image of today's Britain.

Familiar Conservative promises of tax and spending cuts, of round-ups of asylum-seekers and ruthless crackdowns on criminals have been sidelined. The young Tory leader has told his party that it is too white, too male and too middle-class. The Conservatives, he has warned, will win office only if they hold up a mirror to the electorate. That means recruiting more women and ethnic minority candidates.

The old political rules have been rewritten. Before the 1997 election, Mr Blair's party felt obliged to disavow tax and spending increases. In the event, spending has risen at unprecedented rates, paid for by higher taxes as well as increased borrowing. Yet Mr Cameron is now promising that he would not cut spending in order to reduce taxes. Just as Mr Blair accepted the Thatcher political settlement, so Mr Cameron pays homage to Mr Blair.

The thread running through all this has been Britain's response to the second era of globalisation. What has marked Britain out from most of its European neighbours during the past decade has been a willingness to adapt to international economic forces shaped by others. The instinct in much of Europe has been to seek to shelter against the harsh winds of global competition, sometimes to build higher walls. Britain has opened its doors.

The steady influx of immigrants is one measure. More than 1m people from outside the European Union have settled in Britain since 1997. In the two years since the enlargement of the EU, these migrants have been joined by 600,000 workers from Poland, the Czech Republic, Lithuania and other former communist states. From time to time, such inflows have sparked popular, and populist, alarm. But towns such as Southampton are already adjusting to their newly Polish complexion; London won the contest for the 2012 Olympic games as the city most obviously comfortable with all races, nationalities and creeds.

Britain does not make things any more – not much, anyway. It learnt the hard way during the 1960s and 1970s that it is not very good at mass production. The share of manufacturing in national income has been in decline for several decades. Since 1997 it has fallen from 20 to below 15 per cent. What remains of large-scale manufacturing is foreign-owned. The most efficient car plants are Japanese. Iconic marques such as Bentley and Rolls-Royce are German-owned, Jaguar belongs to Ford. Yet the retreat from metal-bashing does not seem to matter. Britain still seems good at globalisation.

The skyscrapers of Canary Wharf, just east of the traditional home of the financial services industry in the City of London, testify to the rapid expansion of what has become Britain's most vibrant global business. Ten years ago it still seemed possible that Paris

[Photography: Alexander Baker and James Coglan]

or Frankfurt might challenge London for the role of Europe's pre-eminent financial centre. The battle was never fought. London remains second only to New York as a hub for the investment banks, hedge funds and myriad professional advisers who manage the vast flows of global capital.

Like its competitors, Lehman Brothers, the US investment bank, has been expanding fast. John Llewellyn, its senior economic policy adviser, identifies two sets of reasons as to why the industry has prospered in Britain. One is largely technical: the tax and regulatory frameworks are relatively favourable, labour laws are flexible and London has a strong professional infrastructure. These things count. But a deeper set of reasons lie in geography, history and culture. Britain, says Mr Llewellyn, "thinks globally". Partly this is a legacy of empire – the UK still has networks stretching out to Asia. But it also reflects a frame of mind that puts a premium on pragmatism and accommodation over exceptionalism.

Scarcely any of these rich financial institutions are British-owned. To the extent that they have survived, the venerable names in British investment banking are now niche players. But again, that does not seem to matter. Instead, the country prospers from what David Willetts, a leading member of Mr Cameron's shadow cabinet, calls the Wimbledon phenomenon. Britain cannot claim to have many top-class tennis players, but it can still provide the environment and the expertise to host the world's most important tournament. Something comparable, Mr Willetts says, can be seen in the success of British universities in attracting foreign students.

David Miliband, a rising young member of Mr Blair's cabinet often spoken of as a future prime minister, has an intriguing theory as to why Britain has prospered from the second wave of globalisation. For most of the postwar decades, he says, successful European economies were broadly defined by a commitment to European integration, by mass production and by compacts between capital and labour. Britain was uncomfortable on every count. In today's open international economy, the markers of success have moved in its favour. The advantage now rests with those whose perspective is global rather than narrowly European, with niche businesses and with flexible rather than corporatist employment markets.

For Mr Blair's administration, the counterpoint to openness has been government intervention to mitigate the social costs of change. Globalisation has not rewritten the rules of economics but, as Mr Willetts remarks, it has amplified the benefits of good economic behaviour and the costs of bad. Most obviously, shifts in manufacturing production to low-wage countries have increased the premium in western economies on highly educated workers and pressed downwards on the wages of the unskilled. Put simply, the rich get richer and poor poorer. The price is paid in fracturing social cohesion.

The government has halted, just about, the rising tide of inequality. But a minimum wage and tax credits for the working poor are palliatives rather than cure. The present generation of young people cannot assume the social mobility taken for granted by their parents. As global competition intensifies, sustained improvements in educational attainment offer the only real shield for those in developed economies.

Mr Blair once said that his three priorities in government were education, education and education. There are some encouraging signs for the future beyond the rebuilding of crumbling Victorian schools. Teaching has become a profession of choice again for Britain's brightest graduates. The overall record, though, is as yet patchy.

The prime minister has not delivered the "New Britain" promised on that heady morning in May 1997, much less the "young country" of earlier hyperbole. The biggest changes have been wrought by forces elsewhere in the world. But Mr Blair and, when they have not been fighting for the top job, Mr Brown have changed Britain's political argument.

The platform on which New Labour was elected was of a marriage of economic efficiency to social justice – market liberalism alongside government activism. It was the centre-left alternative to Thatcherism. By and large it has remained New Labour's lodestar. Mr Cameron, in bidding to return the Tories to power, has acknowledged its strength.

It is too soon to write the epitaph of Mr Blair's New Labour government. But look around modern Britain, at the richness and diversity alongside the inevitable ills, and you could say that it is a country that has been travelling in the right direction.

Philip Stephens is associate editor of the Financial Times and a senior commentator. His column appears on Tuesdays and Fridays

in my opinion...

ZOE FLOOD talks to SIR SIMON JENKINS about the life of a columnist, provoking debate, blogging, and self-restraint

A **COLUMN IS** a conversation with the world," muses Sir Simon Jenkins, a man whom for more than a decade has been considered one of the British media's best conversationalists. So much so that his move from the Times to the Guardian last year was cited by some as evidence of "dumbing down" of the former paper – an interpretation which, incidentally, he refutes, stating rather that it was simply time for a change.

Despite the proliferation, and arguably democratisation, of opinion journalism with the rise of the internet, Jenkins still sees the vital importance of quality daily newspapers in disseminating both news and opinion, and believes Britain to be at the vanguard in this field.

"As far as daily newspapers go, journalism in Britain is the most competitive in the world," he explains, an opinion that he sees reflected in the provenance of the responses he receives to his comment pieces. Around 65 per cent of the Guardian's 13 million online readers are based

[Photograph courtesy of the Guardian]

abroad, with the majority in the United States. "There is a general dissatisfaction with the press in the United States, particularly amongst those with left-wing viewpoints. The rot set in when America went over to monopoly newspapers. A single newspaper for a city is insufficient. That is the great innovation of the web – you can write in the Guardian and most readers will be overseas."

"As far as daily newspapers go, journalism in Britain is the most competitive in the world"

Jenkins is however less convinced by the advent of blogging, certainly one of the most significant developments resulting from the internet revolution. Everyone can now voice their opinion in a public forum, and many seem to, for better or for worse. Although acknowledging in early 2005 that "today's [threat to the press] go the heart of my trade", Jenkins does not seem to be particularly impressed by the constant electronic twittering.

"Of course there is the value of blogging in the democratising sense, and it is certainly better than nothing, but I find that reading many blogs is like going into a pub and encountering a bore at the bar. When I write a column, I spend time considering it, discussing it with people and trying to get it right, in the knowledge that it will stand against my name for some time. Bloggers however go on and go on, producing material that is rarely considered, often illiterate, and that clutters up proper debate. That said, in the end they may bury us all."

Nor does Jenkins enthuse about the value of online, interactive opinion and analysis as exemplified by the Comment is Free area of the Guardian's website. Defined as a "collective group blog" on the site, and described by the Guardian's editor Alan Rusbridger as "a wonderfully lively, buzzing, disputatious, sometimes anarchic arena where some truly fascinating debates are held", Jenkins admits somewhat sheepishly that he doesn't always read the responses to his own pieces.

"I can't bring myself to say I don't read them, but I don't get involved in replying," he admits, but does assure that he is "punctilious" about responding to emails from readers. "If someone has gone to the trouble of reading you and responding directly, I will invariably reply. I see it differently to the static of the blogging."

As former editor of The Times and Evening Standard, and columnist for the Guardian and Sunday Times, it is hardly surprising that Jenkins is a devotee of the British press. That said, there is always room for improvement and despite his "terrible" scepticism about the change in format by a range of newspapers, Jenkins believes that the move to tabloid "is undeniably popular and has given the quality press in Britain a whole new shot of life." He states his preference clearly: "It is purely a matter of aesthetics. The mini-tabloid [The Times and The Independent] is not beautiful, as the advert on the page will tend to dominate. However, the Berliner format [The Guardian] ensures that the editorial usually does."

Jenkins' praise of the British press – although not all newspapers, he is keen to point out – is perhaps in part informed by his own experience of total freedom as a columnist. "I have never felt under any pressure to write anything, nor have I ever been discouraged from broaching a subject. People outside of the newspaper often think that a columnist is pressurised to react in a particular way, but my work is entirely self-directed. Whilst particular writers may avoid certain topics if they feel their position is at risk, I would never not attack something because Murdoch liked it, or the Guardian like it."

That said, Jenkins is keen to emphasise the importance of self-restraint within the media, particularly with regard to terrorism – he was particularly vocal on this point around the time of the recent five-year anniversary of September 11. "Terrorism is not simply to set off a bomb, but to terrify by the setting off of bombs, and this depends upon someone publicising this terror. There is an obligation on the media to report such incidents, but never to magnify. The terrorist depends upon the publicity, upon the magnification of the act."

To Jenkins internal regulation of the media is vital: "The profession has always relied upon self-restraint. Whether terrorists should be given the oxygen of publicity is an argument that professional journalists should have with each other more often."

"Bloggers go on and on, producing material that is rarely considered, often illiterate, and that clutters up proper debate"

However, according to Jenkins external forces could have a role to play in ensuring that that the reporting of terrorism does not give "gratuitous publicity to Bin Laden and al-Qaida", as he accused the anniversary journalism of 9/11 and the London bombings of doing. "I have never seen anything wrong in a minister criticising the media for magnifying terrorism. It is also an issue that the Press Complaints Commission should get more involved in – inordinate publicity is given to police warnings about terrorist suspects, and there are certainly vested interests in keeping people on guard."

"The politics of fear has always been a phenomenon. Normally, in democratic societies, its influence should be checked, but since the so-called war on terror, the politics of fear have been deployed by certain western politicians. Fear has become a potent part of the political equation." And according to Jenkins, the media has certainly played a role in promoting the distorting effect of this factor on politics.

Jenkins also warns against what he sees as a trend of the Blair administration towards "newspapers without government". One of the many themes of his columns is of the various failings of the British parliament in performing its democratic function, and closely tied to this is his thesis that the press have replaced parliament and public opinion as the government's sounding board. He rightly notes that "the journalist's job is to scrutinise and criticise government, not supplant it." Whilst this is above all a criticism of the standing to which Blair's government has elevated the media, it is perhaps also further reminder to the journalists to exercise vital self-restraint. Whether or not Jenkins' columns incense or appease, they certainly remain conservations that are worth having.

THE CV

Simon Jenkins was born in 1943 and educated at Mill Hill School and St John's College, Oxford. He began on Country Life magazine, worked for The Times Educational Supplement and the Evening Standard and edited the Insight page of the Sunday Times. He was political editor of the Economist from 1979 to 1986 and subsequently went on to found and edit the Sunday Times Books section, where he also wrote a weekly column. In 1988 he was voted Journalist of the Year, and in 1993 Columnist of the Year. He was knighted for services to journalism in 2004.

Sir Simon Jenkins writes a twice-weekly column for the Guardian newspaper. He was editor of the Times from 1990 to 1992. Zoe Flood graduated from Keble college in 2005. She was editor of the Oxford Student, and issue one of the Oxford Forum

pod(casting) people

TIM MABY wonders what podcasting is really all about

EVEN THE GUARDIAN Media Editor, Matt Wells, admits that he doesn't yet know exactly why people listen to podcasts. One thing you can surely say about the web is that the people who inhabit it are nosey and that they will sniff out anything happening there. Then it's a simple question of whether a lot of them fixate on the "happening", as to whether it spreads.

It was in fact a Guardian strategist, Ben Hammersley, who invented the expression "podcast" to mean an audio programme that you can download onto your iPod to listen to at any time. As it happens, you can also listen to it on your computer there and then, which we reckon half the Guardian listeners do. In that way it's no different from the "listen again" function on many radio and TV websites offered by companies like the BBC. It has of course spawned the "vodcast" - a video podcast, but I wish we had chosen the term 'vidcast'.

You can get news, commentaries, discussions, interviews - any form of audio. Travelogues and guides to listen to as you walk round art galleries or foreign cities have taken off in the commercial market. I have listened to one-minute technical tip podcasts and even heard of companies like banks using them as tools for in-house communication with their staff. A Guardian recruitment site is offering businesses a tailored podcast to tell prospective employees about the jobs on offer and what its like to work there - more human to hear voices than to read words on paper or screen.

Radio and TV really have been taken to the millions. MySpace and YouTube have become two of the most visited sites on the worldwide web, offering music and video, for total amateurs like my daughter, but even for commercial companies to try out their new stock. Audio podcasting just has not yet made quite so big a splash.

Being prepared to give an opinion on events is no longer regarded as a sign that a reporter is biased

We have, though, already attracted an active audience. I found a complaint on our blog the other day (blog = weblog, a short note of what is in the programme and a link to hear it, or most widely just an observation): "It's 9:35 am in New York and today's Newsdesk has still not appeared in iTunes. How can I go to work?"

As a BBC staffer for 30 odd years, I am fascinated by what is different about podcasting. I worked on the team that started Radio 1 news in the 1970's. In common with that project, in podcasting we are trying to produce speech that is much more direct. We try to interview and discuss in the way we normally talk to each other, with no holds barred. Rather a lot of lewd and crude language has resulted. Jon Dennis, presenter of "Newsdesk", on hearing the story of 'Pantsdown" John Prescott, immediately responded "So he's Two-shags now" (not just Two-jags) - the first to coin that abuse, I reckon.

Radio 1 was aimed at youth and the working-class. I never understood why you could not be middle class and like pop music, as John Peel proved with his huge audience of intelligent students and young professionals. The directness of tone on Radio 1 News did take hold though, even if the tabloid agenda was for restricted taste. It transformed the writing on Radio 4, expelling pompous literary form. In audio terms, it introduced a much wider use of music as a sound effect with intellectual or emotional impact, in the way it is used in feature films. I remember making a pair of Radio 4 documentaries after the first Brixton riots: for the London end I used poetry and dub music. Then I found that music was so directly involved in the culture of Detroit, where we compared the effects of their race riots, that I was able to use gospel and Tamla Motown songs to amplify every documentary point.

This is the way working on the web has got into the fabric of the Guardian and Observer too. Reporters, correspondents and columnists have taken to the blogs and comment with gusto. A reporter's observations of what he feels about what he sees are now as accepted as factual reporting. Being prepared to give an opinion on events is no longer regarded as a sign that a reporter is biased. Instead, by being more direct about the experience of being the "man on the spot," we are able to judge the reporting.

So, on podcasts, we try to get reporters to give us both the facts of the hard news story and the comments that they grunt across the desk at each other. There's an added entertainment factor that comes from that freedom. Gareth McLean, the "Media Weekly" TV critic has invented a camp style and bravura that puts Julian Clary in the shade. Jon Dennis and the newspaper reviewer on "Newsdesk" have established such a comedic rapport that when discussing a story about relationship problems, they behaved like a tetchy couple - "Don't you realise what I gave up for you?" Like music in documentaries, that's when journalism becomes art.

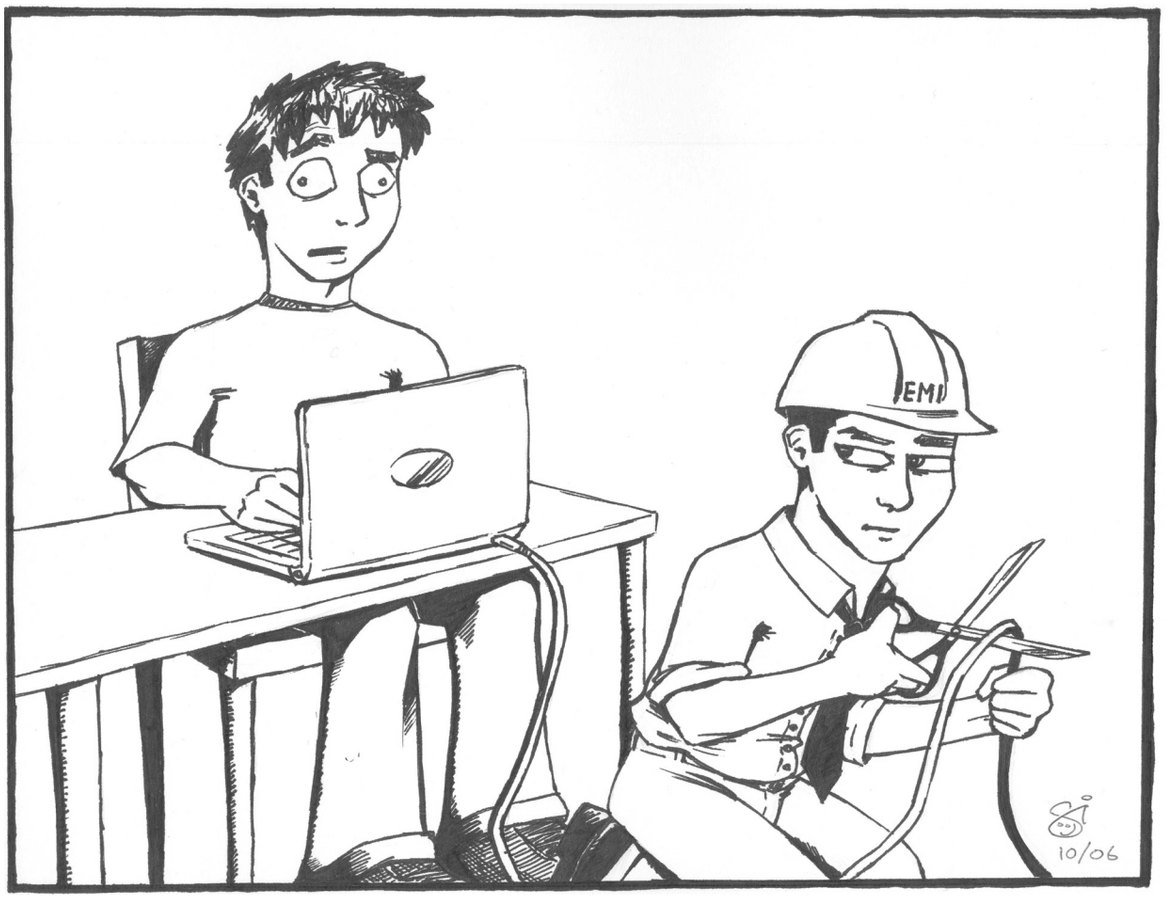
Another important distinction between podcasting and radio is that we can never be exclusive. That's a crucial element of our web journalism: we never say "don't listen to them, don't even look at them, only to us". David Cameron was a columnist on the self-proclaimed "liberal voice on the web". The "Comment is Free" site of Guardian Unlimited owes its undoubted swift success to its commissioning emphasis on controversy and contradiction. When the Telegraph announced it was taking the ultimate step of merging web and newspaper newsrooms, it was the Guardian that wrote the story up, calling it a massive leap into the future, which the Guardian had only experimented with. As we used to say at the BBC when we give a big corporation a powerful blast of free publicity, better advertising than you could pay for.

The instant success of GU's football podcasts depends on that approach. The sports team already have a special relationship with readers through newsletters and style. The continuous live commentary on football and cricket assumes the readers are sitting round watching the same telly pictures as the GU reporter, and start emailing each other from their laptops. That audience immediately gravitated to the football podcasts during the World Cup and added their voicemails at "GU_studio" on Skype telephone calls.

It's the real freedom that is spawning originality in podcasting. Cricket analyst Simon Hughes, simply adopted a stream-of-consciousness style when asked to podcast the tests in Pakistan for the Telegraph - he seemed to be reciting aloud the happenings of the day, as if to himself, quite compelling. The Guardian's Tokyo correspondent, Justin McCurry, made his first podcast the cherry-blossom annual ritual in Japan. You heard him walk out among the families partying in the orchards and meditate on what he saw - it gave the real feel of living in Japan. It has become one of his personal styles. The Guardian science team, all equals and well-qualified, seem simply to take their desk to the studio. They heckle and cajole each other, while reporting their stories and cross-examining the reporter. It seems an ideal podcast, like the quirky videos on YouTube - it sounds as if you are in the newsroom.

