



**FOOD CONFLICT HOMELESSNESS
DEVOLUTION MEDIA CULTURE**

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Editorial Business

James Ball

Orel Byrne

Leo Gough

Sharif Ismail

Sara Langfield

Francesca Rivers

Linden Webster

Design

Matthew Hastley

Cover

"airportour"

OUSU Business Team

Thanks to

Oxford Big Issue

Shelter

Contact

Editorial: editor@theoxfordforum.com

Subs: subscriptions@theoxfordforum.com

Business: business@ousu.org

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Editorial

By anybody's reckoning, we've come a long way since the days of the British Empire - some might even say in the direction of progress. It's tempting, when analysing current affairs, to act as the grumpy muppet in the theatre balcony, moaning and grizzling away with relish. Equally, it seems all too easy to put the world to rights after a glass or two of the house white. We don't particularly wish to fall into either of these traps. Yet venture we shall, to suggest that perhaps things aren't so very different now than they were half a century ago, in many ways.

That fateful day five years ago, when the twin towers were demolished by terrorism, has been hallmarked as the day nations that stand for freedom and independence found common purpose. A supposedly clear path lay ahead: free countries united in a fight for peace - all, apparently, so simple! This was presented to us, the people, as though we were equally simple. Yet, as Britain sinks its supposedly-forgotten Empire hooks in the direction of the Middle East, in the name of liberation, a modern, opinionated Britain reaps the benefits of advanced international media coupled with our very own 'political freedom' to loudly voice its disagreement with (or, of course, approval of) the proceedings. As Iraq still reeks from the fervent 'freedom fighting' initiated by its Big Brothers in the West, questions abound regarding how, when - if - they will finish what they started.

The recent Gulf War has been judged an inappropriate one, both in terms of the reasons for its instigation, and the manner of its implementation. The political gameplay has resulted in many extremely angry and disillusioned citizens - both home and away. And yet, despite all of the attention and interest the conflict has generated, we are left with a nagging feeling that the true casualties of the whole affair have in fact crept by virtually unnoticed: that some of the gravest repercussions have yet to be acknowledged, let alone addressed.

And as all eyes point to the East, and closely follow each development in the political shake-down there, we are perhaps failing to notice the adjustments being made in the set up of our little islands. Short of the Great Empire of a few centuries ago, the comparatively puny United Kingdom of today could be breaking up even further. With an exhilarating international performance to occupy our attention, it might be easy for these domestic matters to pass us by. In fact, it is often the case that the problems closest to home have the least 'appeal', both in terms of discussion, and attempts at reparation.

Perhaps it's the pinot grigio effect: distant situations and causes are more attractive by virtue of the fact you can, indeed, lay out a detailed explanation of how it might easily be remedied, whilst sipping your beverage in an Oxford pub - safe in the knowledge that you won't walk out

of the door and be faced with such a situation on your way home - and be forced to admit with shame that things may not be quite as simple as you might have insisted they were over last orders. It might seem easier to ignore the problems on our very doorstep, rather than admit to the possibility that they could, or should, be addressed. Or that there is a problem at all.

And so, while we immediately see the parallels and contrasts between the conflicts of fifty years ago, we may miss surprising similarities closer to home. The vagrancy laws exposed so tellingly by a 'down and out' Orwell half a century ago have, in the eyes of some, come full circle. Similarly Orwellian privacy fears are recalled through our obsession with detailing our lives online. Astonishingly, in an era of such apparently rapid change and development, the real story seems to be continuity.

But, perhaps we have gained a more honest ability - and improved means - to critically assess ourselves. If so, this would represent no small achievement. And so, in some small way, let the scrutiny begin herein.

James Ball
Francesca Rivers
Editors, The Oxford Forum
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response

defending the indefensible

PROFESSOR DAVID PATON responds to last issue's article on abortion

food

(un)fair trade

JAMES BALL on why he believes fairtrade does more harm than good

bring your own bananas

THE FAIRTRADE FOUNDATION rebut James Ball's criticisms of their approach

the organic delusion

ALEX AVERY unleashes a damning critique of the organic movement

the cost of food

CHRIS FOSTER explores the environmental impact of food production

organic intolerance

JONATHAN JONES offers a forthright defence of GM agriculture

superfood or supersize?

FRANCIS AIZLEWOOD unmaskes the extremes of modern food culture

conflict

reap what you sow

SIR IVOR ROBERTS assesses Britain's role in the Iraq conflict

re-making Iraq

FOULATH HADID figures out 'New Realism' for America in Iraq

mental combat

SHARIF ISMAIL campaigns for more support for war veterans

at what cost?

SCOTT HORTON questions whether war is ever worthwhile

focus

homeless

THE FORUM'S full colour investigation into homelessness in Oxfordshire

6-7

8-9

10-11

12-13

14-15

16-17

18-19

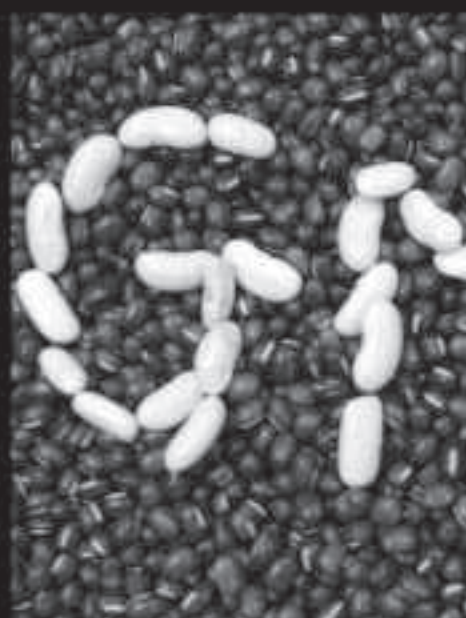
20-21

22-23

24-25

26

27-34





35-37

38-39

40-41

42-43

44-45

46-47

48-49

50-51

52-53

54-55

55

56-57

devolution

act of disunion

THE SNP set out their manifesto for Scottish independence

at what price freedom?

WILLIAM HYNES evaluates whether Scotland can afford independence

an english voice

PROFESSOR JOHN CURTICE answers the West Lothian question

devolutionary strife

ORLA BYRNE on an end to Northern Ireland's troubled past

media

guarding the blogosphere

EMILY BELL talks about journalism in the new media world

news values

STEVE HERRMANN discusses the challenges of editing BBC News Online

life 2.0

ZOE FLOOD tells us about her hyper-connected second life

culture

do dreaming spires inspire..?

RICHARD GRIFFITHS rubbishes the notion of a 'career' in theatre

jackboots on whitehall

ED McHENRY introduces his first film, its unusual production and its all-star cast

stars in your eyes

LEO GOUGH looks at whether film school is really worthwhile

pan's labyrinth

ELENA MANRIQUE on producing the BAFTA winning cult classic

in his own words

SIR PETER STOTHARD speaks on literature, progress and Dan Brown

defending the indefensible



PROFESSOR DAVID PATON responds to Dr Ellie Lee's article defending late abortions. Dr Lee argued in the last issue of the *Forum* that calls for a lower legal time limit on abortions ignored possible practical and emotional effects, and that technological advances improving the life chances of premature babies have been overstated

LAST MONTH'S ARTICLE by Dr Ellie Lee defending the legal status of late abortions was revealing for all sorts of reasons, but perhaps most of all for the unwitting illustration of how the pro-abortion establishment has become increasingly stuck in an out-dated mindset that has left them quite out of touch with both medical science and public opinion.

Dr Lee correctly notes the fact that the voices being raised against abortion come not only from the traditional pro-life movement but increasingly from doctors and journalists who have hitherto been active pro-abortion campaigners. She might have added that the strongest voices now being raised in protest are those of women who have been through abortion themselves.

The presence of all these new voices in the abortion debate seems to have taken many pro-abortion campaigners by surprise. Most of Dr Lee's article was spent trying to persuade us that these people are simply wrong. It seems to me that pro-abortion campaigners might more usefully reflect on why this turnaround in the abortion debate has happened in the first place.

I believe that the roots of the change come from three sources: (i) advances in foetal medicine that highlight philosophical contradictions in the abortion debate; (ii)

advances in our scientific knowledge of the impact of abortion on women's mental health; (iii) an insistence of the pro-abortion campaign that they must resist even those modest restrictions on abortion that have large popular support. I will discuss these points in turn.

(i) *Advances in foetal medicine*

As Dr Lee notes, many people, including some who are otherwise in favour of legal abortion, have been deeply affected both by the new 4-D ultrasound scan images of the foetus in the womb as well as by recent reports of foetuses showing signs of life after undergoing a late abortion. Some medical personnel have been particularly upset and not unnaturally have become increasingly unwilling to participate in abortions.

In her article, Dr Lee just dismisses such people as being emotional and irrational. Her solution to the problem of aborted babies being born alive, articulated without any apparent sense of irony, is that doctors should become more efficient at making sure the unborn baby is killed before delivery "by the injection into the fetal heart of potassium chloride". The logic may be perfect: if people are uncomfortable with foetuses being born alive, let's just make certain they are born dead! However, it demonstrates a complete lack of awareness of why people feel so emotional about this. When an aborted baby is

delivered alive, the reality of what is happening is brought home in a visual and dramatic way: this is not just a lump of cells or a piece of tissue but an individual human being with its own heart and brain. The aborted baby struggling for life emphasises to medics the contradiction that they are expected to try to save the lives of babies the same age as foetuses that are being killed by abortion.

The emotional response is, of course, just the start of the process. We then have to face the deeper philosophical question. It is difficult, if not impossible, to come up with a satisfactory ethical rule that justifies burning an abortion at, say, twenty-three weeks, but not one at seventeen weeks.

One solution is to agree with most pro-abortion groups who argue that abortion should be a legal right up to the moment of birth. Indeed this is what the current UK law allows in the case of babies thought to have a disability. However, this is itself problematic. Why should a baby born prematurely at, say, thirty-six weeks of pregnancy be protected by law, when a baby at the same gestation can still be killed by abortion? Some philosophers recognise this inconsistency and justify the killing of disabled babies for some time after birth. For example, in his book *Practical Ethics*, Professor Peter Singer argues in favour of infanticide on the grounds



that "birth does not mark a morally significant dividing line. I cannot see how one could defend the view that fetuses may be 'replaced' [sic] before birth, but newborn infants may not be."

Faced with the realisation that it is an ethical contradiction to justify abortion whilst opposing infanticide, it is unsurprising that those whose moral conscience is first awakened by an emotional response to late abortion tend eventually to move in the direction of opposing abortion at any stage. There are many other examples in which images and real events cause an emotional response that serves a useful purpose. We know that poverty and famine are terrible things, but sometimes it takes a film of babies starving to death to spur us into action. The emotional response caused by such images is in no way irrational but a necessary reaction that helps us to face up to and act upon the truth. Put simply, it is part of what makes us human.