Why not become part of it? guardian.co.uk/podcasts

Tim Maby is the Audio Editor for Guardian Unlimited



working for the clampdown

BILL THOMPSON discusses online regulation and its potential to destroy the internet's freedom to communicate and create

WHEN THE FIRST Emperor of China, Qin Shi Huang, ordered the construction of the Great Wall in 200 BCE he was trying to protect the newly unified Chinese people from invasion by northern tribes.

The Communist Party's modern equivalent, the Great Firewall of China, is more concerned with keeping the Chinese in, or at least limiting what they can see of the outside world. This barrier between Chinese networks and the rest of the Internet restricts net users' access to online content which may challenge the worldview of the ruling Communist party, and also limits their ability to create websites, post on blogs, engage freely in discussion in chat rooms and send and receive emails.

Given the growing importance of online tools for communication, and the massive growth of 'citizen media' around the world, the way the net is being managed, controlled and censored

[Illustration: Simon Ward]

in China should worry anyone committed to freedom of expression and an open society.

Yet at the same time as expressing concern over the ways the Chinese authorities are controlling Internet use, many Western companies and governments seem happy to do business there, even if doing so means they must compromise with the authorities.

As part of the deal which allows them to operate in China Google, like other companies including Microsoft and Yahoo!, signed the "Public Pledge on Self-Discipline for the Chinese Internet Industry" which obliges them not to host or transmit information that "breaks laws or spreads superstition or obscenity" or that "may jeopardize state security and disrupt social stability".

This is why google.cn is censored according to the requirements of the Communist Party. It is why Yahoo! handed subscriber data to the authorities when asked. And it is why Microsoft removed the popular blog written by Michael Anti (the pen name of Zhao Jing) from its MSN Spaces service.

While this may sound reprehensible we should not be too critical of Google or any other company working with those who wish to control the network in China. The politically motivated censorship that we see in China is just one facet of a general shift from the open network architecture which characterised the early Internet to one where architectures of control are used to constrain what can be done online. China is just ahead of the curve.

In some countries the controls are obvious and oppressive - everyone who wants to use the internet in Cuba must register with the government; bloggers in Iran are jailed and their websites are blocked; and governments from Saudi Arabia to Singapore install filters and firewalls which determine which websites their citizens can see.

In other countries it is a bit more subtle. Here in the UK we have many restrictions on what we can say online. Libels, speech likely to incite violence or racial hatred, names of serving intelligence officers and even computer-generated images of sexual acts involving children are all illegal and suppressed, generally with popular support.

Even in the United States, where the First Amendment protects online speech from government interference, service providers and hosting companies impose terms and conditions of use that limit what can be posted online while search engines routinely take content from their indexes if it is believed to infringe copyright or is deemed inappropriate.

The motivation is not always related to political control or suppression of opinion. In Saudi Arabia local cultural standards are called on to support the censorship of western media and images; MySpace is concerned about avoiding lawsuits from parents whose children may be exposed to predatory adults; in France memories of Nazism mean that trading in SS medals is blocked; and one of the most powerful agents of online suppression in more open societies is clearly concerned with economic rather than political power. It is the copyright lobby, a group whose influence may well be as malign as that of the oligarchs of China.

Some time ago the technologically astute within the neo-conservative cabal that currently dominates US policy making and drives the Bush administration's agenda realised that the operation of the Internet Protocol - IP as understood by Web developers and those who built the Net - was potentially very damaging their preferred form of IP - intellectual property. They have moved swiftly to control the potential for damage.

Our freedom…is increasingly restricted so that large companies can lock our culture down for their own profit

The problem is that today's Internet allows for simple and easy copying of data and so facilitates the sharing of music files, images and any other form of digital content but does not properly support user identification or efficient data tracking. As a result any remotely competent programmer can sit down and write software like Napster, BitTorrent or Tor and with it challenge the economic viability of the music and movie industries.

The actions of the Recording Industry of America in suing individual users of file sharing networks, attacking providers of such services in the courts and threatening ISPs, companies and universities with legal action, should be viewed as part of a clampdown on the free use of the Internet that exactly parallels what is happening in China. It may be happening at the behest of large entertainment companies like Disney, Time Warner and Sony rather than the Communist Party, but the effects are strikingly similar.

The freedom of expression which was once available to Internet users is being stripped away, and the public space of the Internet, that unstructured, unregulated zone of innovation, is being destroyed. Our freedom to play, experiment, share and seek inspiration from the creative works of others is increasingly restricted so that large companies can lock our culture down for their own profit and closed societies can preserve themselves against the forces of democracy, while the network itself is being redesigned to provide greater control to those who would regulate and legislate its operation and far greater technical and legal support to those who have commercial interests in the information transmitted across it.

Technical innovations such as trusted computers, signed content, digital rights management and protected systems on one side find an echo in the Digital Millennium Copyright Act, the European Union Copyright Directive and the European Cybercrime Treaty. Where the technologies are not yet in place, these laws provide strong legal protection for rights holders, serving their interests without providing guarantees that those aspects which benefit the wider society, like fair dealing or moral rights, will be protected.

When Microsoft launches its new Zune player towards the end of 2006 it will allow Zune users to share songs, but limit the number of times a 'shared' song can be played to three even if the music itself is out of copyright, licensed under Creative Commons or - and here we see the real absurdity - something that you have written and recorded yourself.

There is a growing sense among politicians of all parties, in all countries, that the time has come to regulate the Internet. This is happening because while the Internet is widely used and plays a key part in Western economies, its ownership is now sufficiently concentrated in large corporations to permit governments to feel that laws will be obeyed, since instead of tens of thousands of recalcitrant programmers and Web publishers it is only necessary to frighten a few tens of company chief executives into complying with new rules.

Governments from all sides of the political spectrum, from open and closed societies, from Denmark to Saudi Arabia, have also realised that effective legislative control over the network and online activity requires a technical infrastructure to support surveillance, monitoring and sanctions and they are intent on building it.

This is not being done in order to make the Net safer or more secure for its users, or for the five billion people who have yet to use it. It is an attempt to assert control over an increasingly important area of people's daily lives so that governments can assert their power while companies and owners of intellectual property can maximise their profits and ensure that they alone benefit from the creative use of the online space. The end result may well be the complete destruction of the public spaces defined by the Net.

This would be a tragedy for those of us who operate in them. It would be the modern equivalent of the enclosure of common land in the 18th century that deprived the people of space to graze their animals and grow food. If we are not careful we will lose the freedoms which made cultural, social and technical innovation possible online.

It is a tragedy which can be avoided, but only through concerted political action. The solution does not lie in programming, however talented the hackers may be, but in activism, organisation and political will. Otherwise we will see that the regulators of China and the content industries of the West have made common cause, developing an architecture of control which serves their interests, and those of governments around the world, but not those of the people.

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The Ar

20% of the Rainforest now gone

Deforestation is accelerating, having increased 17% in the last 5 years

The Rainforest will have disappeared by 2050 at current rates of deforestation

mazon

The attempts by the UK government to reduce carbon emmissions will be worthless unless the destruction of the Amazon Basin stops immediately, reports PETER BUNYARD

QUITE RIGHTLY, WE should be concerned about greenhouse gas emissions and our role in pushing up the Earth's temperature. Continue as we are, the 'business-as-usual' scenario, and, according to climate models, we could be sending surface temperatures up by as much as 4oC in as little as one century. The Earth hasn't experienced anything like that for many millions of years and no-one can be sure of the consequences other than to believe that they could be dire for many regions of the world.

How, worldwide, we set about reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and that means methane as well as carbon dioxide, is very much under discussion. Obviously energy efficiency must play a big role, with more efficient cars, fridges, heating systems, electricity use, but the other half of the equation, finding alternatives to greenhouse gas emissions from our profligate burning of fossil fuels, is a harder nut to crack. I, for one, believe that nuclear power, were it to be used worldwide as a substitute for coal and natural gas, let alone petroleum, would be part of the problem and not the solution. We do have to take seriously the limitations on economically recoverable ores of uranium, and as the quality of the ore declines, exponentially as it happens, the investment in energy required

to extract the uranium goes up, geometrically. Currently we use fossil fuels to get nuclear power off the ground, whether in mining, in construction and finally in managing the back-end of the nuclear cycle, including waste disposal. Nuclear power fails on economic grounds and ultimately on the returns of energy delivered for energy invested, quite aside from waste management issues, from radiation-induced cancers and, not least, the dangers of nuclear weapon proliferation, now all too real With North Korea having joined the club and Iran, all too likely, well on the way.

One can conjure up a host of alternatives to fossil burning and nuclear power. Energy management, not just at the level of the supply industry, but as very much part of individual responsibility would make a profound difference to the way energy is used at the end of the line, such as keeping a home comfortable. Deriving energy in the home from renewable energies, even when intermittent, combined with a combined heat and power plant - ideally run on biofuels - would make a lot of energy sense, especially when managed through switching devices that, by intelligent regulation of appliances, could keep demand in check. The technologies have been there for more than 30 years; we just need to wean ourselves off the notion that a central grid system, supplied by large isolated power plants, is the only way to get a good supply of electricity to every home and building. Instead, with the grid already in existence, we should transform it into a back-up system, so that excesses in one area can supply deficits in another, but with each region as self-sufficient as is feasible.

Greenhouse gases and how we use energy are only one aspect of human-induced climate change. What we are doing to essential ecological services and to the carbon cycle is another. When I travelled in the Colombian Amazon just over one year ago, my visit was blighted by an ugly smog that left us all with running eyes and a burning throat, the consequence of tens of thousands of fires that were burning a good thousand kilometres away in neighbouring Brazil, Peru and Bolivia. Some days aircraft could land neither in Leticia nor in Brazil's Tabatinga, virtually isolating the region, except for those prepared to arrive by river and, even then, they had to run the gauntlet of sandbanks, other boats on the river and submerged logs hidden from view in the pervasive gloom.

Last year, 2005, even though a non El Niño year, the Amazon Basin had the worst drought for as long as measurements have been taken, in fact for more than a century. The level of the Amazon river at Leticia was 1.5 metres below previous records, which, given the enormity of a river that carries nearly one-third of the world's free flowing fresh water, means an awful lot of water. But, further to the East, Brazil appeared to have been the worst hit, with fish dying in their millions for lack of oxygen in the murky streams, the result of rivers virtually running dry. Boats too were left stranded on sand banks that had never shown their face before. The Amazon was a gigantic disaster area and it certainly worried climatologists, such as Carlos Nobre, director of the internationally acclaimed Large-scale Biosphere-Atmosphere Project (LBA) that such events during a year, when you would not expect reduced rainfall could be indicating the beginning of a dramatic change in the circulation of the tropical Atlantic Ocean and of the trade winds, so important in bringing in masses of rain to equatorial South America.

For nigh on 40 years, through the research of Eneas Salati, Carlos Luis Molion, Carlos Nobre and others in Brazil, we have known that the rainforests of the Amazon Basin, particularly within the Intertropical Convergent Zone (ITCZ), are actively recycling vast volumes of water through transpiration via the billions of stomatal pores in the leaves of the trees. Add to that the water, coursing down the trunks and branches of trees, that gets evaporated before it ever hits the ground, and in some areas such as in the rainforests surrounding Manaus, evapo-transpiration accounts for 75 per cent of rainfall. That prodigious amount serves a number of critical climatic functions. First, it provides rainfall for the forests further to the West, which, without it, would dry out and suffer an all encroaching die-back. Second, through convection, it energises the formation of massive

cumulo-nimbus cloud systems that result in vital rainfall, again further to the West. Third, and not least, the energy carried by water vapour gets transported from one region to another and even to higher latitudes.

As Antonio Nobre, Carlos' brother, has pointed out, the Amazon Basin acts as an enormous convection chimney, ensuring that the water gleaned by the trade winds off the tropical Atlantic, are recycled, perhaps as many as seven times, before the air currents of the ITCZ, reach the Andes. Colombia, by dint of the air system hitting the obstacle of the Andes gets double the rainfall over its share of the Basin as does the central part in Brazil. And the Colombian forests push an even greater volume of water into the atmosphere on a pro rata basis that do the forests of Brazil. The water vapour, in the cloud system, generated over the Colombian forests (the trees emit their own cloud-forming substances – cloud condensation nuclei), feeds the high altitude plateaus and glaciers in the Andes, which themselves complete the circulation by sending the water back into the Amazon Basin. But it also fuels the Hadley Circulation and it is fair to say that, without the convection over the Basin, the trade winds would lose their momentum and in faltering would bring less and less water vapour to the South American continent. The loss of the Amazon rainforests could lead to a dangerous drying out of South America, ultimately resulting in desertification of regions that are now lush with tropical rainforests. The forests, in fact, are the means by which prodigious quantities of energy from the Sun – the equivalent of 6 million atomic bombs a day over the Brazilian Amazon – are largely transported out of the region and towards higher latitudes.

Just to add to the extraordinary importance of the Amazon Basin to the world's climate, it is now known through the work of Roni Avissar, at Duke University, and many others, that, apart from the well-known Hadley Circulation, standing waves of vapour laden air leave the region for Central America and the United States, for Europe and even South Africa. A goodly proportion of the rains that reach the Corn Belt of the Mid West arrive there in time for the growing season courtesy of the forests of the Amazon Basin. The same is true for Argentina which gets one half of its total rainfall from the Basin, even though thousands of kilometers away. Where would that 'teleconnection' be without the forests?

The Amazon Basin, with its forests, therefore acts as a mighty energy pump, water vapour acting as the conduit for energy out of the region. Were the Sun's energy, transformed into soil-baking heat, to stay in the region, that would affect all the world's air circulation systems, including the monsoon season over Asia. It could too mean that less energy gets out of the tropics and into the Gulf Stream. Add in the possibility of a faltering Gulf Stream from excesses of fresh water run-off in the Arctic Circle, as we could find ourselves bitterly cold in our winters.

We should be truly concerned. Avissar and Pedro Silva Dias have shown that deforestation in the Amazon Basin can lead to a critical, tipping point, when the forest recycles insufficient rainfall to sustain itself, and the ecosystem begins to collapse almost in its entirety. All will suffer and not least Brazil, now dependent for 80 per cent of its electricity generation from hydro-electric plants that derive their waters from the very fact of the existence of the Amazon rainforests.

We must get our priorities right. Clean Development Mechanisms which favour the creation of forest plantations in degraded lands, so as to offset carbon emissions by industrialized countries such as UK, pale into insignificance, when compared to the emissions from the destruction of Amazon forests to make way for soya, timber extraction and cattle ranching. And given that the energy transported out of the Amazon region each year in the form of water vapour is equivalent to one half the greenhouse effect of 150 years of emissions, we can get an idea of the Amazon's critical role in giving us a climate we can live with.

Peter Bunyard is the science editor of *The Ecologist*. His new book, *Extreme Weather* has just been published by Floris Books

women in Asia

CHARLOTTE BUTLER takes us beyond the stereotype...

THE VIEW OUTSIDE Asia of women in Asia is distorted. Certainly women have found themselves in subservient roles historically in many parts of Asia. But that has changed in many parts of Asia to a degree that's often not appreciated. The view that Asian women are demure and forced to accept lesser roles to men has been mixed with a view of some women in Asia in their roles as prostitutes (thanks largely to Bangkok's well known Patpong sex strip), victims of sex traffickers or mail-order brides. This has helped to mask the important roles that many Asian women play at senior levels of government Asia and the fact that women senior executives and CEOs are becoming less of a rarity across Asia. Evidence of this can bee seen in the 2005 Wall Street Journal global 'Top 50 Women to Watch' list which included six who were based in Asia.

One reason why women in Asia can be found in senior professional roles, often at a relatively young age, is because home help is cheap and there are few labour law restrictions on it. Maids and nannies free up local professional women so that the breaks in their careers when they have children need not be as great as they are for many women in the West. Another reason why women are succeeding in Asia, is that anecdotally, they are less likely to behave corruptly than are men when acting in an official capacity. Also anecdotally, they are better at complying with corporate governance measures. Whereas men might be seen as visionary and 'big picture', women are more likely to comply with regulations and auditing requirements. The increased use of the internet and rise of the web have also been crucial to female success. Natural networkers, women have been swift to appreciate the gender neutrality of cyberspace and in particular, the power of email to level the communications playing field.

perhaps the West should take some lessons from Asia

Women in Thailand

The Leading Women Entrepreneurs of the World (LNEW) awards were held in Asia, in Bangkok, for the first time in 2006. Ten Thai women entrepreneurs were short listed. And of the 20 global award winners in 2005, two were Thai. Famous Thai business women include Oradee Sahavacharin and Jirapat Sirijit. The former was responsible for Thailand becoming the world's top orchid supplier. Starting with a programme in orchid-tissue culture in 1978, her cloning techniques helped pioneer an export industry worth US$32 million by 2000. Of the younger generation Jirapat Sirijit is, at 30 years' old, the youngest chief executive in the Thai retail sector, responsible for the 1,200 shop Union Mall that opened in Bangkok in January 2006. She aims to make it the most popular mall in Thailand within three years.

Women in Malaysia and Indonesia

Women play a role that is both full and prominent in Malaysia and Indonesia, East Asia's two biggest Islamic countries. It is common to see women in senior management positions in both the civil service and the private sectors in these countries. Islam as practiced particularly in Southeast Asia is one of tolerance and respect. It allows women significant roles in society, government and business. It is nothing like the repressive version of Islam that's practiced in say Saudi Arabia where women must be veiled outside the home and are forbidden to drive.

In the professional and managerial category in Malaysia's federal public sector, almost 43% of officers are women. Given that women do take time out to have babies and raise young children when men don't, such a high figure is extraordinary. Nik Zainiah Nik Abd Rahman, for example, has three grown up children and is a grandmother. She is also Director-General of the National Productivity Corporation (Malaysia), a member of several international organisations and an expert in the field of productivity enhancement, quality improvement, competitiveness, SME development and women entrepreneurship. Several women serve as secretary-generals of ministries and in higher education, the number of female students at the institutions of higher learning is more than 50% of the total enrolment. Affirmative action policies for women might be needed in the United States but clearly not in Malaysia.

Then Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamed appointed Zeti Akhtar Aziz as the

"Chinese women hold up half the sky" - Mao-tse-Tung

governor of Bank Negara, Malaysia's central bank in early 2001. The fact that she was a women barely rated a mention in the Malaysian media, and yet it is one of the few occasions on which a woman has been appointed to head her country's central bank. It hasn't happened in the United States, Australia or the United Kingdom, but it did happen in largely Islamic Malaysia.

And then there is Rafidah Aziz, Malaysia's long-serving Minister for International Trade and Industry whose ferocity and determination have won her wide respect. Malaysia's preparedness not only to have women serve in prominent positions but in those that are hard edged such as finance and trade will come as a surprise to many. In the West, the tendency has been to give prominent women responsibilities in areas that are traditionally seen as 'nurturing' such as in welfare, education or health.

One woman who has succeeded in both business and politics is Rini Soewandi, who reached the top of Indonesia's business notoriously greasy pole and was known as a tough, ruthless executive. Within seven years at Citibank she rose to be Vice President but

[Photography: Kevin Sunblush]

in 1989, hitting the glass ceiling for local executives, left to join PT Astra International, then Indonesia's second largest conglomerate, as general manager of the finance division. Within two years she was finance director, a job previously earmarked for another (male) high flyer and the only woman on the Astra Board. As she observed at that time, "There is no limit because I am a woman, and more talented women are coming up through the Astra ranks…Women often perform better than men. They are better educated and a lot more loyal". Later she turned to politics and was equally successful first as minister for energy and then of industry and trade.

Women in China

Traditionally women have had a difficult time in China. The most overt practice that kept women dependent on men was foot-binding if for no other reason than it rendered them physically immobile, reducing them to ornaments while their husbands took concubines and minor wives.

Then along came Mao-tse-Tung who famously proclaimed that 'China's women hold up half the sky.' He wrote that "In order to build a great socialist society, it is of the utmost importance to rouse the broad masses of women to join in productive activity" Communism sought to abolish traditional submissive roles for women.

Women often perform better than men... They are better educated and a lot more loyal"

Women in Singapore and the Philippines

Women play substantial roles in commerce and public administration in Singapore and the Philippines, which has had two women presidents. In 2005, Olivia Lum, group chief executive, president and founder of Hyflux, a water treatment company, was the first woman ever to be named Singapore's Businessperson of the Year. Under her leadership, Hyflux has become an important regional player, with growing sales in both China and India.

Women in Korea and Japan

Women are less visible in Korea and Japan where society is more male and macho-oriented. A Labour Ministry survey found that many Japanese companies did not promote women to management positions due to their 'lack of knowledge and judgement'. The big drinking culture of business socialising in those two countries also discourages women's effective participation in the workforce at a professional level.

However, in Korea Silver Kim, CEO of the executive search firm, Sterling Resources Group, has tried to push the profile of women via the Businesswoman's Roundtable she founded in 2003. This is a networking forum for women entrepreneurs and businesswomen to share their experience and knowledge. Membership can only be claimed by women with at least five years in a senior executive position, or who are the founding CEOs of a new business. In such a male-dominated society, this represents a revolutionary move.