The truth of the humanity of the unborn and damage that abortion can do to women is becoming harder to deny

(ii) Impact of abortion on women's mental health

The past five years have seen the publication of a steady flow of papers in top scientific journals providing solid, unequivocal evidence on the adverse consequences that abortion has on some women. This work has been published by scientists such as David Reardon, Priscilla Coleman and David Fergusson who have wide ranging opinions on abortion. For example, Dr Fergusson describes himself as a "pro-choicer" yet his research published last year in the *Journal of Child Psychiatry and Psychology* found that over forty-two per cent of women

The pro-abortion establishment has become increasingly stuck in an out-dated mindset

having an abortion suffered depression, nearly double the rate of those who had never been pregnant and thirty-five per cent higher than those who had chosen to continue a pregnancy. Even taking into account a range of other possible factors, such as previous mental health, he found that abortion had a significant adverse impact on the psychological health of many women.

In the past, pro-abortionists have tended to dismiss women who claim to have suffered from their abortion experience as being an insignificant minority or the shooges of the pro-life movement. The weight of scientific evidence is such that these assertions are no longer credible. As a consequence, women who have had abortions have become more confident in questioning whether legalised abortion really does promote women's rights.

In the same week that Dr Lee's article was published, such women were publicly testifying to their experience of abortion on high streets across England under the banner 'Silent No More'. As one woman speaking in Nottingham last weekend explained, "for forty years our voices have not been heard in the abortion debate, but they are silent no more. Women deserve better than the death of their child as a solution to an unplanned pregnancy, and until they are no longer encouraged, through abortion, to suffer the physical and psychological consequences, we will speak the truth: abortion hurts women."

(iii) Resistance to modest abortion restrictions

The third factor that is helping to shift the terms of the debate has been the rigid insistence

past ten years, state and federal laws have been proposed that would outlaw this procedure and, unsurprisingly, these laws have attracted massive public backing from Republicans and Democrats including many who generally support legal abortion.

The initial response of the pro-abortion movement was to argue against a ban on the grounds that the procedure was used in only a handful of "acute" cases. When investigative journalists exposed this as entirely false, the movement shifted to arguing that partial birth abortion should not be banned because alternative procedures for performing late abortions were likely to be even more painful for the foetus. As with Dr Lee's suggestion regarding babies who are born alive after abortions, there is a certain internal logic to this argument. However, in the eyes of the general public, it merely serves to emphasise how out of touch the pro-abortion movement is with the experience and concerns of everyday people. Indeed, just last month the US Supreme Court finally came down in favour of a federal ban on the partial birth abortion procedure.

Misguided attempts by pro-abortionists to oppose bans on late abortions or on the partial-birth abortion procedure have perhaps done more than anything to propel people in the direction of a pro-life point of view. When pro-abortion groups vocally defend the indefensible of late term abortions, people start to question whether there is any ethical limit to the pro-abortion position at all.

In contrast, for years the pro-life movement has been quietly backing up its efforts to attain legal protection for the unborn by providing alternatives for women in difficult pregnancies and offering care for those who have had abortions. Of course this work is ignored by most of the media who unfailingly paint an inaccurate and biased picture of those who are against abortion. In the end, however, the mix of compassion and practical help for women together with an ethically consistent argument against abortion that is based on human rights is very compelling for open-minded people.

The abortion debate in the UK appears to be at a critical point. Whilst pro-abortion groups continue to defend the indefensible, the truth of the humanity of the unborn and damage that abortion can do to women becomes harder and harder to deny.

Professor David Paton is chair of industrial economics at Nottingham University and has researched widely on the economics of teenage pregnancy, abortion and sexual health.

If you'd like to respond to anything in this issue of The Oxford Forum, please email editor@theoxfordforum.com



(un)fairtrade

JAMES BALL explains why Fairtrade harms the people it purports to support

I don't like buying Fairtrade food: it's a matter of conscience. This isn't because I don't care about the plight of third world farmers. It's because I do. I also care about third world mechanics, housewives, children and factory workers – all of

whom, I'm going to argue, are losing out because of Fairtrade. Not just Fairtrade, of course, but as the movement is becoming ever more pervasive (\$1.1 billion worth of worldwide sales last year), ignoring it is no longer an option. So I'm going to

try to persuade you to boycott Fairtrade too. The Fairtrade movement has been immensely successful. Having grown and developed as a social movement since the 1960s, the international Fairtrade mark as

we know it now was born in 2002. Since then, its growth has been huge – sales have grown tenfold in the UK between 1998 and 2005. There are over two thousand Fairtrade certified products (from clothing to wine) on sale in the UK, and cafes are proudly boasting that they sell only Fairtrade coffee and tea. I hope you will soon share my chagrin at this fact.

Fairtrade, as I'm sure you know, guarantees a minimum price, above the market level, to farmers. Given that coffee, by far the most common fairly-traded commodity, has such a low market price (it can be as little as 50 cents per kilo), this seems like it can only be a good idea. But many economists will tell you different. The problem is coffee grows almost everywhere. Huge swathes of the earth's surface can grow the stuff, including many of the planet's poorer countries. This means that as and when the price of coffee increases, and coffee farming looks attractive compared to other jobs (if coffee farming is more profitable than cocoa farming, I may switch crops), more people can and will grow coffee. This makes the price drop again, as we're faced with potentially massive over-supply. Coffee farmers won't be rich until almost everyone else is.

Furthermore, let's imagine you're a car mechanic in Guatemala, earning \$100 per week. You trained as a mechanic because the \$100 wage was much better than the \$60 you'd make as a farmer. What happens if I had come along and offered you \$120 to farm? You might well never have re-trained. But in the first case you were earning your own living in a useful trade. Now you are supported by my charity, being over-paid for work worth only \$60 to the market – and no-one gets their car fixed. A movement like Fairtrade keeps the third world reliant on western goodwill.