In Japan Mari Matsunaga, is credited with the successful launch of i-mode by the Japanese mobile services firm, NTT Docomo. A journalist with 20 years experience, Mari was persuaded to join the Docomo team and provide ideas for the content of the services it would offer on its mobile phones. Although initially uncomfortable in the hierarchical male-dominated male culture of NTT, she overcame opposition to her innovative proposals on content and price, and was responsible for creating the famous "I-mode" identity. In October 2000, Fortune named Mari Matsunaga Asia's no 1 business woman.

Women were given senior positions in state-owned enterprises and importantly, schooling for girls was made compulsory. Certainly, under the Communists the role of women expanded, even if this not always lead to an improvement in their lives.

For the first time women were given roles in public administration and in formal commerce, allowed to seek divorce and to hold land. Mao appointed women to his cabinets and imposed employment quotas for women at all levels of government administration, though with the exception of his second wife, the notorious Jiang Qing, women generally found themselves relegated to subordinate positions in the party leadership.

"Affirmative action policies for women might be needed in America, but clearly not in Malaysia"

But although the position of women in the cities has much improved, little has changed for many women in rural areas. They are cashless, dependent and many are still subjected to arranged marriages and, in the name of China's one child policy, forced abortions. And so they have flooded into China's coastal provinces from rural hinterlands in their millions to seek factory jobs and a better life.

These women have been at the forefront of China's export revolution. The toys, the computer components, the television sets and all the other merchandise exports that China produces are put together on assembly lines at which women have an obvious and often a dominating presence. They work long hours, often in trying conditions in return for a modicum of financial freedom and independence.

Yet there are signs that the entrepreneurial spirit is causing more and more of them to reject such working conditions, and examples are proliferating of women leaving the factories to start up their own businesses. This process is being hastened by the need of many state-owned enterprises to trim their staff as China's economy restructures, often those who are fired first are women. "If the state-owned companies don't want us any more, we'll just go out and start our own firms," was the attitude of Senna Li, who in 2001 set up her own travel agency.

This trend is most noticeable in the cities. In Shanghai, a city with a population of 12 million, a 2002 survey conducted by 18 multinational corporations found that there were more female than male managers in joint venture companies, while a third of all companies were headed by female presidents. Their increased status and wealth is further marked by the fact that in Shanghai, young single women are buying up apartments formerly marketed as bachelor pads.

But old habits die hard. Rules can be changed overnight, but culture is less malleable. There remain women who are disempowered and deprived of respect and opportunity because of their sex, despite the Communist Party's attempts to end such discrimination. Very often laws are not enforced and the old ways triumph. A 2005 opinion poll found that 40% of women in private and foreign-owned businesses and 70% of women working in service industries claimed to have suffered sexual harassment. In September 2005, the Law on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of Women for the first time banned sexual harassment against women and decreed that equality between the sexes was 'a basic state policy'. Time will tell if this heralds real change. Certainly the characters that make up certain words reveal the depth of the problem Chinese women face. When the character for 'female' is paired with that for 'housework', the result is the Chinese word for 'woman'. There, embedded in the written language that all Chinese in China use, are powerful subliminal reminders about the traditional role of women in Chinese society.

So the position of women in China - all 600 million of them - is replete with contradictions. However, critics should remember that progress in Europe has equally failed to live up to its promises. In the UK, despite the thirty years old Sex Discrimination Act women still make up only 11% of directors and 9% of the judiciary. In France, where equality was made part of the constitution in 1946, the average net salary of women in 2005 was 21% less than for men. So, perhaps Europe and the US should take some lessons from Asia.

Adapted from 'Big in Asia: 30 Strategies for Business Success' (3rd edition) by Michael Backman and Charlotte Butler, published by Palgrave

one in nine

CARRIE SHELVER argues that when talking about rape in South Africa, "one in nine" is much more than just a number

DESPITE SOUTH AFRICA'S progressive Constitution, women's occupation of public and private spaces remains limited and constantly under siege. As we stood outside the court on the first day of the rape trial involving the former Deputy President of South Africa, it was clear how even those of us gathered to support Khwezi, the complainant in the case, were under siege, our space limited to a small cordoned off area.

By contrast, the supporters of Zuma roamed and merged with bystanders all of whom were only occasionally pushed back by police. A few hours earlier the complainant in the case had entered the court, head bowed and covered. The accused had entered through another entrance. He emerged after the day's proceedings to loudly take centre stage, sing the contentious Awulethe Mshini Wam ("bring me my machine gun" - already interpreted by some as a phallic symbol representing male virility and power) and dance with the crowd - all with the attitude of someone not raped, not someone who has been accused with rape, nor someone who even takes the matter of violence against women seriously.

The Zuma rape trial, both the events that took place inside and outside the court, provides us with a mirror that reflects how we as South Africans continue to respond to rape. Despite our efforts during campaigns such as the 16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence, gender based violence is commonly viewed as a private affair that should be kept out of the public domain. Sexual violence, specifically rape, continues to mar our legal and human rights landscape in South Africa. Rape statistics are up by 4 per cent according to the police in 2005. Research conducted by the

[Photography: Zanele Muholi]

Medical Research Council indicates that only 1 in 9 cases of rape are reported. Frighteningly, less than 10 per cent of reported cases are successfully prosecuted. Women are more likely to be killed by their intimate male partner than by a stranger. Violence is more likely to occur in women's homes than on the streets.

Women who experience violence are often silenced for fear of the stigma associated with speaking out about the violence they have experienced. Women who do speak out and report rape - an estimated 1 in 9 - are often characterised as either 'victims', who are weak, frightened and vulnerable or 'whores', who are somehow responsible for the violence. This simplistic characterisation maintains patriarchal relationships and reinforces gender stereotypes.

Much of the innocent/guilty victim dichotomy is tied in with how society views women's sexuality. Women older than fifteen and younger than sixty who are raped are deemed to be sexually active and thus often characterised as being of 'loose morals' and questionable character. They are questioned about their dress and their reasons for being at the site of the rape. Their entire sexual history and character is open to public scrutiny. In a cruel twist of public revenge for having brought their experiences of sexual violence into the public domain, the rape survivor is held responsible for the behaviour of the rapist. The rapist is described as having lost control, he fell pray to her 'womanly whiles', and he is somehow the victim in a revenge plot. His sexual history and character remains shrouded in a protective veil of patriarchy. In this way, rape is falsely located within the ambit of sex - a crime of passion.

In part, the focus on the victim as being somehow responsible for the actions of the perpetrator has to do with the laws that govern sexual violence. The Sexual Offences Act defines rape as the act of sexual intercourse without the woman's consent. This places all the responsibility on the survivor to prove that she did not give consent. It further reinforces men as perpetrators and women as victims. It does not recognise that men are raped by other men. Society can accept women being the victims of rape but cannot accept men being the victims of rape. Strangely ironic was a placard outside the court reading 'Zuma has been raped'.

'Umsholozi', as the former Deputy President of South Africa is affectionately known, to his thousands of supporters, emerged from the trial as being a 'bad boy' or perhaps as a bit of an old fool because of his failure to practice safer sex with a 'known HIV + woman' and then taking a shower as a means of reducing the risk of infection. Senior women and men within the 'progressive' political formations may have disapproved of his statements made about HIV/AIDS, the age gap or his foolishness in succumbing to the complainant's charms (herself a comrade's daughter), but surely he could not have actually raped such a girl? After all, Deputy Presidents and political leaders cannot be rapists.

The Deputy President emerged from the trial as a 'bit of a fool' because of his failure to practice safe sex with a 'known HIV+ woman'

Certainly, the 'foolish bad boy' label, along with the verdict of 'not guilty', did little to undermine his suitability for candidacy in the upcoming presidential race. In a strange way the rape and corruption trial almost turned into a giant media marketing and publicity exercise for Mr Zuma. While not every South African may support Mr Zuma, those who do are far more vocal and visible than those who do not.

The One in Nine Campaign, formed in March this year, responded to the need for a new phase of activism and mobilisation on women's sexual rights. The core mandate of this Campaign is giving support to individuals who in the face of stigma, victim-blaming and poor service delivery still find the courage to speak out about their experiences of sexual violence. An important component of this campaign is direct action - visible demonstrations of women denouncing patriarchy and committing their solidarity with other women who report rape. The Campaign members are drawn from both HIV and AIDS, violence against women, women's rights and lesbian and gay rights sectors.

Since the Campaign's formation, frequent calls to action have been made and yet despite these calls relatively few women have joined us at the gatherings. During our involvement with Khwezi's and subsequent cases, we received many electronic and telephone messages of support from women of all walks of life including women in political and economic leadership.

Yet the numbers of women on the pavements at the different sites of gathering remained small compared to those women who expressed commitment to the cause. Fear of violence, of being labelled along with the complainant was one of the biggest barriers to women joining us. Just as the one woman who does report rape represents the eight other women who remain silent, these few women on the pavement came to represent and stand for thousands of women who couldn't stand there themselves.

One such woman who has found the courage to stand up, speak out and be counted is Buyisiwe (Not her real name - Buyisiwe means 'Bring her Back' in Zulu). Buyisiwe is a 27-year-old Tembisa resident who was gang raped by eight men on the 2nd October 2005. On the 12th June 2006 the case was struck from the court roll as a result of certain key evidence being missing from the docket. While the specifics of this case are

horrific, they are not uncommon. Buyisiwe's story is one that is echoed in courts around the country. State officials, either consciously or unconsciously, bungle rape cases; dockets are lost, sold or incorrectly filed. Evidence is tampered with; not available at the time of the court date. The end result is the same; the matter is postponed and finally struck from the roll.

As Buyisiwe put it after her case was struck from the roll - complainants are reduced into being 'pieces of paper' with little attention being given to their needs, protection or rights. It is hard to explain to women survivors how they are different to those pieces of paper that are shuffled across desks which can reportedly be 'lost' for as little as 250 Rand per docket.

When the justice system has failed them so desperately and repeatedly, it is hard to temper their anger and resolve to take justice into their own hands.

It becomes hard to explain how living under the new democratic dispensation means that we must abide by the rule of law. Accepting the rule of law means that we must accept injustice at the hands of biased, ill-informed and sexist judicial officials.

At some point, one wonders when the women of South Africa will stand up and more importantly stand together on the issues that cripple us in our ability to enjoy the Constitutional promises.

When will our fear of living under patriarchy surpass our fear of fighting it? When will the discomfort and pain of the present become so unbearable that we will stand together in our numbers and demand equality, dignity and freedom? When will the liberation of women be seen as worthy enough to warrant building a movement around, a movement that attracts both men and women into its ranks?

Buyisiwe and the countless other women who do speak out should be the spark that ignites the movement. We are being given an opportunity to stand up and be counted.

Carrie Shelver is Training and Public Awareness Manager for POWA (People Opposing Women Abuse)

RAPE IN SOUTH AFRICA

A woman is raped every 26 seconds in South Africa

A woman is killed every 6 days by her intimate male partner

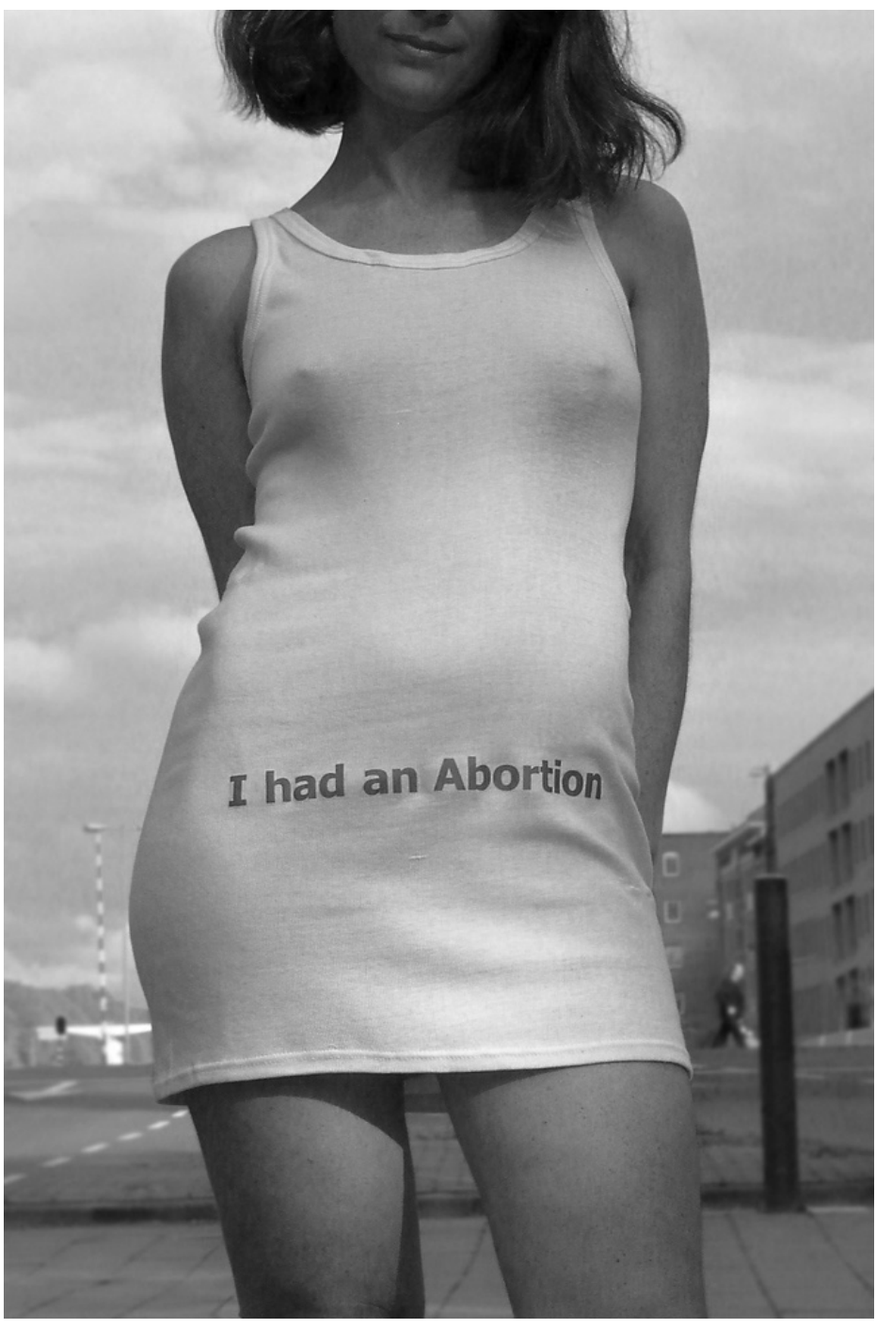
85% of rapes are gang rapes

Just 7% of reported rapes resulted in prosecution

A Jhb survey suggested that one in four men have committed rape
Source: POWA

on abortion

DR ELLIE LEE investigates the issues behind the reignited debate on late-term abortions



[Photography Willem Vilthoven]

ABORTION HAS BECOME a hotly debated issue once again. A flurry of media comment attended a meeting in June this year between the head of the Catholic Church in England, Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor and the Secretary of State for Health, Patricia Hewitt, where the former reportedly pressed for a re-opening of public debate on British abortion law. This politicisation of abortion has followed extensive media discussion about whether abortion after 12 weeks of pregnancy should be restricted because of 4D ultrasound images of a fetus apparently 'walking' and 'smiling', and of whether developments in the care of babies born very prematurely should lead to a reduction in the upper time limit for legal abortion. 'Botched abortions', where 20 or 21 week old fetuses have shown signs of life following abortion procedures, and allegations that abortion providers act illegally by providing women with information about a Spanish abortion clinic that will terminate pregnancies after 24 weeks gestation, have been the subject of controversy.

The central claim pressed in much of this discussion is that British abortion law needs to be changed. Under the current law, the 1967 Abortion Act, abortion can be legally performed up to 23 weeks and 6 days of a pregnancy (usually termed 24 weeks) where two doctors agree that the pregnancy, if continued, threatens the health of the woman or her family. After this point, it can only be provided where the life or health of the woman is at grave risk, or where there is substantial risk of serious abnormality in the fetus. It is the legality of 'late' abortion that has attracted most recent criticism, with many who have commentated during most of the episodes mentioned above calling into question the legal provision of abortion up to 24 weeks. After a long period of time when abortion law appeared to be a settled question in Britain it has thus re-emerged as a matter of public controversy.

A striking aspect of current criticism of the abortion law is that it has not been only traditional abortion opponents who have encouraged it. Although the Catholic Church has provoked debate, the anti-abortion organisations SPUC (Society for the Protection of Unborn Children) and Life have played a relatively marginal role in turning late abortion

into the issue it has become. Some journalists, in contrast, have acted as campaigning crusaders presenting 'late' abortion and those that provide it in particular as ethically dubious. The role of those who describe themselves as 'pro-choice' has also been notable. Professor Stuart Campbell, the obstetrician who runs a London clinic that provides 4-D ultrasound images to women during pregnancy, contends he is a firm supporter of legal abortion, but has been arguing for an upper limit of 18 weeks, with 12 weeks for 'social abortion'. American feminist Naomi Wolf has concluded that the current 24-week time limit is 'too generous', and a clutch of 'feminist' journalists including Allison Pearson have argued that there is no defence that can be made of a law that allows women to terminate pregnancies after 20 weeks. I would encourage people to question such arguments, and consider the following issues.

1. Why women terminate pregnancies in the second trimester

About 22, 000 women each year have an abortion after 12 weeks, around 2,500 of who abort at 20-24 weeks. The most important issue to address is why these women have abortions when they do.

In most cases - available evidence suggests at least 80% - these women did not realise they needed or wanted to request abortion until they were more than three to four months pregnant. This is the case for women for whom the fetus is found, through routine ante-natal screening, to be abnormal. The experience of two other groups of women is less well recognised. First, there are women who fail to realise they are pregnant earlier because of irregular, infrequent periods; failed contraception, particularly with methods that can cause amenorrhoea or irregular bleeding; and denial of pregnancy, sometimes associated with occasional episodes of bleeding that are interpreted as menstruation. Some women, secondly, delay seeking abortion because of indecision or ambivalence about the pregnancy; apprehension, perhaps due to difficulty in confiding in parents or partner; failure of anticipated emotional or economic support from family, partner, or employer; and unanticipated change in socio-economic circumstances with her partner, parents, or others dependent on her as a carer.

A recent study of the experience of young women indicates how some of these factors result in second trimester abortions. As one young woman, age 17, who had an abortion at 20 weeks explained:

I started on the pill about the end of August… I'd never been on the pill before…I didn't know what to expect….When I'd been to the GP I'd worked out I was two months pregnant…then I went in to have the internal examination [at consultation for termination of pregnancy]…he was like, 'well actually…you're more like four and a half months pregnant'…I hadn't known, 'cause I hadn't been having my periods normally.

Another, also 17, knew she was pregnant at eight weeks, but had an abortion at 19 weeks:

I told my partner….he seemed all right with it as well. But then I started getting mixed feelings about whether or not I should keep it and I started coming up with all the reasons in my head …it's from there it started to change.

An on-going study, including interviews with staff working for abortion providers, highlights another aspect of women's experience:

A recent one, that was a planned pregnancy, very much wanted. She was about 23 weeks. And her husband said he was leaving her for her best friend. She just couldn't continue. She just couldn't have his baby. She just wept, and wept and wept.

the truth should be told about the practical effect of a lower legal time limit

There is a fourth category of women, those who experience difficulty in accessing abortion. The GP is unwilling to refer; the local NHS services are inadequate with long waits for assessment and treatment; the local NHS service does not terminate pregnancies for 'social reasons' after 12 weeks; and/or the woman is unable to afford treatment in the independent sector. These women seek abortion relatively early in pregnancy, but because of these service provision reasons end up having to abort 'late'.

Current proposals need to be assessed in relation to their effects for women like these. In most cases, they would not have early abortions because, for reasons beyond their control, they did not seek abortion until later. Making access to abortion harder would likely have made some abort later still, or they would have had babies they did not want. An understanding of this reality needs to be injected into the currently overly abstract, moralised debate.

2. The real extent of technological development

It is becoming something of a given that technological developments should make us re-think the abortion law. But this is a misrepresentation of the situation. The prospects for premature babies are far better than in 1967. But they are still very poor.

Those born in the United Kingdom and Ireland have survival rates of 0% at 21 weeks, and about 1% at 22 weeks, 11% at 23 weeks, and 26% at 24 weeks. The EPICure study (the most recent study of UK and Irish premature birth outcomes) found that of 865 live births of up to 24 weeks gestation recorded in the UK and Ireland between March- Dec 1995, 47% died in the delivery room and 38% died in neonatal intensive care units. 15% of all the survivors in the study were able to leave hospital, however a further 0.3% of these died at home afterwards. There is no clear evidence that there has been any reduction in long-term disability among the survivors of infants born at 24 weeks or more. Indeed, rates of severe disability in the long-term are 25%.

The argument that advances in technology clearly make the current limit outdated is, therefore, often dishonest. But it is of course to be hoped that the situation for premature babies improves, and we need, in this light, to consider the problems of an approach which suggests that technological advances that assist one group of pregnant women (those with wanted pregnancies who deliver early) should imply a diminishment of choice, and the ability to control their lives, for another (those with unwanted pregnancies). Surely we can welcome improvements in premature baby survival rates, without having to force women seeking abortion to continue their pregnancies? Do we really want an abortion law that rests on the assumption this cannot be the case?

3. The problem of an emotionalised response

The third problem with current arguments is that they pander to irrational and confusing views. The time-limit should come down it is claimed, for example, in response to highly emotive stories about 'botched abortions' in the NHS, where a fetus is seen to move following the performance of a late abortion. There are important issues requiring clarification here.

In the vast majority of cases where it is necessary to stop the fetal heart, and thus prevent the possibility of a fetus showing signs of life after an abortion, this is done effectively and efficiently (the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists recommends feticide from 21 weeks onwards, by the injection into the fetal heart of potassium chloride or by the intra-amniotic injection of concentrated urea). The fact that there are a small number of cases where feticide has failed requires not moral panic about 'botched abortions' but serious discussion about how best to provide a better late abortion service.

Staff must have special training and a caseload that is sufficient to maintain their skills. Yet most NHS gynaecological units now handle only a small number of abortions over 20 weeks (75 per cent are now performed by independent sector clinics). There is a need, in this light, to consider how late abortion services should be provided, and how training should be managed. Simply proposing banning late abortion confuses matters and ignores the relevant issues.

It is equally important to question the case against late abortion made on the basis of 4-D images of fetuses apparently 'walking' and 'crying' in-utero at 13 to 17 weeks. Telling the truth is essential here, and the truth is that fetuses are not like year-old babies 'in miniature'. While they move and exhibit reflex reactions they are biologically undeveloped, and most certainly not sentient or self-aware. It helps no-one when such false impressions about the fetus are allowed to hold sway.

It is important that society debates its abortion laws. But it is to be hoped that more honesty about the relevant issues will emerge from now on. Above all, the truth should be told about the inescapable practical effect of a lower legal time limit. A larger number of women than is currently the case will either have to continue an unwanted pregnancy and give birth, or seek abortion in another country.

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on the edge

ANDREW MacDOWALL examines the implications of the accession of Bulgaria and Romania to the European Union

"ÖSTLICH VON WIEN", said the great Austrian statesman Klemens Metternich, "fängt der Orient an." East of Vienna, the Orient begins. On January 1 2007, a considerable new portion of Metternich's Orient will be included in that most Occidental of clubs, the European Union.

Lagging two years behind the "big bang" Central and Eastern European countries, Romania and Bulgaria are being grudgingly ushered over the threshold, trussed up in the fears of increasingly sceptical European electorates. There are threats of fines if the countries fail to meet stringent EU targets. There are limits on export of agricultural goods and, of course, labour ensure that the delicate stomachs and labour markets of the Occident are not troubled by these strange newcomers. This base protectionism gives the lie to the concept of a united Europe of equals. The quite unbelievable furore tabloid about Bulgarian criminals flooding into the UK would be an absolute taboo if it were applied to many other nations. Metternich died in 1859 but clearly his spirit lives on.

Romania has been set back by irresponsible and brutal political leadership and poor economic decision making for many decades. While we remember the fall of Communism in 1989 and 1990 – and indeed the Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceauþescu was shot on Christmas Day 1989 – there was no end to authoritarian rule in Romania. The end of one nightmare led to the beginning of another. Democracy did not emerge, fully-fledged, and some cynics would say it has yet to do so.

Romania, under Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej and Nicolae Ceauþescu, underwent the Warsaw Pact's most extensive "experiment" with Stalinisation outside Hoxha's Albania. Despite this, in long Romanian tradition, he deeply mistrusted the Russians, fearing that, as with the Hungarian uprising and the Prague Spring, the Soviets would use any pretext to re-assert their authority. Ceauþescu was decorated by the British Government for his resilience. Ceauþescu became obsessed with autarchy and starved his citizens to pay off the national debt; which was successfully achieved in the summer of 1989, months before his overthrow.

In his final years, Ceauþescu became almost Bond-villainesque in his actions, bulldozing one sixth of Bucharest to build a vast new "Civic Centre", the pride of which was The Palace of the People, the world's second largest building. Leading to the Palace-strictly off limits to the People it celebrated, of course-was the Boulevard of the Victory of Socialism, a few inches longer and wider than the Champs

Élysées. The Seine or Moskva of this brave new capital was a rerouted stream called the Dâmboviþa, grandly flowing through a concrete trench. Bucharest legend has it that the "river" regularly has to be drained and dredged of all the detritus thrown into it by the ungrateful citizens.

It is no longer the case that the dictator's downfall is a "subject of much controversy"; few doubt that "the stolen revolution" of December 1989 was a palace coup. His replacement was eminence grise Ion Iliescu, an authoritarian communist recently voted the worst Romanian in history (Ceauþescu came second).

In the summer of 1990, students and others gathered in University Square in Bucharest to protest at the lack of change in political leadership. The government of this brave new democracy, impeccably using the logic of class struggle supposedly scrapped after the "revolution", called in miners from the Jiu Valley, armed them and set them upon the bourgeois "counter-revolutionaries". Up to 300 people may have been killed and dumped in mass graves; the official figure was six.

Iliescu ruled Romania for 11 of the post-revolution years. It may seem unusual that the electorate did not cast the old regime aside and start afresh. There were two main reasons for this. Firstly, there was no opposition to speak of. Ceauþescu had so completely lobotomised Romanian society that there was no young generation ready to take the helm. There was no Solidarity in Romania, there was no Vaclav Havel. It had not been in the West's interest to encourage opposition.

Even the leader of the students, Adrian Munteanu, proved to be a rather sinister nationalist. Instead, parties formed from parts of the rotten bulk of the Communist Party. At the 2004 presidential election, Traian Băsescu of the Democratic Party faced Adrian Năstase of the Social Democrats. The worst aspect of the election, as Băsescu, to his credit, pointed out, was that the electorate had to choose between two former communists.

Secondly, many Romanians did not want radical change. Communism had, through brutal means, industrialised the country and given people jobs, homes and electricity. When a liberalising government was elected in 1996, it coincided with an economic crisis, discrediting the reformers and ensuring Iliescu's re-election four years later.

1990s Romania was one of dodgy deals and retarded economic development

Iliescu's regime had to act like a reforming government in some ways, to keep international opinion happy. Romania got the worst of both worlds: while election results suggested that people wanted a gradual change rather than free-market shock tactics that would have hit hard, they got an authoritarian government which botched privatisations of important assets. Opinion tends to be that Romania should have gone down the road of the Central European states with rapid liberalisation; privatisation, low taxes and welcoming capital with open arms. However, this prescription was not popular in Romania, and arguably would not have worked well either. Liberal capitalism requires a strong civil society, an independent judiciary and a robust pluralist political system. Romania did not have these, and Central Europe did. Also, Hungary started bringing in mixed-market reforms as early as 1968, so there was already an element of capitalism in the system. In Stalinist Romania, this was not the case.

Romania and Bulgaria are being grudgingly ushered over the threshold, trussed up in the fears of sceptical European electorates

Iliescu himself talked at one stage of "the Swedish model", and perhaps Romania could have gone down the road of becoming a social democracy, with generous welfare, low levels of inequality in a capitalist system. However, the history of 1990s Romania was one of shady sell-offs, dodgy deals and retarded economic and political development. It had neither a constructively active state nor a thriving free-market economy.

Now, the voters finally having thrown Iliescu and Năstases PSD out in 2004, liberals are very much in power. Romania has a flat tax of 16%, foreign investors are everywhere. One hopes that this will benefit all Romanian people, rather than just the multinational firms and their well-heeled employees. Romanians are told that they have no choice but to accept liberalisation. Maybe, after a decade of failure, they do not.

Civil society is now stronger, and judicial reforms have strengthen the rule of law, though the judiciary lacks professionalism in some areas and is still regarded with some suspicion by ordinary people. Parties on something of a left-centre-right continuum have emerged, though Băsescu's Democratic Party (part of the ruling Justice and Truth (DA) Alliance) has shuffled to the right from the other side recently. Romania is on the right track, but the economic, social and political scars of the 1990s are still clear. Romanians have been attacked, killed, lied to and stolen from for decades. They can only hope that EU entry will bring them the security they need. Recognition as equals would be a good start.

Across the Danube in Bulgaria, the recent Presidential election went unnoticed abroad. It was significant that a run-off was forced between incumbent President Georgi Pârvanov and a candidate from the far-right Ataka Union, Volen Siderov. Also notable was the derisory turnout of just over 40%.

Siderov, who is anti-Semitic, anti-Roma (labelling the minority "thieves") and would ban the Turkish-minority backed Rights and Freedoms Party, polled 25% in the second round. He has called for Bulgaria to re-align its foreign policy towards Russia, to leave NATO and to refuse to meet many of the EU's accession demands.

Recently Dimitar Stoyanov, an official Bulgarian observer to the European Commission and an Ataka MP, caused a scandal when he sent an email to MEPs making derogatory remarks about a Hungarian MEP of Roma origin.

While the office of President is not as important as that of the Prime Minister, the head of state represents the country abroad and helps forge coalitions like the one currently ruling Bulgaria.

While 75% of the electorate who turned out did not vote for Siderov, the fact that a quarter were willing to vote for an ultranationalist who would destroy relations with the EU is indicative of a malaise that should not be ignored. One foreign banker I talked to recently said that 85% of the population is "just getting by". This may be an exaggeration. But the political and economic leaders in Bulgaria should take note that many of their compatriots are not happy with the current situation, and see in the future instability, poverty and loss of sovereignty. Recent elections in Central and Eastern Europe have seen populism on the rise. Elites in capital cities and Brussels have been naïve and shortsighted; not everyone believes that EU accession will be the cure to every malady - many think the opposite. They fear that their businesses will be closed down by regulations (a recent estimate was that less than 20% of Bulgarian businesses fully comply with EU legislation), that the funds will be siphoned off by corrupt politicians and that only an urban elite are benefiting from the country's economic boom. While the figures are impressive, many people compare them to their situation and see a large discrepancy.

If governments do not re-engage with their people, and ensure that the benefits of EU accession and liberalisation support the weakest in society rather than marginalising them, there will be more successes for the vile likes of Ataka.

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twin chall

JOHN MICGIEL probes the implications of family ties on the drafting of Polish foreign policy

During a visit to Washington in September 2006, Polish Minister of Defense Radoslaw Sikorski announced that Poland would send 1,000 troops to Afghanistan in February 2007. The statement provoked a political crisis that ultimately brought down the coalition government that had ruled since May 2006. The leader of the Self-Defense Party, Andrzej Lepper, railed that the prime minister had lied when he claimed that the matter had been previously discussed at a cabinet meeting. It was not revelations from the archives about a prominent person having collaborated with the security services, nor the arrest of party notables for corruption, nor the sort of domestic economic issue that usually bring down governments, but a foreign policy issue that caused the demise of the ruling coalition.

The event raised numerous key questions: who makes foreign policy in Poland? With twin brothers serving as president and prime minister, what role does the foreign minister play? What are the underpinnings of Polish foreign policy?

Following the collapse of the communist system and throughout the 1990s, Poland's foreign policy goals were unambiguous: entry into NATO and the European Union. In a recent interview, Poland's first post-communist foreign minister, Krzysztof Skubiszewski, (Rzeczpospolita, July15-16, 2006) outlined the enormous challenges that faced policymakers in those early days: tying Poland closely to the West, and ending Poland's dependence on and subservience to the Soviet Union. Presidents, prime ministers and foreign ministers were unanimous in their pursuit of these goals, which were met with broad consensus among politicians and the people. But as the endgame drew near for EU accession, some parties challenged the notion of Polish accession. The League of Polish Families and the Self-Defense Party pursued Eurosceptic policies, and to a lesser extent, so did Law and Justice. All three parties won seats in the parliamentary elections that were held in September 2005, and the Kaczynski brothers' party won the largest number of votes and began the process of forming a coalition.

Talks with the second largest faction in Parliament, the Civic Platform, soon turned sour and then downright acrimonious. Curiously, both parties, in their efforts to outline ambitious programs of change, began to outdo themselves in their discussion of a more robust foreign policy in an effort to distinguish themselves from the previous governments. As Slawomir Popowski pointed out in an article last August, (Rzeczpospolita, August 21, 2006) the Civic Platform began to speak of "more autonomous and assertive" policies, while Law and Justice touted its vision of a Poland defending its national interests, because, it was asserted, only those count in the world. In an April 2006 Coalition Program entitled "A State of Solidarity" [Solidarne Panstwo] available on the Prime Minister's website, the parties in the governing coalition explained that "Politics in Poland after 1989 in too large an extent were based on the continuation of many faulty mechanisms and connections from the period of Peoples' Poland. This resulted in a series of pathologies present in our political life, such as corruption and the frequent pursuit of particular interests at the cost of the common good of all of society." Clearly, in the area of foreign policy things were going to change.

there are more than enough domestic and foreign problems to keep the media and pundits busy

The twins had an enormous appetite and were determined that Lech Kaczynski win the elections for the presidency in December. Guided by public opinion polls, Law and Justice Chairman Jaroslaw Kaczynski declined the prime ministership and installed Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz as head of government. The strategy was a winning one and Lech Kaczynski became head of state in December 2005.

As Marcinkiewicz began to put together his cabinet, the choice for Minister of Foreign Affairs was Stefan Meller, former ambassador to Paris, and then-current ambassador to Moscow, a diplomat of considerable talent and tenure. On assuming his responsibilities on October 31, 2005, Meller pursued a policy of continuity in foreign policy, not rocking the boat, and increasingly, finding himself at odds with the Kaczynskis. Meller was not invited into the "inner circle" of the National Security Council, for example, and was forced to decline an extension of mission to ten Polish ambassadors, en masse, who were viewed as members of the ancient regime and whose missions were thus abruptly and publicly brought to an end. Meller resigned in May 2006, just as Jaroslaw Kaczynski was preparing a bolder move, the resignation of Prime Minister Marcinkiewicz, who was also seen as too independent.

Stefan Meller's successor was appointed in May 2006. A protégé of Lech Kaczynski, Anna Fotyga could be relied upon to be loyal to the president, who, it was widely speculated, particularly among the liberal opposition, made foreign policy, which according to the Polish Constitution is not among his responsibilities. The prime minister designates cabinet ministers who are then appointed by the president. But the unique situation of having identical twins as president and prime minister, siblings who often finish one another's sentences make the chain of command less clear.

Moreover, when Prime Minister Marcinkiewicz's chief foreign policy advisor, State Secretary Ryszard Schnepf resigned in May 2006, for proposing without the prime minister's approval an alternate policy toward the problem of the soon-to-built Russian-German Northern Pipeline under the Baltic, it appeared that most foreign policy decisions

lenges

were now being made by the President, with a small group of advisors.

It should be noted that few of these advisors have much of a background in foreign affairs. That is not so unusual. Former U.S. President Bill Clinton similarly had little experience, and closer to Poland, the same is true of Hungarian Foreign Minister Kinga Goncz, a psychiatrist and the daughter of former President Arpad Goncz.

To be sure, the learning curve was rather steep for the new Polish foreign policy makers, and gaffes were made and seized upon by the opposition as well as by liberal and left-wing European politicians and by the media. An unflattering portrait of Lech Kaczynski in the somewhat obscure German newspaper Die Tageszeitung was said to be the reason for President Kaczynski's cancellation of the Weimar Triangle summit. It also led Foreign Minister .Fotyga to compare the publication to the Nazi propaganda weekly, Der Stuermer. Most analysts agree that the article crossed the line of good taste, but even proponents of the president admit that the reaction by President Kaczysnki was a bit over the top. And all eight of the previous post-communist foreign ministers, regardless of political stripe, signed an open letter protesting the cancellation.

When Polish parliamentarian (and now vice minister of defense) Antoni Macierewicz said on the conservative TV Trwam channel (associated with Father Rydzyk's Radio Maryja) that most of those foreign ministers had been agents of the Soviet security services, the Foreign Ministry took no position on the matter, and the Foreign Minister herself left a parliamentary commission looking into the matter after making a brief statement. When in response former Foreign Minister Wladyslaw Bartosiewicz resigned from the leadership of the Polish Institute for International Affairs, President Kaczynski muttered that he would not ask him to return. (Rzeczpospolita, May 9, 2006)

Like Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and even Vladimir Putin in their early periods, the Kaczynski brothers are more interested in domestic policy than foreign affairs. Comparisons between the current and former President of Poland, Aleksander Kwasniewski, are invariably less favorable toward the former. To be fair, the Kaczynskis are preoccupied with destroying old-boy structures among the political elite and military counterintelligence, rooting out corruption in the ministry of finance and the state administration more generally, and in building a stable government with a well-designed program that can be sustained by a coalition government.

Foreign policy was the pretext for the political crisis triggered by Minister Sikorski's statement in September 2006 on sending Polish troops to Afghanistan, but the fissures that separated the three coalition partners are deep and of long-standing. Foreign Minister Fotyga has not yet given any real indication of her policy goals since the annual address to parliament that her predecessor gave in February 2006. Presidential visits to Israel and the United States were generally assessed favorably. Issues such as Afghanistan, Polish-Jewish relations, property restitution, and relations with Poles living abroad were addressed in a businesslike and straightforward fashion that was very different from that of former President Kwasniewski.

Since then, the government has been reconstituted with the same coalition partners, and a framework has been drawn up outlining in detail its goals, among other areas for strengthening Poland's international status. In very brief form, the objectives pertaining to foreign policy are provided at the end of this essay [see box].

Some may quibble about whether the more assertive brother, Prime Minister Jaroslaw Kaczynski, will in the course of events eclipse the special relationship that Foreign Minister Fotyga has with the President. I believe that this is a moot issue, given the even more special and closer bond between the identical twins. From their perspective, it is far more important that the coalition partners live up to their bargain, so that less time is spent on political haggling and more time on the implementation of the framework. Of course, that does not mean that the Polish Peasant Party, nor the new alliance of four liberal-left parties that includes the Polish Democrats (formerly the Freedom Union), the Socialists, the Labor Party, and the Democratic Left Alliance, nor the increasingly popular Civic Platform, will cease politicking, particularly before the local elections on November 12.

A recent survey by Rzeczpospolita (October 11, 2006) indicates that had elections taken place in early October, 31 percent of those polled would have voted for the Civic Platform, while Law and Justice polled 22 percent. With parties now going into electoral blocs prior to November 12, it is difficult to say which bloc (the four-party left bloc, the three-party governing coalition, or the Civic Platform/ Polish Peasant Party bloc, will be victorious. The results will reveal whether the coalition has enough popular support to carry out its plan. In the meantime and irrespective of the results, there are more than enough domestic and foreign problems to keep the media and political pundits busy, and the Kaczynski twins will soldier on.

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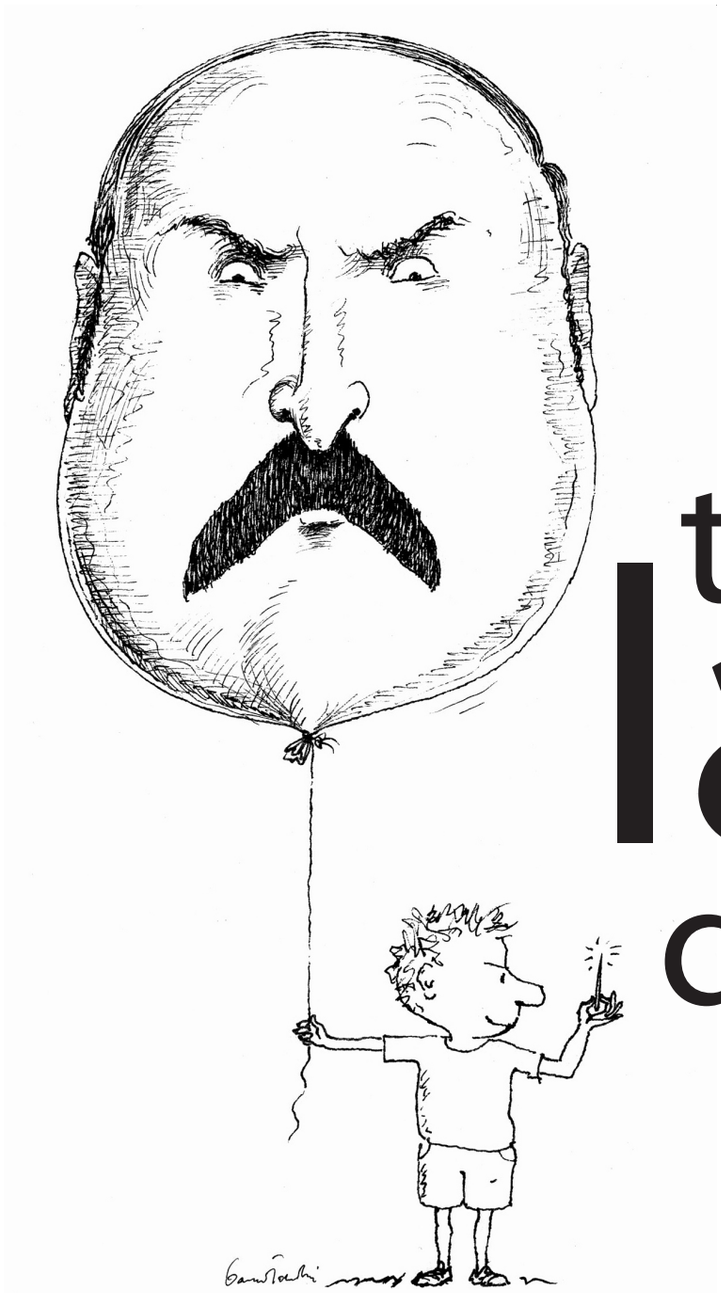
POLAND'S GOALS:

"Poland's strategic foreign policy goal is to be able to participate in European and Euro-Atlantic policymaking. In the medium term, Poland should continue to enjoy security and create the best possible conditions for reforms aimed at modernizing the country, to compete globally, and to increase national wealth...