'I've done my bit to help the third world – haven't you seen the contents of my kitchen cupboards? What more do you want?'

It's not even a particularly good way to give: profiteering quite certainly occurs on the way. Fairtrade products are significantly marked up over their "unfair" counterparts. Indeed, it's often the case that less than 10% of markup actually gets back to the producers; if I pay a 10p premium, only 1p of that gets to the farmer. I feel like I'm helping much more than I am.

There are more sound economic arguments about why Fairtrade is undesirable. It's possible that as Fairtrade products become more common, it could actually cause the price of non-Fairtrade equivalents to drop, helping some in the third world at the expense of others, which would be a truly tragic situation. But there is a lot of scepticism around these issues, and it is seen by many campaigners as an ideologically-driven right-

wing attack on the movement.

So instead I will come to my real gripe with Fairtrade. It's just not enough. Even if you believe Fairtrade is benefiting farmers and their families, it is making their previously intolerable lives only fractionally better. Good, committed activists, who once would clamour for political and economic change, instead promote Fairtrade products that mean pennies a week for the beneficiaries. This is a tragic waste of activism, drive and effort, and it is costing the third world dear.

I cannot help but feel Fairtrade is far more effective at salving our consciences than it is at solving problems

Real change does not come about through what we buy; it comes through what we do. Could any of history's real struggles have been won through consumerism? Would we have freed the slaves by buying wristbands? Could the civil rights movement been won by buying "black friendly" products? Would we have lifted apartheid if boycotts hadn't been matched by heroic worldwide direct action? I'm sure I'm not the only one who has my doubts.

There are real, potentially painful but eminently possible lines of action we can and should take to try to lift the shameful conditions in which too many of the world's population lives. Investment in infrastructure, education and basic healthcare is sorely needed. The immense corruption which afflicts too many countries must, somehow, be

simple, seductive and we can understand how it "works". Reforming agricultural subsidies is complex and painful – I don't deny that it would result in many UK and EU farmers going out of business. But why are we willing to give more charity to them than we ever would to the starving? When blurberry announce they are closing a factory we do not volunteer to subsidise their output. So why subsidise a farmer?

The real solutions to these global issues are complex, and have consequences that will

affect us in the west. Ultimately, we could all benefit from appropriate reforms and actions, but it would be folly to suggest these actions could be simple or painless. And this is ultimately why I so vehemently detest Fairtrade. I cannot help but feel it is far more effective at salving our consciences when it comes to the problems of the world than it is at solving them. "I've done my bit to help the third world – haven't you seen the contents of my kitchen cupboards? What more do you want?"

This is an unfair charge to level at the real activists who push Fairtrade. I've met, and argued with, many of them. They are passionate and committed to finding solutions for third world poverty. However, this focus on Fairtrade misplaces their efforts, and diverts their attention away from pushing for real change. I am not naive about such reforms: they would not be simple to achieve, but they are far from impossible. This is far from such pipe dreams as nuclear disarmament, or a Liberal Democrat general election win. But as long as the little attention most of us are willing to give to the third world is focussed on Fairtrade, real change is impossible.

That, such as it is, is the reason for my objection to the Fairtrade movement. It has nothing to do with free market fundamentalism, or a lack of sympathy for its motives: doing the wrong thing for the right reasons is still doing the wrong thing. As I am now forced to buy the wretched products when I go to my favourite café, I have resorted to other means of protest. And so I urge you: next time you're at the coffee aisle and your hand hovers over the Fairtrade coffee, step to the right a little and grab the Nescafé – if you can bear the taste, that is. Then sign up to Oxfam, research the issue a little, and write to your MP. You'll not only help save the world – you'll save yourself a few pence, too.

James Ball is a final-year undergraduate reading Philosophy, Politics and Economics at Trinity College, Oxford. He is co-editor of issue six of the Oxford Forum

tackled. Agricultural subsidies must be dealt with: it is unforgivable that, for example, we subsidise European cows to the sum of \$2 per cow every day. This is not only a horrendous waste of money, but it allows European farmers to undercut their international rivals. We keep our farmers in business at the expense of their third world competitors. And the biggest beneficiaries of these subsidies are not who you may think – Sugar exporting firm Tate&Lyle is the biggest UK recipient, though some farmers make over £1 million each year through subsidy payments. Are they really more deserving of your money than a third world farmer – for that matter, are they more deserving of your money than you?

Agricultural subsidies, though, lack the charm and simplicity of Fairtrade. Saving the world by paying more for your shopping is



bring your own bananas

THE FAIRTRADE FOUNDATION mount a spirited defence of their approach

THESE DAYS, INVITATIONS to debate the question of 'free trade versus fair trade' are made regularly to the Fairtrade Foundation. Rebutting the old and tired arguments from economists whose rigid and dogmatic approach to free markets demands a 'one size fits all' model for trade and development is not difficult but it's becoming somewhat tiresome.

The Fairtrade movement believes that countries can trade with each other in a spirit of partnership and co-operation and not just compete for their own advantage. Fairtrade is a collaboration between prosperous nations with established modern economies and those countries emerging from underdevelopment, with continuing high levels of poverty. It demonstrates how groups based on shared values and principles can command as much respect in wider international forums as those based on economic or political power. And finally, it deserves more credit than it is often given for evolving and adapting to changing times and needs without compromising its values and principles.

Through our work with coffee farmers, we recognise that while the scale and pace of modern globalisation is unprecedented, the trend itself has been with us for a long time. From its origins in the Horn of Africa over a thousand years ago, coffee was inextricably linked to the rise of mercantile capitalism through the coffee houses of London and other trading centres. Lloyds and the London Stock Exchange both have their origins in seventeenth-century coffee houses. Coffee production was adopted by the Dutch in the East Indies, by the Spanish in Central America and, more recently, by the British in India and East Africa.

In fact, the history of one of the earliest truly global commodities is also entwined with the era of colonialism and its after-effects; not least in the dependence of producing countries on the value of the raw materials compared with the value of the manufacturing and marketing processes that are usually retained in the richer consuming countries. Producers and traders in commodities such as tea, cocoa and bananas from countries like Uganda,

Ghana or into the countries of the Windward Islands will recognise this scenario very well.

Fairtrade is fundamentally a response to such continuing poverty, and the injustice of a system in which the odds are stacked against the people that have the least. We acknowledge that increased trade flows are a crucial driver of economic development, but we also witness that more trade does not by itself mean better trade in terms of the fight against poverty. In fact it's been estimated that over eighty per cent of increased trade flows in the last two decades have benefited the richest twenty per cent of the world's population, while the bottom twenty per cent has received only one per cent of the benefits.

This disconnect between increases in the wealth of nations and the extent of poverty within nations is something that the advocates of unadorned free trade have failed to grasp. In his book *The World is Flat*, Thomas Friedman, one of globalisation's most ardent cheerleaders, extols the fact that India is no longer a primarily agrarian economy but is now one of the world's major information technology hubs and



delusion

ALEX AVERY exposes the truth about organic food

SOME PEOPLE SAY that I'm "anti-organic" because I openly question the claims made by organic proponents. I wrote an entire book exploring their claims of cornucopia, ecotopia, and superior healthfulness. But being a skeptical non-believer in the organic religion is quite different than being a "hater". I have no axe to grind with people who want to farm a specific way, nor with consumers who choose to buy such foods. Kosher, Halal, organic – I'm truly of the "live and let live" philosophy.

But the organic food movement doesn't share this same spirit. They are not content with merely selling high-priced fare to the well-heeled and well-fed. Organic is as much political movement as agronomic, and one that is increasingly intolerant and obstructionist.

The maneuvering on biotech crops is an excellent example. After successfully redefining plant pollen into a "pollutant" in the minds of many, organic activists have demanded zero tolerance of biotech pollen in their crops. Soil Association policy director Peter Melchett told

the Daily Telegraph last year, "our position is no GM in Soil Association certified organic, which in practice means the lowest level of GM that can be reliably and consistently detected, which is 0.1 per cent."

Not only does this lead to an Alice-in-Wonderland scenario where corn "contaminates" corn, but it's an impossibly strict standard that would make GM crops unviable – which is, I believe, exactly the intent. The natural world is awash in plant sperm, that is, pollen. Even growers of seed crops, who produce seeds that other farmers plant, cannot guarantee more than 95 to 98 per cent genetic purity, let alone 0.1 per cent.

Moreover, organic political wrangling does more than just enmesh agricultural innovation in bureaucratic quagmires such as the Farm Scale Evaluations, where effective weed control in biotech crop fields was cynically spun as "harm to the environment". In 2002, organic activists helped convince the president of Zambia to reject thousands of tons of emergency food aid

corn from the US based on unsupported claims that it was "toxic", leading to the starvation of possibly thousands in the south of the country. An estimated 40,000 die in India each year from vitamin A deficiency that fortified biotech Golden Rice could put an end to for pennies.

And the stakes in this debate are high. Over the next half century we'll need to figure out how to feed three billion more people the high quality diet their incomes will allow. China's population of 1.3 billion doubled its total meat consumption over the past decade as personal incomes rose. We already plant crops and graze animals on nearly forty per cent of the world's land area. If we don't continue innovating and raising farm productivity, more land will be taken from nature.

The truth about organic food and farming is that it is an ideological straitjacket that would hamstring humanity in meeting this fundamental twenty-first century challenge.

The Achilles heel of organicism is also what started the movement: synthetic nitrogen fertilizer. As the world's population grew in the

seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the lack of nitrogen fertilizer became a significant limiting factor in food production. Starting in the early 1800s, humanity began using nitrogen-rich bird droppings (guano) found in thick deposits on remote oceanic islands as fertilizer. After nearly 75 years of exploitation, we had exhausted the guano deposits and were left with mineral nitrate deposits in Chile's remote Atacama desert. But Chilean nitrate contaminated soil with plant-killing salts and the search was on for a sustainable method to make nitrogen fertilizer.

That search ended in 1909 when Fritz Haber and Carl Bosch invented a process to compress atmospheric air (which is 78 per cent di-nitrogen) under heat and pressure to make ammonia (NH₃) and nitrate (NO₃) for fertilizer. Both were eventually awarded separate Nobel prizes for their invention and it is today considered one of the most important technological advances in mankind.

Globally, we now use nearly 100 million tons of synthetic nitrogen fertilizer each year, or the equivalent manure of six billion cattle. This is five times more than the current global cattle population. Without this synthetic nitrogen, far more land would need to be farmed to grow nitrogen-fixing legume crops and animal forage.

As the dust from World War I settled and most farmers began using synthetic nitrogen for the first time, romantic thinkers such as German mystic Rudolf Steiner led a backlash, claiming that food produced with "artificial manures" produced nutritionally inferior food. As Steiner stated in one lecture in 1925, if one used only synthetic nitrogen, "your children, more particularly your grandchildren, will have very pale faces". The anti-synthetic fertilizer movement gained momentum through the 1930s, leading to America's Jerome Rodale coining the term "organic" with the launch of the *Organic Farming and Gardening* magazine in 1942.