Poland supports deepening cooperation within the European Union wherever it is in the interest of its member states and the will of the community."



the last dictator

NORMAN GRAHAM examines Lukashenko's prospects of retaining control of Belarus after the 2006 electoral controversy

SAMUEL P. HUNTINGTON (1991) describes the "Third Wave of Democratization" as a major feature of the late 20th Century. The process has not been without setbacks and lingering authoritarian regimes, some of which seem remarkably stable, but the transition of many former state socialist regimes in Eurasia to liberal democracies in the period since 1991 is a remarkable development. There is, of course, a long tradition of scholarship on the appropriate strategies and ingredients of democratization. The work of Lipset and Lijphart on the socioeconomic bases or at least the correlates of democracies is widely familiar, and has stimulated considerable empirical work on the requisites of democracy and the explanation of patterns of political party formation, voting behavior and political conflict (Lipset, 1963; Lipset and Rokkan, 1967; Lijphart, 1984; and Przeworski, et al, 2000).

Larry Diamond (1999) used the Freedom House ratings and his own independent judgments to categorize states into four main groups: 1) Liberal Democracies; 2) Non-Liberal Electoral Democracies; 3) Pseudo-Democracies; and 4) Authoritarian Regimes. An adaption of these scheme was applied to the former state socialist regimes of Eastern Europe and the successor states of the Soviet Union as of 2006. Belarus is ranked as one of the most authoritarian of these states here, and furthermore Belarus has seen a gradual reduction in political rights and civil liberties since 1991, as judged by the well-respected Freedom House evaluation team. Former US Ambassador Mark Palmer, listed Lukashenko among the forty-five least wanted dictators in Breaking the Real Axis of Evil (2003); he is the last dictator of Europe in the view of many analysts and commentators. The "color revolutions" in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan, 2003-5, seemed to ignite new optimism for democratization in the remaining authoritarian regimes in Eurasia, but the March 2006 "elections" in Belarus, and the repressive campaigns there and elsewhere, most notably in Uzbekistan, seemed to dash these hopes, at least for now. How did this resistant form of

[Illustration: Jacek Gawlowski]

tyranny evolve, and what are the prospects for democratization and prosperity in Belarus?

From the modest position of a state farm manager, having been educated at the Mogilev Teaching Institute and the Belarus Agricultural Academy and served a stint in the Soviet Army, Alexander G. Lukashenko was elected as a Deputy in the Supreme Soviet of the Socialist Republic of Belarus in 1990. Interestingly, he initially campaigned for a democratic Soviet Union, founding the Communists for Democracy group, and according to his official biography, was the only Belarus deputy to vote against the Belovezh Agreements for the dissolution of the USSR. He was essentially pushed aside when Belarus independence was declared in 1991. The fledgling Belarus government was led by Stanislau Shushkevich in the early 1990s, with a reform agenda in his mind, but one that was not well-implemented.

the 2006 vote offered a textbook case on how to rig an election

Lukashenko gradually made a political name for himself as a crusader against corruption, given his first opportunity to do so by Shushkevich when he was made chairman of the anti-corruption committee of the Parliament. Shushkevich, then speaker of the Parliament, became a target of the anti-corruption campaign, if largely for his failure to address the issue versus others in the government. Lukashenko's real breakthrough came in the 1994 Presidential election which was relatively competitive/open with six candidates, including Lukashenko, Sushkevich, and Vyacheslav Kebich. Lukashenko was a darkhorse at best, but he made it past the initial round to emerge with a stunning victory, 80% to 20% in the run-off against Kebich. From this point on, Lukashenko moved to consolidate and preserve his political power with bold and ruthless skill.

A series of attacks on opposition groups and their leaders, often justified with the need to preserve socio-poliitical stability and economic progress, marked his first term as President. He also made clever use of referenda to make key changes that would buttress his control and pursue closer relations with Russia. Most significant of these was one that gave the President power to dissolve Parliament, but another extended his term of office by two years, and a third provided for economic union with Russia despite the fact that one of the key criticisms of Shushkevich in the 1994 campaign was that he had relied too much on Russian economic assistance. His initial efforts to restrict political opposition and his failure to implement liberal economic reforms promoted by Western governments, the World Bank, IMF, EU and EBRD, led to considerable foreign criticism and a curtailing of foreign financial assistance. This external pressure did little to chasten Lukashenko; indeed, he seemed to revel in the posture of independence (from the West at least) and felt free to criticize Western policies and programs with vigor. He joined Russia in opposition to NATO enlargement, but continued participation in the training programs of NATO's Partnership for Peace. He called for a nuclear-free zone in Eastern and Central Europe, and upset many Western leaders with his willingness to trade arms in areas of tension and consort with dictators.. Indeed, there have been reports that he supplied small arms to both sides of the Chechen wars.

Domestically, his overriding goal seemed to be social stability. This led him to eschew economic liberalization; indeed, he strengthened and celebrated the role of the state. The most prominent motto articulated in Belarus state communications is: "The State for the People." The "people" of Belarus could will look to the chaos of economic transition, especially "shock therapy" in Poland, and wonder if the pain of a dramatic rise in unemployment and the loss of social security could be worth the promises of Western experts (for an early critique of Western guidance to Eastern Europe, see Andor and Summers, 1998 and Wedel, 1998). Lukashenko may have sacrificed long term prosperity for short and medium term gain, but Belarus has enjoyed lower levels of unemployment and higher economic growth than many of the other post-Soviet successor republics. Data released officially by the Belarus state and those reported in the various publications of the development agencies of the UN and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development point to low levels of foreign investment and privatization, but do also present a picture of equity, social stability and some growth. Lukashenko also takes great pains to emphasize the lack of "mafia" influence in the economy and the modest levels of crime more generally.

The goal of social stability also helped to justify political restrictions. Electoral observers found the elections and the referenda unfair. The lack of political freedom became abundantly clear in the 2001 and especially in the 2006 Presidential elections. Independent minded educational institutions and political groups were closed, some candidates were imprisoned or "disappeared," and state-controlled media were anything but unbiased in their reporting and coverage. In 2004, the constitutional limitations on Presidential terms were removed by a referendum, and the 2006 elections offered a textbook case on how to rig an election. This was curious or at least excessive, given that it looked very much like Lukashenko was popular enough to win a fair election against the apparently weak opposition. Determination not to follow the trend of the color revolutions may have animated the enhanced power and training given to police and security forces for dealing with protests and demonstrations, the closure of opposition party offices, the change (moving up) in the schedule for the elections, and the closure of IISEPS, the country's largest independent polling agency. External observers from the EU, OSCE, and US, not to mention Western media, were very critical of the election, while some observers from Russia and the CIS were satisfied with its fairness. The election resulted in another clear victory for Lukashenko. The united opposition attempted to ignite a campaign of protests and civil disobedience, but the impact was limited in duration and scope. External leverage was minimal, given that Lukashenko had already steered a course clearly independent from Western finance and institutional support. (For a detailed discussion of the 2006 electoral campaign, its aftermath, and possible lessons learned see: Silitski, 2006).

Vitaly Silitski argues persuasively that the 2006 election was instructional for the democratic opposition in Belarus. The effort to forge a unified challenge to Lukashenko was modestly effective, though it deteriorated somewhat. Valuable experience and working relationships were gained. Silitski joins what may be an emerging consensus among analysts, however, that Lukashenko has consolidated his power quite effectively. Things are unlikely to change in this unless there is important change in the immediate external environment. Interestingly, there are signs that there may be some of this in the cracks that seem to be developing in the generally supportive relationship with Russia. Russian announcements that the price of energy shipments to Belarus would rise dramatically to market prices soon threaten to disrupt the economy and thus the social stability on which Lukashenko's "popularity" may rest. Recent efforts to establish closer economic relations with other energy-rich countries in the region, most notably Azerbaijan, may be a partial solution, but the role of the state in the Belarus economy may not appear so effective in this new environment.

What is the appropriate role of the state? What has worked best in the transition countries of Eastern Europe and the Central Asia? This remains an open question. One may wonder specifically if Lukashenko's approach fits the mold of the "the Lee hypothesis" (advocated by Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore), which stresses the need for discipline and centralized state power for effective economic development. Singapore, the Republic of Korea, Taiwan and Chile are often cited as effective examples of this model in practice, and a long tradition of political and economic development scholars have struggled with this question. Democratization followed the periods of centralized state power in Korea and Chile. This does not appear to be part of Lukashenko's vision, and few in the Baltics or Central Europe would likely trade life in present day Belarus for their own situations; but nostalgia for the security of the old pension and social welfare systems and impatience with the uneven benefits from economic liberalization remain evident.

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public property

MARTYN PERCY converses with the *Forum* on the Church's evolving role in public discourse

PUBLIC LIFE IS that space in society which we regard as being commonly owned, in which while nobody has the right to dictate what happens, we can all contribute. Modern society has manifold public spaces; we have free media, theatres galore and numerous 'virtual' public spaces. Even life itself in a way is an enormous public space - we have capacity to produce ideas (even wild ones) which would be the envy of our predecessors 300 years ago, who faced a much more censorious attitude to what could be expressed. But how has this public life developed, and who now shapes it? What can the Church contribute to this discourse?

Do you think this is a new situation?

Even 500 years ago, the primary shapers of public life in any European country were the Church and the Crown, and it was extraordinarily difficult to envision a public sphere developing in which you could have conversation or acts that weren't in some sense under review. In theatre, for example, any production needed to be regulated by the Crown until really quite recently. It was difficult, even if one owned a press, to get books published without imprimatur from the Church. But eventually we began to see emerging nation states asserting their authority over and against papal control: the Reformation. Furthermore, an emerging middle/merchant class which was literate and wanting to explore ideas that weren't necessarily "on message" began to in some ways challenge monarchical dominance of public space. The Crown is essentially being checked - a sign of emerging democracy.

Are you saying the contemporary dimensions and contours of this debate are more securely rooted in the past than many realise?

In a sense, the conditions for a more open public life have been there since the Renaissance - many things have come together to produce an enquiring society that is quite flush with money. Even Georgian architecture reflects that, producing theatres, copy houses and public parks: all places where people can meet, talk and do things in which Church and Crown are subjects of discussion rather than controllers of discourse.

Our modern understanding of public life has all that coming together, and as such represents a trajectory of history 700-800 years old. It's rooted in profound cultural and social forces producing merchant and then middle class, the emergence of democracy and the establishment and development of our universities, themselves a cause and effect of emerging public life.

Did the industrial revolution have an impact on the role of churches in public life?

During this period, or certainly from the early Victorian period onwards, the Church

[Photography: Sharon Mollerus]

has moved from the position where it has controlled, or at least had some authority over large amounts of public life to one where it is instead in a position of contribution. The Church has had to contend with the fact that a whole range of social and cultural forces, such as (in no particular order) industrialisation, pluralism, secularisation, emergence of cities and democratisation have taken the privileged role away from the Church, so it now speaks on a more level playing field in which its voice may be valued, but is only valued provided it can find an appropriate public language in which to speak.

Can you give an example?

Education would be one, where the Church has held on to a lot of the power it has had in schools, but has not held that power so well in universities, leading to a significant decline in Church power in disciplines like science, and more broadly in universities as a whole, where the Church has had to give ground. The Church could no longer mount a campaign requiring, say, a professor of mathematics to be an ordained clergyman - for one, it wouldn't work anymore, and for another we can acknowledge that a professor of maths only really need to be a good mathematician. In a sense, there's been a receding in higher education of the Church's authority and influence.

How have these cultural shifts been carried forward?

The Church has instead worked to retain influence where the synergy between Church positions and academic and secular positions may be much closer, particularly in schools where for a variety of reasons a Church school education is seen as a good thing by many people - because there's a lot of people who think the addition or presence of religious values in educating communities at a certain age is a very good thing compared to the secular alternatives.

Presumably this has an impact on other spheres of life?

The same is true in areas of moral probity. It's now less credible for the Church to man the barricades for certain moral issues using a theological vocabulary around the issues that may concern them, be they gender or sexuality issues, or broader, more political issues. The Church cannot rely on cashing in on its theological vocabulary for that to make sense in public life. It must find a different way, ethically, for arguing its corner if it's to carry any weight in the public sphere - using the values that have currency rather than, to put it crudely, simply saying "we're opposing this because we think the Bible says so". That's an argument that won't get you very far in public life. It might on certain issues, but in many of the more sophisticated and contentious areas of public debate it won't get you very far at all.

So what is to be done about this?

The Church might have to reach for arguments or rhetoric outside its own normative frame of reference, such as in debates about poverty. Clearly scripture has a great deal to say about poverty and how to treat the poor, but to go into bat in the public arena based on what you think scripture says about the poor will only take you so far. So naturally the Church becomes embroiled (quite rightly) in the more sophisticated arguments around the causes of poverty, the outcome of poverty - what it determines, how people can be supported in/moved from poverty, the role of politics.

Simply saying "we're opposing this because we think the Bible says so" won't get you very far...

Consider the publication in 1985 of the "Faith in the City" document, a report by the Archbishop's commission on urban affairs which was seen at the time by some Conservative MPs as 'neo-Marxist'. The document represented a sophisticated piece of theologising about economics, free market and its consequences, which we can crudely argue as leaving some people unsupported and thus in a worse state. A document such as this can be seen as an example of the Church attempting to engage in a debate in public life that it's not really doing any more on its own terms. There's a sparsity of scriptural references in "Faith in the City". That is not to say it isn't soaked in scriptural allusion or based in those concerns, but rather that it recognises readers' frame of reference is influenced by a much wider and mixed economy, of which Church is merely one part.

That sounds like a profound change...

The 'shift' for the Church in the public sphere is that from imposition to contribution, from privilege to participation, and so it has had to move from being reliant on its own authority to finding new rhetoric to constructively engage in dialogue. As such, new vocabulary emerges which is flavoured with Christian rhetoric but not necessarily dominated by it. This leads to interesting debates - do people waving placards outside "Jerry Springer: The Opera" have more right to be heard than people who bought tickets? In modern times, the answer is essentially 'no'. They have the right to protest but not to send everyone out of the theatre. Similarly those protesting outside animal testing labs - they have no right to stop the building work, but instead the right to alert public to their concerns. Modern public discourse does not necessarily produce consensus; rather it nurtures (or at least allows) dissent.

Are there other areas of contention that also pose similar questions?

The Church faces this on the gay issue - it can't find a common mind in itself (in nearly any denomination) about how to move forward, but it knows it has people of nearly every shade of opinion who feel very passionate about these issues. There are many who agree on nearly everything but not this particular one, and so it becomes a very divisive thing. However, dissent should not be seen as a threat to the Church - dissent has been around at least since the reformation. The Church is a rich and plural body, which could even be called a civilised community of disagreement. Whether we call modern public discourse within the Church disagreement or diversity is really just a question of whether the glass is half-empty or half-full.

So is the church being slowly removed from public life – pushed, as it were, from a position of centrality to marginality?

Yes and no. In a sense, my own career reflects the Church's shift from a controlling role to an advisory one. For six years I was council member and director of the Advertising Standards Authority. As I took the role, it was made very clear to me that my job was not to represent the Church but rather to provide some theological and ethical insight into some of the debates that were emerging. The group of 12 directors have a remarkable range of skills and expertise on offer - the gender, ethnicity and skill mix is all there. So of course, you are just one voice in that with no kind of power of veto.

What sort of areas does the Authority tackle?

One of the earliest issues we tackled related to taste and decency in relation to religious buildings. We needed to consider whether a large poster advertising lingerie 50 yards from a mosque was good practice, or alternatively whether it could reasonably be said to cause "serious and widespread offence". A poster site is definitively within public space, so what rights does a community have with respect to their space? In areas such as these the Church is essentially unrepresented, excepting that it provides people like myself to contribute in ethical spheres. I now serve on the Portman group, the self-regulation body for the alcoholic drinks trade.

Does the rise of 'self-regulation' point towards new understandings of public life and moral authority?

This shift towards self-regulation is interesting. We have moved from 'high-handed' Government regulation (which itself was a 'move on' from regulation by the Church and the Crown), say 50 years ago, into a world where the bodies producing goods are setting up their own independent bodies for self-regulation.

In a sense, this shift is a sign of a wider trend. We have moved from that of a Church and Crown imposing morality, through democratic Governments monitoring it, to ideas such as self-regulation putting the moral and ethical onus back to businesses themselves. Instead of imposing values, the role of bodies such as the Church is now to cultivate values in the discrete fields they are concerned with. And that can only be a good thing.

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continuous creation

ZOE SPRIGINGS shows us that sustainable development is much more than just the new Corporate Social Responsibility gimmick

IT WAS BACK in the 1980s that 'sustainable development' was first conceived by the Brundtland report as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs, but for almost two decades it languished at the bottom of the average national agenda. Not so today. The twin concerns of demand outstripping a finite oil supply and the terrifying consequences of human-induced climate change have shaken the world out of its complacency. It is clear that the traditional concept of development as fossil-fuel based industrialisation and the over-exploitation of natural resources it facilitates has become a fatal anachronism.

In this article I will outline exactly why there is such an urgent necessity for sustainable development to be adopted as the uniting ethic across the world. However, although it is a practical imperative I hope to dispel the perception of sustainable development as a 'necessary evil' for not only is it the only viable option but it also brings many benefits with it. Throughout, I shall provide current examples of sustainable development in practice because although the theoretical debate over the term itself is an interesting and important one, I would like to move beyond it towards an analysis of its actual implementation.

Despite insufficient awareness, important first steps have been taken and sustainable development has the potential to be the triangulation point for governments, businesses and civil society movements. However, it is only through active collaboration on both a local and global scale that the ethic of sustainable development can be realised.

Whether one feels it to be a moral or a pragmatic issue, unsustainable development means that life as we know it will change for the worse

First, the uncomfortable reality, Al Gore's 'Inconvenient Truth': that is, anthropogenic climate change is the biggest threat we face and our carbon dioxide emissions need to be drastically reduced. The UK currently has a target to cut emissions by 60% by 2050 but in his latest book, George Monbiot argues that we actually require a 90% cut by 2030 in order to avoid the 2°C rise which would tip our ecosystems over the edge. Melting polar ice alone would cause flooded coastal cities due to increased sea levels, and changed millennia-old climactic and ecological systems as a result of disrupted sea-currents.

Hundreds of books have been written on this topic and it is imperative that we inform ourselves of the pressing reason for change, but I shall not attempt to summarise the literature in this article. I would add that while climate change is the top priority for global action, the fact that if everyone in the world lived like a European then we would need three worlds to support us (5 worlds for Americans) is evidence that is our entire approach to the natural limits of the world needs fundamental readjustment.

In 'Capitalism: As If the World Matters' Jonathan Porritt borrows Schumacher's idea of the world's ecosystems as our natural capital, and although we should be living off the 'interest' it provides, we are instead eating into the capital itself at a frightening rate. From a purely practical point of view, we need to develop a concept of development which takes natural capital into account and decouples environmental degradation from economic growth before it erodes the very foundations on which all development ultimately relies: the world around us.

The latest example of this is the link between poverty and climate change, and in a report on this topic prepared by DfID, the World Bank and the UNDP amongst others, is states that climate change "threatens to undo decades of development efforts". The message is clear: we can either take action now to change our ways, or we can wait (not long) until forces beyond out control change them in ways we cannot control. This is why sustainable development needs to be taken seriously and adopted urgently.

The key to sustainable development is its interdisciplinary approach, and the way in which human activities are interconnected. It is for this reason that every aspect of human life ultimately relies on sustainable development and we can see the way in which the concept is already influencing a diverse range of groups. From the Bishop of London declaring flying to be a sin to BP promising to go 'beyond petroleum' to David Cameron pushing the message of renewable energy, climate change has clearly seized the concerns of a number of groups. It sometimes takes unusual guises, such as the American evangelicals who care about protecting God's creation or the White House officials who fear they fund terrorism by buying Middle Eastern oil, but everyone is talking about finding an alternative to fossil-fuels and reducing the amount of energy we consume. Of course, discussion and publicity is important but it's the actions which really matter when it comes to tackling climate change and the general degradation of our ecosystems.