By 1946, the organic debate had progressed far enough that the editors of the prestigious British medical journal *The Lancet* lamented the "somewhat emotional reaction against modern agricultural methods, particularly against the use of artificial fertilizers, which are supposed to ruin the land and the crops grown on it", and editorialized that "many of the statements made in preaching this new gospel are unacceptable both to the scientist and to the practical farmer".

So has the "organic debate" progressed in the sixty years since that editorial? On the nutrition question, there have been a sizeable number of studies over the past fifty years that have found no evidence for organic food being more nutritious. The Soil Association was actually founded to definitively answer *The Lancet* and other scientific critics by proving organic food's nutritional superiority. In 1977 after more than thirty years of on-farm research, Soil Association founder Lady Balfour admitted at an international organic farming conference that their research "revealed no consistent or significant differences". The Soil Association hardly acknowledges such research was conducted, let alone divulges the disappointing results.

A 1997 review of more than 150 past studies also found no consistent or significant nutritional benefits in organic food in any category. A 2002 study commissioned by Canadian TV and the *Globe and Mail* newspaper found no nutritional

differences in 133 comparisons of organic and conventional fruits and vegetables.

The industry-funded Organic Center for Education and Promotion (OCEP) in the US highlights evidence indicating organic produce may have higher levels of antioxidants, polyphenolic compounds and other plant "secondary metabolites" - which may (or may not) provide protection against cancer and other age-related diseases. Hence the hype over finding more vitamin C in organic kiwi earlier this year. Yet when I phoned the researcher, he called the differences "pretty insignificant" and said they weren't unexpected given the significantly greater amount of fertilizer applied to the organic kiwis. That was done in an effort to get organic kiwi yields on par with conventional. It didn't work, as the organic kiwi yielded twenty per cent less despite the additional fertilizer.

Proponents of organicism are not content with merely selling high-priced fare to the well-heeled and well-fed

Last autumn, the Soil Association submitted research to the British Food Standards Agency showing roughly sixty per cent higher omega-3 levels in milk from "organic" grass-fed cows versus "conventional" milk and asked to be allowed to market organic milk as "healthier". The FSA concluded that the difference was of "limited health benefit" because "organic milk consumed in volumes consistent with a healthy diet, would not provide sufficient amounts of long-chain omega-3 fatty acids to provide significant health benefits, over and above those associated with conventional milk". The FSA recommended eating oily fish such as salmon, which are 100 times richer in long-chain omega-3s.

What about pesticides? Even organic farmers use pesticides and some, such as copper sulfate, present far more environmental risk than most synthetic pesticides. The newest pesticides, such as spinosad obtained from a natural soil bacteria, are widely used by both conventional and organic farmers. Few of the botanical/natural pesticides used by organic farmers have residue tests available - so consumers falsely believe these pesticides don't leave behind residues.

Nevertheless, the evidence is clear that organic fruits and vegetables have fewer residues of synthetic pesticides. According to the most comprehensive analysis, which compared residue data from 194 samples of organic produce with more than 26,000 non-organic samples, conventional fruits and vegetables have about six times more pesticide traces than organic. This may seem like a large difference, but most pesticides are found at only parts per billion levels (or one second in 32 years). The typical residue is 1/10,000th of a non-toxic daily lifetime dose in the most sensitive animal studied. While five pence may be 500% more than a penny, neither will make you rich.

What about food safety? Again, there is no evidence that organic methods offer any

advantages. Organic chickens and poultry have been repeatedly found to harbor two to three times more illness-causing bacteria than battery-raised birds because they take longer to grow to market weight and are exposed longer to bacteria from wild birds and the environment.

Numerous studies have found more generic *E. coli* on produce, universally considered a red flag indicating possible pathogenic bacteria risk. Research conducted at the University of Minnesota found organic produce was three to six times more contaminated with *E. coli* in 2001, but no significant differences in 2003 and 2004.

Perhaps more interesting was the group's finding that "organic samples from farms that used manure or compost aged less than twelve months had a prevalence of *E. coli* nineteen times greater than that of farms that used older materials". This may mean that manure

composting methods need to be more stringent, but it is clear that using animal manure as a primary fertilizer on crops eaten raw by consumers (such as salad greens and vegetables) carries inherent risks that simply don't exist when using synthetic nitrogen fertilizer.

Research is also progressing on organic farming's agronomic performance. Last year the pro-organic Rodale Institute reported that 22 years of field study showed organic corn-soy-wheat rotation using green-manure cover crops gets equal yields to conventional corn and soy yields. But the wheat yields are low, dragging the organic system's total grain yield down to only 75 per cent of the conventional rotation using synthetic fertilizer. More importantly, researchers at the US Department of Agriculture using the same rotation as the Rodale experiment (and conducted within 150 miles of the Rodale farms) recently reported that even with cover crops, the organic system suffers five times more soil erosion than the most modern conventional no-till system. The no-till system uses herbicides to kill weeds rather than tillage and plowing, making it by far the most sustainable cropping system yet devised - and totally unacceptable to the organic zealots.

The organic debate will no doubt continue, as it has for the last seventy years. And with non-organic farming technology evolving and improving at an even more rapid pace, let us hope that this debate leads all farmers - and their consumers - toward a more productive, sustainable, and healthy future.

Alex Avery is Director of Research at the Hudson Institute's Center for Global Food Issues and author of the new book, The Truth About Organic Foods. His website can be found at www.TheTruthAboutOrganicFoods.org.