On a political level, sustainable development is undoubtedly much talked about, but Kofi Annan and others have made pleas for it to be put into practice. Despite international conventions such as the Kyoto Protocol, the world's leaders are yet to produce and adhere by credible commitment to reducing their emissions. The irony of the situation in the UK was highlighted by a letter from the Corporate Leaders Group on Climate Change which told the Prime-Minister that investing in a low-carbon future should be "a strategic business objective for UK plc as a whole" and urged him to take more serious action.

Within government, the UK sustainable development strategy, 'Securing the Future' was launched last year and we are currently at the beginning of the UN 'Decade for Education in Sustainable Development' although the lack of awareness is evidence that policy implications have yet to become an everyday reality for the average Briton.

Nevertheless, while he or she might struggle to define the term, the fact that now every party – not just the Greens – is talking about reduced emissions, environmental taxes, recycling and even 'general wellbeing' is evidence that the British people, like their fellow world citizens, are beginning to care about the environment as something intrinsic to their way of life.

Even business, painted by the more radical in the green left as anathema to sustainable development, has begun to take a serious interest. Of course, there is always the danger of it being used as the new CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) and an optional bolt-on rather than the fundamental concept at the heart of all policies. It is for this reason that consumers must keep corporations accountable to their claims of sustainable practice, just as citizens must hold governments to their promises. But there is every reason for business to embrace sustainable development as the sensible business option and the only one which will return dividends in the long-term, or even in the short- to medium-term. Launched in 1999, the Dow Jones Sustainability Indexes were the first global indexes tracking the financial performance of the leading sustainability-driven companies worldwide. They have outperformed both the Morgan Stanley Capital International (MSCI) World index and the FTSE World Index and good rating in the DJSI is highly sought after.

Individual business cases also demonstrate the growing popularity of sustainability, and BP is the leading example in the controversial energy sector. In the '2005 Sustainability Report' BP's Chief Executive, Lord Browne, writes that long-term investment in the future in the form of BP Alternative Energy can "help meet the energy needs of a growing world while minimizing the impact on our common environment" and he explains "the actions we take are designed to enable our business to prosper and all our activities contribute to the delivery of our purpose as a business". For BP, sustainable development is presented as compatible with good business prospects, and it is undoubtedly true that there is enormous potential for innovation in providing energy-efficient and renewable energy technology. There is certainly a debate to be had about the intrinsic sustainability of the oil industry, but the fact that even this sector is beginning to adapt to the challenge of climate change with investment in renewable and carbon-offsetting schemes suggests that change can be effected in other areas with far more ease.

Sustainable development is a concept which requires us to alter the basic paradigms of industrial development which have developed in the West since the Industrial Revolution, and it is understandable that this alteration takes time. However, 200 or so years in the context of millennia of existence, and less than 200 years for many nations of the world, is not such a long time. Until this time, faith in indefinite linear growth was unfamiliar to most thinkers, and Malthusian ideas of natural limits and traditional beliefs in cyclical development were far more common.

Now, when we only have decades in which to take action, sheer necessity requires that we force ourselves to adjust to the idea that our human actions really do shape the world around us and are currently doing so in an unsustainable and truly dangerous way. As never before, we are global citizens in the face of global warming and therefore need to agree on a global ethic which will form the platform for action.

Whether one feels it to be a moral or a pragmatic issue, unsustainable development means that life as we know it – political, religious, social, business and financial – will change for the worse: this is the bad news. The good news is that we do know what the solution could be and that our actions have unprecedented potential for change, should we choose.

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negative liberty

ELSA DOBLER explains the French concept of laicité, and its application in banning headscarves in public schools

"THE REPUBLIC DOES not recognize any cult" (art.2 of the state and church separation law of the 9th of December 1905) is the expression of the state's laicité. The state is therefore neutral in that it does not intervene in religious issues; it admits the existence of every religion but does not recognise any. The practical results are that there is no official state religion, the government cannot give funds to the churches and an employee of the state cannot show or talk about their religious beliefs… The purpose of the principle of laicité is to ensure equality, protection and respect for the citizen without taking into account his religious beliefs.

This idea is expressed in the article two of the French constitution of the 4th of October 1958, which proclaims: "France is a laic republic. It assures equality in front of the law for all citizens without distinction of origins, race or religion". This was the ideology of the fifth republic but the evolution of the principle of laicité can be criticised as going against those purposes, especially from an English point of view. In fact, the main area laicité affects today is education and the law of the 15th of May 2004 has been criticised as it forbids the wearing of religious signs, such as crosses or headscarves, in public schools.

In order to explain why we need such a

radical solution, it is necessary to give some history regarding the problem. The first time courts had to deal with a question concerning the "wearing" of religious signs was in 1989. The secretary of education asked the Conseil d'Etat (the higher administrative court in France) whether the wearing of religious signs in school against the principle of laicité of education. The Conseil d'Etat has, on the 27th of November 1989, developed the idea that wearing a sign in itself was not against the principle of laicité, unless the wearing was an act of provocation, but the court gave no detail on what was considered a provocative manner of wearing such items. As the number of cases dealing with the wearing of religious signs grew, the government tried to provide details about the difference between provocative and acceptable attire. In a "circulaire" of the 20th of September 1994, a distinction was established between discreet signs, which were acceptable, and ostensible signs, which were forbidden.

Nevertheless the first questions that arose were deciding who was entitled to decide what was acceptable and what was not. How could they decide where to draw the line? The main problem was with headscarves was that this was at the discretion of the head of the school, therefore in some schools it could be allowed whereas in others it would be forbidden. This situation was, of course, not satisfactory, as it was not respecting one of the main purposes of laicité: to ensure equality of treatment for students no matter their religion. As a result the government decided that it was necessary to legislate, in order to ensure a better protection of the citizens and to clarify the law. On the 15th of March 2004 was introduced a new article in the Code of Education (art. L141-5-1: "in primary, middle and high public schools the wearing of signs or clothes by which the students expressed ostensibly a religious appartenance is forbidden").

Why did the parliament take such a radical decision? The main reason that was given was that it is necessary to protect the concept of laicité. The French believe the law must protect liberty. The only way to protect the freedom of religion for all is to have laws that limit expression of belief. In first year of law school, one of the first constitutional principles students learn is that "my freedom stops where yours begins". The 2004 law is an application of this principle. It ensures that all religions are respected and equal. It forces the students to learn how to respect people without paying attention to their religion and nobody is offended (by not showing my religious sign I am not offending you and vice versa). It protects the person with the religion but also respects other people with different religions and those who are uncomfortable with some signs.

It may look like the government prefers to pretend that the religious beliefs of a person do not exist but this is necessary to protect that person. And the question is then: how can it work? It is not fair to say the French application is the best one, only that it is now necessary in France. The wearing of religious signs was starting to create conflicts: teachers refused to give lessons to people because they were wearing headscarves or kippot. If teachers did not have the right to express their religion because school is laic then why should it be acceptable for students? The government thought it was in the public interest to legislate. The government also fears that if the citizens are free to wear religious signs, conflicts may be triggered, as the relationships between different religious communities in France are tensed.

one of the first constitutional principles students learn is that "my freedom stops where yours begins"

The state considers religion to be private and therefore must be practiced in private places (churches or temple) and during private hours (outside schools hours). It is the "interet general" which prevails over the private interest of the citizen. As part of a laic state, school has to be neutral and independent from religion, which is impossible if there are people practicing religion by wearing religious signs. Because wearing a religious signs is part of the practice of your religion, by this you force a neutral school to deal with this religion. This is also why there are no religious courses in public schools - the government believes this is not the role of school, though this idea is highly criticised as it promotes religious ignorance, and do you not fear what you do not know? In order to learn respect and tolerance, schools should teach all religions, in order to develop a religiously aware culture. However people might be offended and many teachers will refuse to teach it, or will focus the course only on their religion, thereby not respecting the laicité of school.

But the protection that the government is looking for is not always ensured in its application - a lot of people wear religious signs in public school but as these signs are discreet they can be hidden, for example Christians and Jews with the cross and the Star of David whereas a Muslim will never be able to wear the headscarf, as it is considered ostensible. So there is inequality. Also, by preventing people wearing religious signs, the government is forbidding people to exercise freedom of religion and they may become frustrated. In a time where many people are turning to extremism, it is dangerous to limit this freedom of religion. People may feel rejected by society and some influential religious leaders may use this to attract new people. So by trying to protect the citizen, the government may pushes them to extremes that may be dangerous for the individual and even for the public, in the case of terrorism.

France is currently dealing with various immigration issues, as it is becoming more and more difficult to enter or stay legally in the country, and as a result immigrants feel unwelcome. The majority of immigrants in France are from Arabic countries where Islam is frequently part of their identity. Therefore by forbidding them to wear Muslim signs, the government may be seen as rejecting part of their identity. Immigrants feel rejected because they are not French natives and because of religion. Most do not understand the concept of laicité as they are coming from countries with an almost mandatory state religion and they are often in difficulty financially so turn to violence. The riots that took place last year in Paris can, in part be explained by this feeling of rejection. In that case, the will to protect the public order fails in practice.

This law was an answer to a particular problem: the headscarf. It will be wrong to say all the signs were an issue. On the one hand there is the freedom of every Muslim woman to wear a headscarf, but on the other there is the obligation of the state to protect girls forced by their families to wear headscarves. It is a conflict between the private interest of the person and the interest of the public, and this is interfering more with family life than with freedom of religion.

The French courts were asked if this law was against freedom of religion - the Conseil d'Etat held (8th of October 2004, Union Française pour la cohésion sociale), that this limitation was not against the article 9 of the European convention of Human Rights, as it did not infringe the rights of religious expression, because it was done with the objective of protecting the general interest - laicité in public schools. The European Court of Human Rights also had to deal with this issue, in the case Leyla Sahin v. Turquie dated of the 29th of June 2004. The plaintiff was a student in medicine at the University of Istanbul; she was wearing the headscarf until the head of the University took the decision that it was forbidden to wear the headscarf or a beard. The court held that in a democratic society the state could limit the wearing of the Islamic headscarf, if the wearing harms the objective of protecting the rights and liberties of others, the public order and the public safety.

The English and American view of the laicité is very different in the sense that they allow religion to express itself freely and do not interfere. It can be difficult to understand the French view from an English perspective as the English parliament allows as much freedom as possible in order to protect people and public interest. However recently in the UK there has been an instance where someone was fired because they did not want to take off their headscarf, and the debate has been reopened, and even though Tony Blair believes this debate is the quickest way to create conflict, the government will have no option but to deal with it.

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The Tate Modern Expansion

[Photography: Alexander Baker]

Architects HERZON AND DE MEURON are back again to rejuvinate London's South Bank in time for the 2012 Olympics. But what are their plans?

EVER SINCE THE Tate Modern opened in the year 2000 - and in fact earlier, while still in the planning stages of the then Bankside Power Station - we had hoped that we would one day be able to work on the planning of the southern part of the premises as well. It is an opportunity, unique to our entire career, to be able to devote such a long period of time, from 1995 to 2012, to the design of a central and new location in London as one of the most important capital cities in Europe. To complement existing architecture, to renovate it and to reinvent it at different points in our careers is an exceptional challenge.

Tate Modern London has changed since the year 2000. The impact it has had on urban design and on tourism in London has been quite as great as its artistic, architectural influence on the city's everyday cultural and social life. The new development of Tate Modern will add another decisive dimension when the new south entrance, currently blocked by the Switch Station, is opened up. People will be able to cross the Thames, walk through the existing Tate Modern and the Turbine Hall, past the new building, out onto the new plaza at Sumner Street and from there on to Southwark - a neighbourhood that will have an entirely new appearance in the years to come as a result of the substantial construction and investment. In close collaboration with the Tate, we carved a path through the jungle of unusually numerous parameters that must be taken into account. The resulting paths and connecting lines gradually acquired shape, condensing into spaces, both filled and empty. In the end, a kind of masterplan emerged consisting of a triangular plaza that is open toward Sumner Street and bordered to the west by a basically vertical volume and to the east by a more horizontal volume.

We have focused our attention primarily on the volume to the west, which can be accessed from the ramp to the west and from the new plaza to the south. In addition, the clover-shaped oil tank, which we wanted to use as a point of departure for the new building, is buried here. Thanks to the oil tanks, we do not have to place the new body flat on the ground but are able to dig down into the site and develop the building from below. We had taken a similar approach to the Turbine Hall, which we also dug out in order to turn the vast physical dimensions of the existing structure into a tangible reality. The convoluted world of the oil tanks is not simply the physical foundation of the new building, it is also the starting point for intellectual and curatorial approaches, which have changed to meet the needs of a contemporary museum at the beginning of the 21st century. This applies

The more ambivalent, experimental and fragmentary architecture of the new building forms a complementary contrast to the unequivocal, hermetic and monolithic structure of the power station

especially to the diversity of exhibition spaces and facilities open to the public inside and outside the complex. Spaces in a variety of sizes at Tate Modern primarily satisfy the need for classical galleries. In the new building, new forms will be added, some functioning more like caves and not necessarily right-angled in shape, others consisting of spacious shafts that will enlarge the dimensions and enhance the curatorial and artistic potential of the current lofts. Although the organisation and fittings of these exhibition spaces have not yet been fixed, their vertical orientation is clearly recognisable within the building as a whole - in clear contrast to the horizontal orientation of the first phase of Tate Modern. For that phase, we aimed explicitly to use the existing brick structure of the power station to the greatest advantage, treating it with respect and actually emphasising the neo-classical structure. Now we have taken a diametrically opposed stand, satisfying the specifications of the brief by having gigantic blocks protrude out of a basically pyramidal structure. The specified rooms, most of them exhibition spaces, are stacked on top of each other yielding a complex spatial organisation that keeps everything together inside while the appearance of the building from the outside generates the impression of a rough-cast, fragmented form in progress. This means that we will be able to make modifications through to the very end of the design process without affecting the basic character of the building. The more ambivalent, experimental and fragmentary architecture of the new building thus forms a complementary contrast to the unequivocal, hermetic and monolithic structure of the power station. The basic form is a pyramid, a Platonic shape that has become well established in the great public buildings of the world over the centuries. In this case, however, that shape is essentially a consequence of spatial and programmatic needs rather than stylistic intent. The numerous protruding cubes can be interpreted in two ways: as the erosion of the pyramid in its entirety and, in contrast, as a pyramid in the process of emerging.

We also felt it was important for the building to be visible from the north. As one approaches Tate Modern from the other side of the river, it can be seen rising behind and above the power station but without competing with the tower in front. If it were to make a stronger statement, it would dominate the existing building with simpleminded arrogance. On the other hand, concealing it behind the brick volume of the former power station would merely be a display of false modesty. In addition, orientation for visitors would be more difficult if the new part of the Tate were not integrated into the skyline of the city. No, we wanted the combined elements of Tate Modern, old and new, to express a whole, to have them come together and function as a single, though disparate organism. Coming together means above all an easy-to-use and easy-to-find organisation of the paths and connections in this immense complex. Significantly, in the course of our constant dialogue and exchange with the Tate, existing elements like the Turbine Hall and the Level 2 bridge acquired evermore weight with respect to the integration of the new building into the organism as a whole. The Turbine Hall will become even more important as the backbone of the entire complex. Moreover, a bridge will be added on Level 5 and a so-called 'vector', an expansive vertical boulevard, will cut through the entire new building building, passing several decisive topographical locations. Some of these locations are 'anchor spaces' - galleries in the old and new parts of the complex serving as curatorial and architectural centres of gravity that will contribute to sketching an over-all spatial and intellectual landscape.

Swiss architects Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron have been practicing since the 1970s. Their projects are typically large scale, with several football stadiums and art galleries making up significant parts of their portfolio. Herzog and de Meuron's current projects include the Bejing National Stadium for the 2008 Olympic Games. To find out more, please visit http://www.tate.org.uk/modern/

What ho, Jeeves!

STEPHEN FRY explains why P G Wodehouse is his favourite author

HAD HIS ONLY contribution to literature been Lord Emsworth and Blandings Castle, his place in history would have been assured. Had he written of none but Mike and Psmith, he would be cherished today as the best and brightest of our comic authors. If Jeeves and Wooster had been his solitary theme, still he would be hailed as the Master. If he had given us only Ukridge, or nothing but recollections of the Mulliner family, or a pure diet of golfing stories, Doctor Sir Pelham Grenville Wodehouse would nonetheless be considered immortal. That he gave us all those - and more - is our good fortune and a testament to the most industrious, prolific and beneficent author ever to have sat down, scratched his head and banged out a sentence.

Had his only contribution to literature been Lord Emsworth and Blandings Castle, his place in history would have been assured. Had he written of none but Mike and Psmith, he would be cherished today as the best and brightest of our comic authors. If Jeeves and Wooster had been his solitary theme, still he would be hailed as the Master. If he had given us only Ukridge, or nothing but recollections of the Mulliner family, or a pure diet of golfing stories, Doctor Sir Pelham Grenville Wodehouse would nonetheless be considered immortal. That he gave us all those - and more - is our good fortune and a testament to the most industrious, prolific and beneficent author ever to have sat down, scratched his head and banged out a sentence.

If I were to say that the defining characteristic of Wodehouse, the man, was his professionalism, that might make him sound rather dull. We look for eccentricity, sexual weirdness, family trauma and personal demons in our great men. Wodehouse, who knew just what was expected of authors, was used to having to apologise for a childhood that was "as normal as rice-pudding" and a life that consisted of little more than "sitting in front of the typewriter and cursing a bit".

[Illustration: Simon Ward]

The only really controversial episode of that life, namely Wodehouse's broadcasts to friends from Berlin while an internee of the Germans in France and Belgium during the Second World War, is dug up from time to time by mischief-makers and the ignorant. It would not be worth mentioning now if it had not been unearthed yet again recently, together with headlines in the British newspapers linking the name Wodehouse with words such as "Nazi", "Fascist" and "traitor". Anyone who has examined the affair closely will agree with the Foreign Office official who wrote in 1947 that it was unlikely

"... that anyone would seriously deny that "l'Affaire Wodehouse" was very much a storm in a teacup. It is perfectly plain to any unbiased outsider that Mr Wodehouse made the celebrated broadcasts in all innocence and without any evil intent. He is reported to be of an entirely apolitical cast of mind; much of the furore of course was the result of literary jealousies."

For Wodehouse's view on Fascists, one need only consult the descriptions of Sir Roderick Spode in The Code of the Woosters to see how a political innocent may still be capable of scorching satire. Enough of all that. If the episode reveals anything, it is Wodehouse's other-worldliness, a quality that shines through his work and a quality that in our muddied and benighted times ought in fact to be celebrated from the hilltops.

Many have sought to "explain" Wodehouse, to psychoanalyse his world, to place his creations under the microscope of modern literary criticism. Such a project, as an article in Punch observed, is like "taking a spade to a soufflé". His world of sniffily disapproving aunts, stern and gooseberry-eyed butlers, impatient uncles, sporty young girls, natty young men who throw bread rolls in club dining-rooms yet blush and stammer in the presence of the opposite sex - all may be taken as evidence of a man stuck in a permanently pre-pubescent childhood, were it not for the extraordinary, magical and blessed miracle of Wodehouse's prose, a prose that dispels doubt much as sunlight dispels shadows, a prose that renders any criticism, positive or negative, absolutely powerless and, frankly, silly.

When Hugh Laurie and I had the extreme honour and terrifying responsibility of being asked to play Bertie Wooster and Jeeves in a series of television adaptations, we were aware of one huge problem. Wodehouse's three great achievements are plot, character and language, and the greatest of these, by far, is language. If we were reasonably competent, then all of us concerned in the television version could go some way towards conveying a fair sense of the narrative of the stories and revealing, too, a good deal of the nature of their characters. The language, however, lives and breathes in its written, printed form. Let me use an example, taken at random. I flip open a book of stories and happen on Bertie and Jeeves discussing a young man called Cyril Bassington-Bassington.

"I've never heard of him. Have you ever heard of him, Jeeves?"

"I am familiar with the name Bassington-Bassington, sir. There are three branches of the Bassington-Bassington family - the Shropshire Bassington-Bassingtons, the Hampshire Bassington-Bassingtons, and the Kent Bassington-Bassingtons."

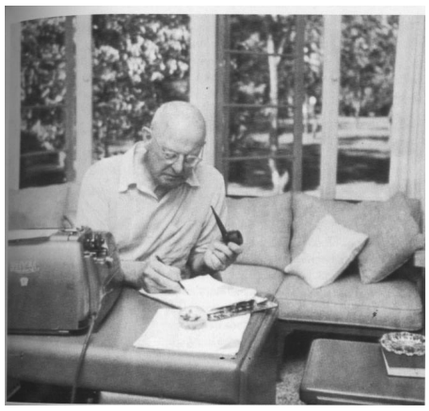
"England seems pretty well stocked up with Bassington-Bassingtons."

"Tolerably so, sir."

"No chance of a sudden shortage, I mean, what?"

Well, try as hard as actors might, such an exchange will always work best on the page. It may still be amusing when delivered as dramatic dialogue, but no actors are as good as the actors we each of us carry in our head. And that is the point, really: one of the gorgeous privileges of reading Wodehouse is that he makes us feel better about ourselves because we derive a sense of personal satisfaction from the laughter mutually created. Every comma, every "sir", every "what?" is something we make work in the act of reading.

"The greatest living writer of prose", "the Master", "the head of my profession", "akin to Shakespeare", "a master of the language"... If you had never read Wodehouse and only knew about the world his books inhabit, you might be forgiven for blinking in bewilderment at the praise that has been lavished on a "mere" comic author by writers such as Compton Mackenzie, Evelyn Waugh, Hilaire Belloc, Bernard Levin and Susan Hill. But once you dive into the soufflé, once you engage with all those miraculous verbal felicities, such adulation begins to make sense.



Example serves better than description. Let me throw up some more random nuggets. Particular to Wodehouse are the transferred epithets: "I lit a rather pleased cigarette", or, "I pronged a moody forkful of eggs and b". Characteristic, too, are the sublimely hyperbolic similes: "Roderick Spode. Big chap with a small moustache and the sort of eye that can open an oyster at sixty paces", or, "The stationmaster's whiskers are of a Victorian bushiness and give the impression of having been grown under glass". Here is an example that certainly vindicates my point about his prose working best on the page. Reading this aloud is not much use:

Without Wodehouse I am not sure that I would be a tenth of what I am today - whatever that may be

"Sir Jasper Finch-Farrowmere?" said Wilfred.

"ffinch-ffarrowmere," corrected the visitor, his sensitive ear detecting the capitals.

Then there is a passage such as this, Lord Emsworth musing on his feckless younger son, Freddie Threepwood.

Unlike the male codfish, which, suddenly finding itself the parent of three million five hundred thousand little codfish, cheerfully resolves to love them all, the British aristocracy is apt to look with a somewhat jaundiced eye on its younger sons.

If you are immune to such writing, you are fit, to use one of Wodehouse's favourite Shakespearean quotations, only for treasons, stratagems and spoils. You don't analyse such sunlit perfection, you just bask in its warmth and splendour. Like Jeeves, Wodehouse stands alone, and analysis is useless.

Chronology, with Wodehouse, is not necessarily reliable or relevant, but it seems sensible to describe his creations in a more or less historical order - an order compromised by his tendency to introduce a character in a short story and only later pick up and, as it were, run with the ball. He started writing at the end of the 19th century and continued until his death, manuscript on lap, on 14 February 1975 at the age of 93.

It can be clearly stated that Wodehouse's first great creation, and for some his finest, was Psmith (the "P" is silent). Said to have been drawn from life (one Rupert D'Oyley Carte, of the Savoy Opera family), Psmith is a startling sophisticate, an expelled old Etonian whose delicately attuned nervous system can be shocked by loud colours, celluloid cuffs and the mere mention of an inadequately pressed trouser crease. He has adopted his own brand of "practical socialism" and retains to the end the habit of referring to everyone as "Comrade". Much as Jeeves was to extricate Bertie time and time again from the soup, so Psmith is the eternal saviour of stolid, dependable Mike Jackson - the Doctor Watson to Psmith's Sherlock Holmes.

There is in fact a little thread of autobiography in the second Psmith novel, Psmith in the City. Mike, whose only real ambition is to play cricket, at which he excels to the point of genius, is denied by family ill fortune his chance of going to Cambridge University and is forced instead to earn his crust at the New Asiatic Bank. The young Wodehouse, too, was obliged to work for some years at the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank in the City, until the time came when he realised that he was earning more from his writing than from his weekly stipend.

The second Wodehouse immortal to come along at this time (pre-First World War) was Stanley Featherstonehaugh Ukridge (pronounced Stanley Fanshawe Ewkridge). Ukridge keeps his pince-nez together by means of ginger-beer wire, wears pyjamas under a mackintosh, calls his friends "old horse", uses exclamations such as "Upon my Sam" and is

eternally in search of funds. The master of the scam, he forever embroils his chief biographer, Corky, in a series of terrible money-making schemes. It is not yet the age of cocktails and nightclubs and sporty two-seaters. But Ukridge is, for all that, deeply loveable; his amorality and blithe disregard of others do not irritate. Imperishable optimism and a great spaciousness of outlook inform the spirit of these stories. He is capable, when occasion demands, of splendid speech:

"Alf Todd," said Ukridge, soaring to an impressive burst of imagery, "has about as much chance as a one-armed blind man in a dark room trying to shove a pound of melted butter into a wild cat's left ear with a red-hot needle."

Wodehouse never lost his affection for Ukridge and continued writing about him until 1966, always setting the stories back in a pre-Wooster epoch.

In 1915 Wodehouse published Something Fresh, the first of the Blandings novels. I think he knew what he was doing when he chose that title, for with the creation of Blandings Castle, he hit upon something original, something different. He was beginning his stride into mid-season form.

Wherever lovers of Wodehouse cluster together, they fall into debate about whether it is the Jeeves stories or the Blandings stories that take the trophy as Wodehouse's greatest achievements. The group will, of course, dispel, muttering embarrassedly, for they know that such questions are as pointless as wondering whether God did a better job with the Alps or the Rockies. The question is bound to be asked, however, because each time you read another Blandings story, the sublime nature of that world is such as to make you gasp.

The cast of resident characters here is greater than that of the Wooster canon. There is Lord Emsworth himself, the amiable and dreamy peer, whose first love - pumpkins - is soon supplanted by the truest and greatest love of his life, the Empress of Blandings, that peerless Black Berkshire sow, thrice winner of the silver medal for the fattest pig in Shropshire; Emsworth's sister, Connie, who, when sorely tried, which was often, would retire upstairs to bathe her temples in eau-de-Cologne; the Efficient Baxter, Emsworth's secretary and a hound from hell; Emsworth's brother, Galahad, the last of the Pelicans (that breed of silk-hatted men about town who lived high and were forever getting thrown out of the Criterion bar in theEighties and Nineties); the younger son, Freddie, the bane of his father's life... The cast list goes on and is frequently supplemented by young men we will have met elsewhere, Ronnie Fish, Pongo Twistleton and even Psmith himself.

Blandings comes, in the Wodehouse canon, to stand for the absolute ideal in country houses. Its serenity and beauty are enough to calm the most turbulent breast. It is an entire world unto itself and, one senses, Wodehouse pours into it his deepest feelings for England. Once you have drunk from its healing spring, you will return again and again. Blandings is like that: it enters a man's soul.

The young men I mention as visiting Blandings are all members of Wodehouse's great fictional institution the Drones Club, in Dover Street, off Piccadilly. There are dozens of individual stories about members of the Drones, and two principal collections, Eggs Beans and Crumpets and Young Men in Spats. The title of the first derives from the Drones' habit of referring to each other as "old egg", "old bean", "my dear old crumpet" and so on. The Drones Club is a refuge for the idle young man about town. Such beings are for the most part entirely dependent on allowances from fat uncles. Indeed the name Drones is a reference to the drone bee, which toils not, neither does it spin, unlike its industrious cousin, the worker. An archetypal member would be Freddie Widgeon, intensely amiable, not very bright up top and always falling in love. The only Drone who is distinctly unlikeable is Oofy Prosser, the richest and meanest member. He sports pimples, Lobb shoes and the tightest wallet in London.

Wodehouse was used to having to apologise for a childhood that was "as normal as rice-pudding"

The second-richest member of the club is the most likeable. He is Bertram Wilberforce Wooster, descendant of the Sieur de Wooster who did his bit in the Crusades, and young Bertram retains the strict code of honour handed down from his ancestor, the code of the preux chevalier, the gentil parfit knight. Bertie Wooster is, of course, the employer of Jeeves, the supreme gentleman's personal gentleman.

Jeeves made his first appearance in 1917 in the short story "Extricating Young Gussie". Wodehouse liked to mock himself for not seeing straight away that he had hit a rich seam with Jeeves, but in fact it was only two years later that he wrote four more stories. From then on he gave the world Jeeves and Wooster right up until his last complete novel, Aunts Aren't Gentlemen (1974). Much has been written about Jeeves. His imperturbability, his omniscience, his unruffled insight, his orotund speech, his infallible way with a quotation... in short, his perfection. It would be a pity, however, to overlook the character of Bertie Wooster, who is himself a great deal more than the silly ass or chinless wonder that people often imagine. That he is loyal, kind, chivalrous, resolute and magnificently sweet-natured is apparent. But is he stupid? Jeeves is overheard describing him once as "mentally negligible". Perhaps that isn't quite fair. While not intelligent within the meaning of the act, Bertie is desperate to learn, keen to assimilate the wisdom of his incomparable teacher. He may only half-know the quotations and allusions with which he peppers his speech, but proximity to the great brain has made him aware of the possibilities of exerting the cerebellum.

Wodehouse's genius in the Jeeves and Wooster canon lies in his complete realisation of Bertie as first-person narrator. Almost all the other stories depend upon standard, impersonal narration. The particular joy of a Jeeves story comes from the delicious feeling one derives from being completely in Bertie's hands. His apparently confused way of expressing him- self both reveals character and manages, somehow, to develop narrative with extraordinary economy and life. Since the Jeeves stories often lead one from the other, he will often need to repeat himself, which he manages to do with great ingenuity. He is called upon more than once, for example, to remind the reader about the dread daughter of Sir Roderick Glossop. The first example shows Bertie's way with Victorian poetry:

"I once got engaged to his daughter Honoria, a ghastly dynamic exhibit who read Nietzsche and had a laugh like waves breaking on a stern and rockbound coast."

Another description of precisely the same characteristics in Honoria give us a very Woosteresque mixture of simile:

"Honoria... is one of those robust, dynamic girls with the muscles of a welter-weight and a laugh like a squadron of cavalry charging on a tin bridge."

Sometimes Bertie's speech moves towards a form of comic imagery so perfect that one could honestly call it poetic:

"As a rule, you see, I'm not lugged into Family Rows. On the occasions when Aunt is calling to Aunt like mastodons bellowing across primeval swamps... the clan has a tendency to ignore me."

The masterly episode where Gussie Fink-Nottle presents the prizes at Market Snodsbury grammar school is frequently included in collections of great comic literature and has often been described as the single funniest piece of sustained writing in the language. I would urge you, however, to head straight for a library or bookshop and get hold of the complete novel Right Ho, Jeeves, where you will encounter it fully in context and find that it leaps even more magnificently to life.

I think I should end on a personal note. I have written it before and am not ashamed to write it again. Without Wodehouse I am not sure that I would be a tenth of what I am today - whatever that may be. In my teenage years, his writings awoke me to the possibilities of language. His rhythms, tropes, tricks and mannerisms are deep within me. But more than that, he taught me something about good nature. It is enough to be benign, to be gentle, to be funny, to be kind.

He mocked himself sometimes because he knew that a great proportion of his readers came from prisons and hospitals. At the risk of being sententious, isn't it true that we are all of us, for a great part of our lives, sick or imprisoned, all of us in need of this remarkable healing spirit, this balm for hurt minds?

Steven Fry has, among many other things, played Jeeves in the television adaptations of Wodehouse's works.

In praise of

As a novelist, I learned about eighty percent of what I know about plot from Hergé's Tintin books. Maybe ninety. How to set up a narrative trajectory; how to mirror this in sub-plots; how to split, double, misdirect, introduce snares that send the reader the wrong way – all the sleights of hand that one associates with Nabokov or Borges can be found in copious supply throughout the Belgian author's cartoons. And it's not just plot: characters such as Captain Haddock and Bianca Castafiore rival any dreamt up by Balzac or Dickens for sheer strength and depth of personality. A huge symbolic register runs through the books, a register that, turning around signs like water, fire and the sun, is worthy of a Faulkner or a Bronte. Played out against a backdrop of wars, revolutions and recessions, of technological progress imbued with an almost sacred aspect operating side-by-side with old gods who refuse to die, they bring a whole era into focus as sharply as the work of Pynchon or George Eliot. Moliere-style social comedy, Dumas-style adventure, Conradian boxed narratives – Tintin has them all. It even has Beckettian non-event-scapes. My advice to any would-be writers reading this is: study The Castafiore Emerald, and study it carefully.

writes dramatic monologues. It's not just that the cultural gesture's tedious: it's also simply bad logic. Zidane may move his feet with just as much craft and artistry as Nureyev, but that doesn't mean he's a ballet dancer, any more than it means Nureyev's a footballer. What's so groundbreaking about the work of Hergé is that he helped an emerging medium 'take up,' as the journalist Numa Sadoul put it when pondering his work, 'an original and autonomous ground between drawing and writing.' Words and images jostle with one another. Signs become material, more and more self-consciously so, until by the final book, the unfinished Tintin and Alph-Art, the characters hold up and scrutinise giant sculpted letters. Speech-bubbles spill from people's mouths but remain silent. The logic of cinema is deployed, with still frames following one another in rapid progression. And all of this in a mode that's neither properly speaking that of art, writing nor cinema.

Perhaps the most unlikely medium whose presence makes itself felt throughout the Tintin books is radio. Forget journalism: Tintin never files a single story. What he actually does is send and receive radio messages. That's his job on the boat in Land of Black Gold and in

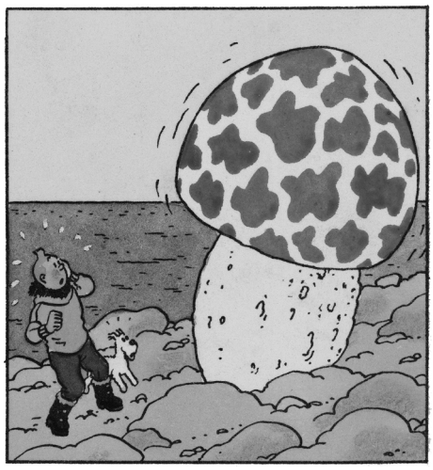
Like really good literature, Tintin keeps moving, keeps one step ahead of all interpretation

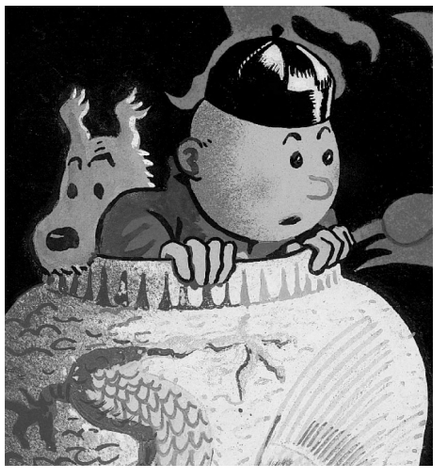
Am I saying Tintin is great literature? Not necessarily. There's nothing more banal than cultural theorists claiming that Eminem should be canonised alongside Browning as he also

the rocket of Explorers on the Moon. Some of Hergé's most striking images are not of characters or actions but of radio masts, wires casting signals and antennae picking them up.

In both Cigars of the Pharaoh and The Red Sea Sharks Tintin floats on the ocean while radio transmissions billow and swirl around him. In The Blue Lotus he tracks a radio transmitter to its source. In this respect he resembles the eponymous hero of Jean Cocteau's 1950 film Orphée, who sweeps through the spectrum as he manically fiddles with the dial. 'WHEET… CRACK… CRR… dernières nouvelles d'Europe… CRR… ÄA?… ÄA?… HNET!… HNET!… CRR… The European news service…' crackles Oliveira da Figueira's radio as Tintin tunes it in Land of Black Gold. 'BEEP-BEEP-BEEP… 724… 326… Listen: the bird sings with its fingers… Two times… BEEP-BEEP…' crackles Cocteau's. When asked why he is listening to it, Orphée, who could as well be speaking for his contemporary Tintin, responds: 'I'm tracking the unknown.'

But despite Hergé's fascination with cinema (he styled his earliest cartoons as 'great comic films') and radio, despite his desire to be taken seriously as a 'proper' artist (he even visited Warhol and asked him if he considered Tintin to be pop art, only for Warhol to smile back at him in silence), and despite his relative indifference towards high-brow literature (he grew up reading populist books, although late in life he read Proust, Balzac and even Roland Barthes), it's with literature that the Tintin books, to my mind, have the most affinity. In strict literary terms, Hergé's sensibility is utterly classical. Like Aeschylus or Sophocles he takes as his central theme the house: the noble, royal, ancestral house, domain of Kings, Pharaohs, Incas or European haute bourgeoisie. These houses are threatened with decline and usurpation, prey to infiltration by intruders, be these drug-runners who store their opium in the pyramid (as in





Tintin

Should Herge's Tintin be considered great literature? TOM McCARTHY investigates

Cigars of the Pharaoh) or press photographers who snap unauthorised photos of the château's residents (as in The Castafiore Emerald). Hergé's favourite plot device, which he reuses countless times, is the host-guest relationship gone wrong. This one is Shakespeare's favourite as well. Look at MacDuff screaming 'horror, horror, horror!' when he finds King Duncan murdered by his host in Macbeth, then flip to the sequence in Tintin au Congo in which the Babaoro'm sorcerer 'finds' the tribe's sacred fetish with its head staved in among their guest Tintin's luggage and cries 'Horror and sacrilege!' Look at the arguments which follow King Lear's arrival as a guest in Regan's castle with his over-staffed retinue (Do you need so many servants? she keeps asking him; Do you even need one?); then open The Castafiore Emerald to the page where the diva, arriving uninvited with her entourage at Marlinspike Hall, explains that 'we didn't have to ring' – to which Haddock replies: '"We"? There cant be more than one of you!' There is.

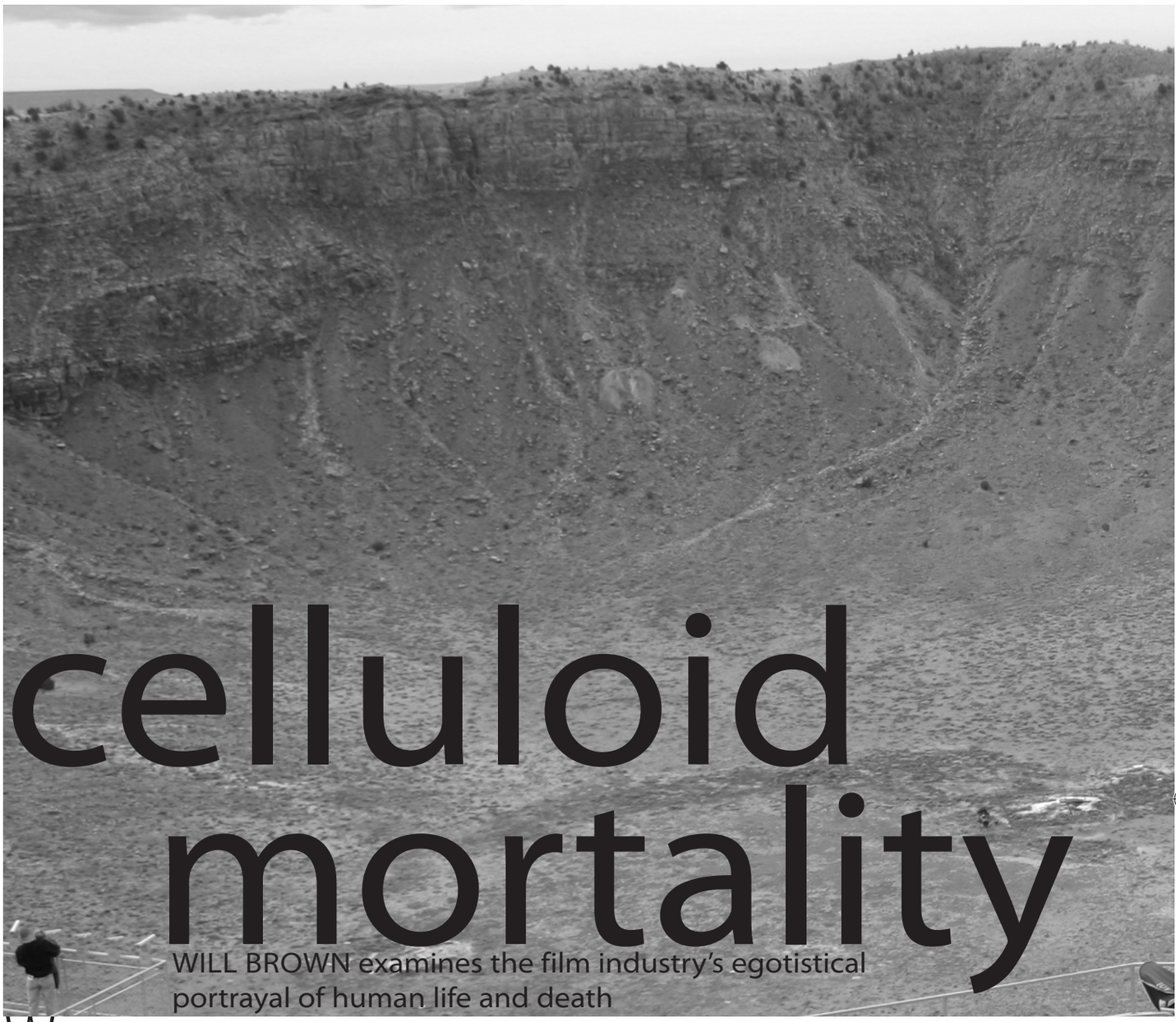
Hergé – or, to give him his real name, Georges Remi – had personal reasons to be interested in this theme. His paternal grandmother, Marie Dewigne, worked as a maid in a château not unlike Marlinspike: that of the Comtesse Errembault de Dudzeele at Chaumont-Gistoux. In 1882 Marie was impregnated by a visitor to the château and gave birth, out of wedlock, to twins, Hergé's uncle and father. A complex set of cover-ups ensued: the château's gardener, Philippe Remi, was made to stand in as the children's father, and the Comtesse, perhaps in deference to the boys' birth-father, raised them as young aristocrats – only to unceremoniously turf them out at the age of fourteen. They eked out their adult lives in much-reduced circumstances, but bequeathed to their own children the secret knowledge of a high ascendancy – indeed, the very highest – strongly implying that their real father was none other than the Comtesse's most illustrious guest, the King.