Conventional farming involves the spraying of pesticide, which is harmful to biodiversity...



the cost of food

FOR A FEW YEARS now, it seems that addressing the environmental impacts of food production and consumption has been about two things - promoting organic agriculture and "local" food. The shift to organic has sought to mitigate visible changes to the landscape (including flora and fauna within it) resulting from recent developments in farming practice, as well as seeking to respond to alleged pollution problems caused by chemical-intensive farming. Local food sourcing has been linked to reducing the environmental burdens associated with food transport.

Research reports released in the last couple of years have reminded us, however, that food and drink production and consumption is a significant contributor to the environmental impact of European lifestyles across a much wider front. Thus the food and drink sector accounts for around twenty-five per cent of all greenhouse gas emissions in the EU and around sixty per cent of excess nutrient outputs to the water environment, while worldwide livestock production uses thirty per cent of the Earth's land area and over eight per cent of human water use.

Perhaps we shouldn't be surprised at the relative importance of food production and consumption in the load each of us places on the environment - after all, at some time in the past food production and consumption presumably accounted for almost one hundred per cent of our environmental impact, and food production is a direct, widespread intervention in the "environment" by mankind. But in an environmentally-constrained world in which meat and milk production are forecast to double by 2050 to meet demand from new consumers, there is a pressing need to find ways of reducing the environmental burden of a western European-style food production and consumption system.

To tie down the sources of the environmental

impacts mentioned above (for example to check whether fertiliser production or the digestive process in cows is the principal source of greenhouse gases associated with meat products) we need to unpick the systems that connect production of agricultural and aquacultural inputs to food and drink products on our plates. Environmental life cycle analyses (LCA) of single product systems are one framework for doing that. Like all modelling techniques that analyse industrial systems that are both interlinked and continually evolving, LCA is imperfect, and LCAs have not been completed for a full range of food products. But when we bring this research together with other knowledge about food chains, some themes emerge that take us beyond the pat formula of 'organic + local = sustainable' - even if we confine ourselves to the environmental side of the sustainability debate.

dramatically different for organically and non-organically produced versions of the same product (the difference is commonly around ten per cent, but not consistently in favour of organic or non-organic). The scale of these impacts is driven by the fundamentals of carbon and nitrogen cycles, animals' reproductive patterns and their digestive processes, which aren't so different between organic and non-organic systems. Conversion to organic certainly doesn't address the fundamental "inefficiencies" involved in the use of animals as a means of producing protein for human consumption.

It's less intuitive to see how "local" food can have higher transport-related impacts on the environment than food sourced from the other side of the world. The key is to realise that what's important is not the distance that individual products travel to individual consumers, but the total amount of fuel used to shift

Conversion to organic certainly doesn't address the fundamental 'inefficiencies' involved in the use of animals

Consider organic production first. On the one hand, it's clear that organic agriculture improves biodiversity and conserves landscape diversity. On the other hand, yields are generally found to be lower from organic farms, so more land (often around twice the area per tonne as on non-organic farms) is needed to produce the same amount of food. Greenhouse gas emissions and excess nutrient outputs (per unit of production) are not

an entire diet from a set of producers to a population of consumers. Because small vehicles (cars and vans) use so much fuel per unit of goods moved, raising the dependence of a food distribution system on these costs more, in environmental terms, than increasing distances travelled by food in bulk in large ships or fully-loaded articulated trucks. Increasing the amount of driving that consumers do, in total, to collect their food is particularly deleterious in this

...but Organic farming necessitates more "slash and burn" agriculture.



CHRIS FOSTER explores the environmental impacts of food production and consumption

respect – so if we all add a car trip to the farmers' market for a couple of kilos of local beef on to a weekly run to the supermarket, we've probably more than undone any emissions benefit associated with the absence of bulk long-distance transport further back in the beef supply chain.

But the focus on transport in the "local vs. global" food debate ignores the possibility that some places have an ecological comparative advantage over others. While they have sometimes been squandered (consider the productive capacity – in cod terms – of Newfoundland's Grand Banks), such advantages surely underlie the early development of global food trade – sugar from the Caribbean, cod from Canada and so on. Exploiting them might offset (either directly or indirectly) the burdens of extra transport. In the case of tomatoes, the trade-off can be expressed simply: either import sunshine from southern Europe, expending some fossil fuel, or use fossil fuel in northern Europe to provide the warmth and light that tomatoes need to grow and ripen. Unfortunately, there's again no simple answer to the question of which option is better; tomato yields per cultivated area vary for different varieties and the size of a greenhouse, in area terms, largely determines fuel demand, so the balance might be different for different types of tomato. Some northern European producers also have the opportunity to use low-grade heat and reject CO₂ from industrial processes, cutting their need for direct fossil fuel inputs.

The case of tomatoes highlights another complication: water. Places that are richer in sunshine tend to be poorer in water resources. So at the same time as we import sunshine from (say) southern Spain in tomatoes, we import water too. Given that restricted water resources are becoming a significant issue in the Mediterranean region, it could be argued that the environmentally perverse practice of transferring water from there to the UK in the

form of fresh produce merits as much attention as the fuel used to effect the transfer, if not more.

Moving on from this complexity at the production end of the food chain, we might ask where trends in food processing and consumption are leading. For example, do the resource efficiencies offered by large-scale industrial processing reduce impacts overall, or are these economies undone by the introduction of extra processing steps, more transport and additional freeze-thaw cycles?

For now, we don't have sufficient evidence to answer these questions. It's clear that drying and freezing introduce significant additional burdens into food systems, but they provide important functionality – year-round availability of peas, for example. It's clear too that how people manage and prepare food can considerably affect overall environmental burdens. Cooking can account for half of total energy inputs to the entire production-consumption cycle of staple foods such as potatoes and pasta, so changing cooking methods, or even improving appliances can make a difference.