Whether he was in fact the King, another aristocrat or simply a passing tradesman will never be known, and doesn't really matter. What is interesting is the way this secret family story permeates the Tintin books, lending itself to a whole landscape of half-buried secrets, an archaeology of crypts and tombs, a maze of coded puzzles. The critic Serge Tisseron has pointed out that behind the gift from Louis XIV to his 'beloved' Sir Francis Haddock (Captain Haddock's ancestor) of Marlinspike (a history uncovered in The Secret of the Unicorn) most probably lies the seventeenth-century convention for the monarch to give property to his illegitimate offspring in lieu of recognition – a suspicion that's confirmed when a dolphin-and-crown blazon, unambiguous symbol of royal filiation, appears above the château's front door in the following book, The Seven Crystal Balls. Louis XIV was known as the Sun King: in the cryptic parchments which Sir Francis leaves his descendents he writes of ships sailing like children 'in the noonday Sunne' and light issuing forth from light, simultaneously spelling out and re-encoding Louis's solar, paternal presence. No sooner have they bought the ancestral hall back than Tintin and Haddock set off Westwards to South America, break into the royal tomb of the sun and are presented (in Prisoners of the Sun) to the 'Sovereign Star' itself – which, once again, turns away and eclipses itself at the vital moment. The pattern will repeat again and again, pulsing through the books like a secret cipher.

Yet what makes Hergé's work so rich in literary terms is not that it simply contains secrets which we can discover – rather, that its secrets are transferred onto new contexts, which in turn generate new secrets, whole new landscapes of half-burial. Each time Bianca Castafiore arrives on the scene, she sings the Jewel Song from Gounod's Faust, in which the lowly Margarita, like Marie, is impregnated and abandoned by the (ig)noble hero. When Professor Calculus, who can't hear her sing (he's deaf), compliments her in The Castafiore Emerald on the bold colour of the paintings for which he believes she's famous, she tells him: 'You make me blush' – in the original French, Vous me faites rougir, 'You make me become red.' Calculus retreats to his garden and sets about creating a new, white variety of rose which he will call 'Bianca'. Via her name, he whitens her, turns Margarita from a deflowered woman into a chaste rose. In his zone of near-silence, he injects language into a flower – only for it to bloom back, through the cross-pollination of information that occurs when two journalists visit his garden and misinterpret the horticultural account he gives them, into a spurious news report of an impending wedding between Castafiore and Haddock, whom they understand to have met at the Chelsea flower show in which Calculus's new rose has its origins.

The overcodings here are fantastically dynamic – and yet what, ultimately, is it about? Cryptic autobiography? A meditation on the nature of the media? Or on the mediation of nature? Mannerist comedy? Farce? All of the above, and more: like really good literature, it keeps moving, keeps one step ahead of all interpretation. The best writing should do this. And so should the best readings.

Tom McCarthy's new book* Tintin and the Secret of Literature *is published by Granta Books. His novel* Remainder *is published by Alma Books.



celluloid mortality

WILL BROWN examines the film industry's egotistical portrayal of human life and death

WHAT A VAIN piece of work film is. The world might yet end with a bang rather than a whimper, but mankind will almost certainly expire with the latter. The recent tsunami that took the lives of hundreds of thousands of humans in Asia was one of the most appalling natural disasters in recent memory. The following is not written in any way to belittle this cataclysm, but merely to reflect the vanity of man and his belief in his own greatness.

Apocalyptic films followed shortly after cinema's inception, for its first century was also the century of the Great War, the Holocaust, Dresden and Nagasaki. Film's infancy and young adulthood was accompanied by mass destruction; it seems natural that films should therefore depict mass destruction. I find it distressing that the moniker 'World War II' is a tacit admission that such events are normal and inevitable for humans, as if WWII were simply the next in a line of World Wars; I am also baffled that people do not openly find the Nagasaki bombing equally or more distressing than the Hiroshima bombing – as if it were too much effort to mention them both.

In addition to man's self-immolation, film has also often depicted man at the mercy of external phenomena: natural disasters, disease, asteroids and alien invaders – the latter being an imaginative result of understanding our own insignificance in an infinite universe; I wonder sometimes whether the universe is in fact much smaller than people imagine.

It stands to reason that some of these disasters would be magnificent. For example, an alien life form capable of reaching Earth would have to be technologically more advanced than us and therefore mightier than us – otherwise we would have reached them first. Similarly, planets are 'destroyed' – in the sense that they no longer exist as previously they had been every day (however long a day is in this poor planet's particular solar system). It could be even worse: we could end up in a gamma-ray burst, a documented cosmic explosion so violent that it emits the energy of 100 million billion Suns. It may be that the current Manhattan Project team is looking into harnessing such power, but one thing is certain: I'd like to see that on film.

But whilst these possibilities are at the very least conceivable, if not wholly feasible, man does love to exaggerate his own mortality. Unless, as I secretly believe, sci-fi films about alien invasions are made to condition us into accepting the forthcoming advance of the little green men, (we have not discovered any alien life forms as yet, except the ones we are holding prisoner in Nevada – their being captured proving that they are not that great).

Nor has an asteroid come along to destroy the Earth recently. One might contend that a meteorite impact caused the demise of the dinosaur and that it could equally cause mankind – or should it be man cruel? – to come to a sticky end. Yes, it is possible. But the last impact (assuming it happened) did not end the world; the world is still here and our existence is proof of the matter.

An interesting delusion: we humans love to believe that the end of us is the end of the

[Photography Kevin Zimm]

Image: The crater formed by the Canyon Diablo meteorite, which impacted 20,000-40,000 years ago

It is hard to get our heads around it, but quite simply it does not take much for us to die

world – that somehow we are the world, an equation that goes against our usual stance that we (humans) are in permanent conflict with the world (nature). The meteorite collision, should it ever happen (and I suppose inevitably it must occur if we have a long-sighted enough viewpoint), does not presuppose the end of mankind and certainly not the end of life or of the world. But whilst this vaguely depressing prospect is perhaps an inevitability, this is not my point.

My point is that whilst a meteorite could certainly in theory wipe us all out, the chances are that we will have already offed ourselves in a much more banal manner, the collective recipients of a species-wide 'Darwin Award'.

In a film like Outbreak, we see a terrible disease vaguely similar to Ebola wiping out most of a city. Similarly,28 Days Later… sees a load of tree-huggers cause many people's deaths by liberating 'Rage'-infected monkeys. In both films, the 'end of the world' is averted by quarantines. This is all well and good, but to defeat a mega-disease in a fiction film is a revelation of man's vanity when we cannot (or, to evoke the conspiracies again, will not) find a cure for the common cold and influenza, the latter of which possesses strains that are decimating human populations as you read.

Of course, in The Day After Tomorrow an enormous tsunami brings New York to its knees (and the rapid onset of a new ice age wipes out the rest of the Northern Hemisphere). This recalls the mega-tsunami at the end of Deep Impact, or indeed the one that aliens control at the end of the director's cut of The Abyss.

In our minds, it would take a wave the size of the Statue of Liberty (the symbolism is wonderfully ironic) to destroy man. In reality, it takes a tsunami that is significantly smaller to terminate hundreds of thousands of people.

I have overheard people watching footage of the Asian tsunami express their disappointment at its size and implore the dying humans onscreen just to swim to safety. It is hard to get our heads around it, but quite simply it does not take much for us to die – as every person who falls from a ladder or drowns in a bath should, but somehow fails, to remind us.

In the case of December's tsunami, the number of the dead impresses us, not the manner of death itself. Perhaps we also over hystericise the Holocaust in this sense: in the popular imagination, Pure Evil walked the paths of Auschwitz and Belsen. Pure Evil did walk there, but Pure Evil looks and talks like us and is quite a boring bloke to boot. Vainly we expect that only a diabolical monster, a mega-disaster or a super-disease will kill us; in reality it takes normal but misguided people, water and a cold. Our bodies are not as able as our minds think.

To cower for fear of dying at all moments is pointless: what kind of life would that be? To feel for the victims of and to seek not to repeat natural or human-induced disasters is, of course, right. But let us also remember that, real though the movies look, life is ultimately very different from film.

Will Brown is studying for a D.Phil in Cinemtography at Magdalen College, Oxford

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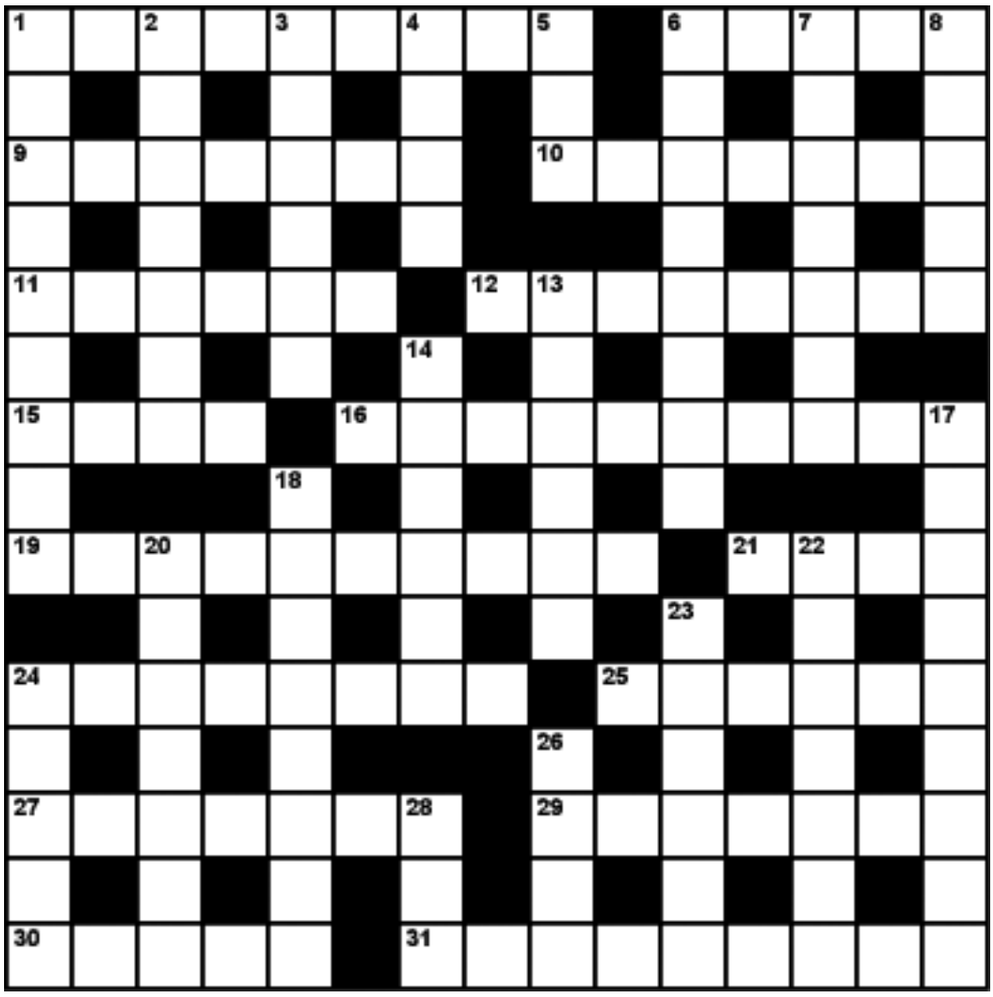
CROSSWORD



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ACROSS

1 Consuming ground I've made (9)
6 Reptile company supporter (5)
9 Official officer? (7)
10 Top dog awake in 'Morse' alternative (7)
11 Extra sleep (more than once), that's in fifty-second surroundings (3-3)
12 About employment journalist made anew (8)
15 Test weapon up at Maidenhead (4)
16 Variation if French queen's in retreat with church (10)
19 Application of science for cogent holy development (10)
21 Competent sailor left England... (4)
24 ...to nearly make hay with wife for years inside weapon (8)
25 Unusual exit? (3,3)
27 Sorted pure God out (7)
29 Doorman for a ball? (7)
30 Fabric returning river with time (5)
31 What could happen to one planet, perhaps (9)

DOWN

1 Softening of French animal books caught inside (9)
2 Type of word, in French a plant (7)
3 Release a French worker (6)
4 Not doing anything, I led astray (4)
5 Fuel for a tennis player without a second identity at first (3)
6 100-up, reportedly tired of storage space (8)
7 Succession of pots in burglary (5-2)
8 Refrain from a five-nil ideal start with bad end (5)
13 Image of fruit in eastern heartless fairy (6)
14 Edge up and down cushion (6)
17 Strange celery - almost a lot of voting? (9)
18 Good from weapons happened without writer and without form (8)
20 Come out of cannabis dessert (7)
22 British inch or new tubes (7)
23 South African bird, reportedly god! (6)
24 Starts to take innocent Germans - how terribly mean! (5)
26 Assist a stake (4)
28 Princess and Prince go down (3)

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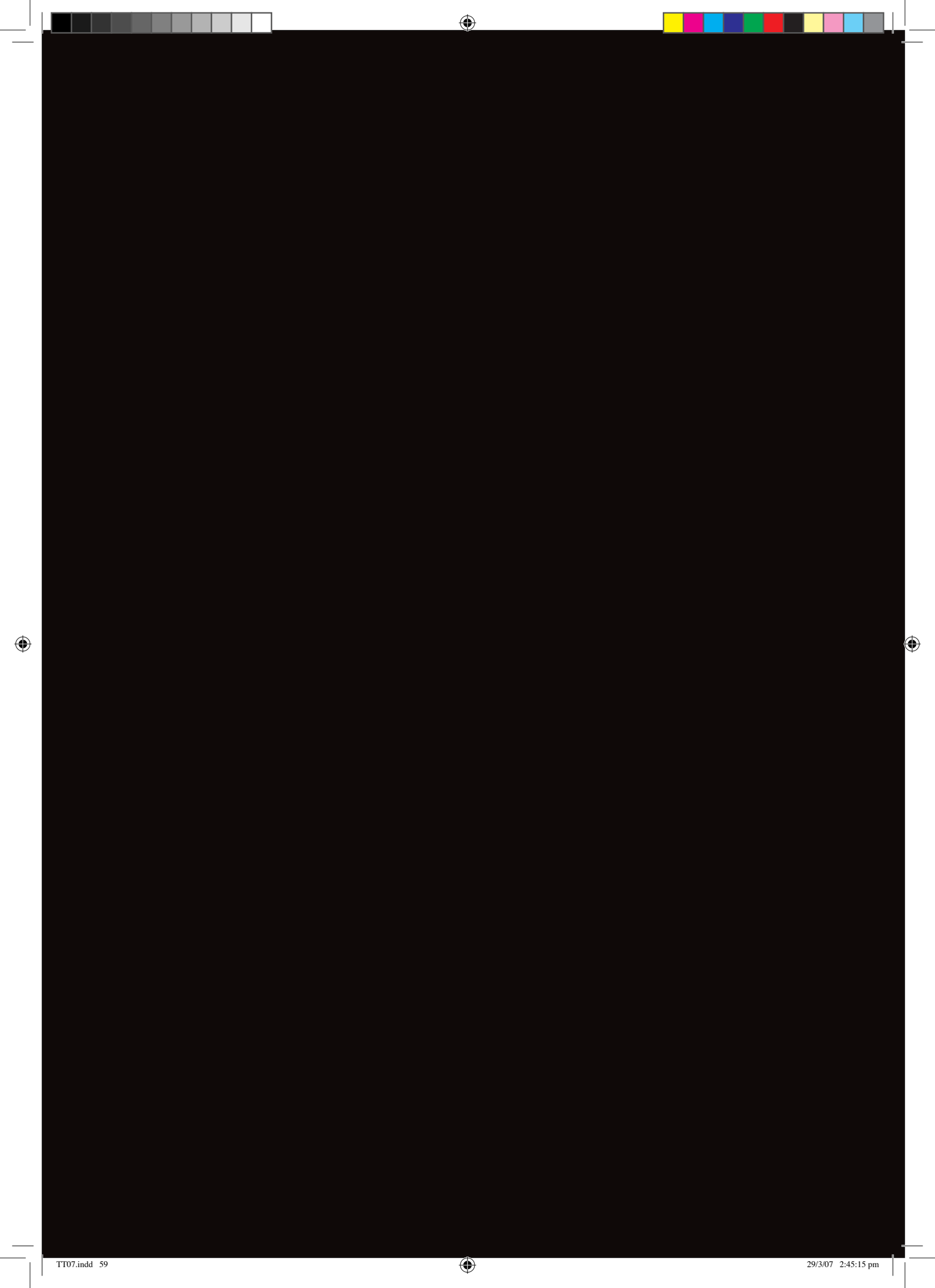

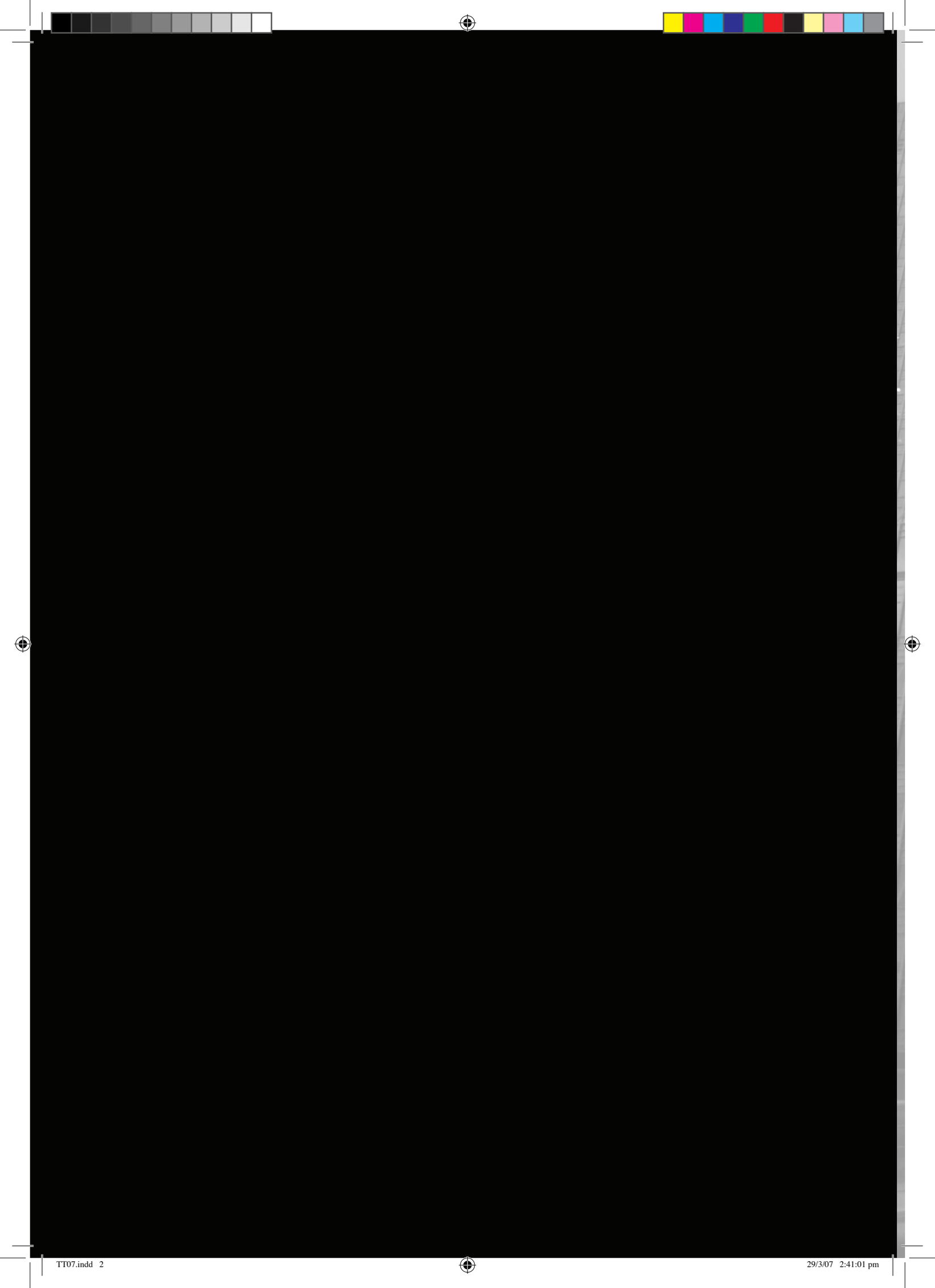

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