Wasting food probably has even more significant consequences; one litre of milk delivered to the supermarket has over 1kg CO₂ equivalent "embedded" in it, from its production, processing and distribution. If it's thrown down the sink, all of that – and all of the impacts under other environmental themes – will have arisen without delivering any function to the consumer. The proportion of milk that's wasted in this way is unknown, but recent research suggests that thirty per cent of all solid food purchased by individual consumers in the UK is discarded, and that around half of this amount is edible. Improving food utilisation by final consumers is one way in which all of the environmental burdens of the food chain can be reduced, without trade-offs.

One conclusion that emerges from all of this is

that single-issue action plans, whether they're based on "organic", "local" or "low-carbon" won't take us to an environmentally-sustainable food production and consumption system. Indeed, too much effort on single issues might bring unintended consequences – the prospects of North Sea cod stocks won't be improved if, as a result of the current fascination with carbon labelling, it turns out that they are "lower-carbon" than their more abundant, better-managed cousins further afield.

Then again, application of the classic eco-efficiency agenda to food systems might bring improvement across several fronts, but it's unlikely either to deliver enough improvement to allow the low-cost growth in meat and milk production to occur within the resource base available, or to bring about a food system that would be considered "sustainable" in the widest sense. Just as agriculture provides more functions to modern society than simply producing food, so food products provide more than just simple nutritional functionality to individuals and the quest for sustainable food systems must recognise this.

So the path towards a sustainable food system in the context of a global market economy is not at all clear. Finding it will surely involve change at least as radical as that which has taken place over the last fifty years in food production-consumption systems in the UK and other western countries. Some of the cows now regarded as sacred by many will surely need to be slain on the way. Taking balanced decisions to guide the process of change will be a huge political and managerial challenge.

Chris Foster is a part-time Research Fellow at Manchester Business School and director of EuGeos Limited, an environmental consultancy he founded in 2000. He studied Chemistry at New College, Oxford.



organic intolerance

JONATHAN JONES provides a stout defence of GM agriculture

THERE'S A BIT of flap on. A major multinational chemical company (BASF) is threatening to reduce pesticide applications by trialling blight resistant potatoes. This is deeply confusing for the organic movement, perhaps explaining why they dug up a Yorkshire farmer's bean field in an attempt to stop the trial.

BASF's resistant potatoes were developed using two blight resistance genes from wild potatoes, cloned by researchers in Holland,

and then put back into potatoes using GM methods. The genes could have been introduced by breeding, but it would have taken an extra ten years, and would have resulted in a variety with many differences from the potato varieties preferred by the market.

Blight is a very serious threat to potato production, so creating resistant varieties quicker is better. To control blight, farmers must spray potatoes at least ten times per year with

fungicides, with all the associated CO₂ emissions and soil compaction from tractor passage over fields. Organic potato producers struggle to control late blight using copper-based sprays, but are adamantly opposed to GM methods that will reduce the need for copper or other fungicide applications.

Why? How did we arrive at this impasse? The trials are now on hold because 'organic' beekeepers profess concern that they will lose

their organic status if a GM spud is within six miles of their bees. But it is absurd for beekeepers to be able to create a six-mile GM exclusion zone around their hives, when blight-resistant potatoes with the same resistance genes could have been developed by breeding without any such objections. Potato varieties do not reproduce by seed, did not originate in Europe and are killed by frost. A safer GM plant is hard to envisage. The opponents of GM technology are recklessly misleading the public by ignoring some obvious truths.

First, agriculture, even organic agriculture, is not "natural" any more than it is "natural" to talk to someone miles away on a mobile phone. For most readers in London, a natural state would be to read this in a dense swampy oak forest and they would not appreciate the "natural" state for long. Converting wild areas for agriculture is about the most damaging thing humans can do: we should maximise agricultural productivity in order to minimise the extent to which such conversion is required.

Breeds of domestic animals and plants are all unnatural. Consider the extraordinary diversity of dogs, all bred by humans from wolves, which breed is the most natural? It is absurd to suggest that GM represents a quantum shift in unnaturalness. How can it be more unnatural to put two blight resistance genes into a potato than it is to move potatoes from South America to Europe in the first place?

Second, farmers have to solve practical problems. What is the least bad way to control weeds in their crops? Or insects, or diseases? Very few of those who lecture farmers on how to solve these problems without modern methods have any experience of doing so themselves. It is absurd to propose that we hand weed millions of hectares. Ploughing damages and promotes release of CO₂ from the soil (and from tractors).

If you're going to use herbicides, what is the least bad herbicide? It turns out that for cheapness, low mammalian toxicity, lack of persistence and lack of tendency to contaminate groundwater, glyphosate (Roundup) is hard to beat. The trouble is, it kills the crops. Solution? GM Roundup-Ready crops. Those who think this is a bad way to control weeds have yet to propose a better alternative.

The Greens'...posturing ensures that small companies can't compete with big companies

Third, with decreased affordability of oil, the competition between food and bio-fuels will intensify. A ton of grains requires a thousand tons of water; is it any wonder that China, which is experiencing water shortages, is importing grain? We cannot afford to waste land and water by growing organic wheat with a 50% reduced yield compared to conventional farming methods. It is worth noting that many of those who profess anxiety about GM food and crops have no qualms about holidays or shopping trips in Florida, New York or California, where much

of the food will originate from GM maize and soybeans.

During the last century the human population increased four-fold and is expected to rise by another 30% to nine billion people. Humans already intercept about 30% of all terrestrial photosynthesis; for any species to be so greedy is unprecedented. We need to reduce our footprint on the earth; by increased use of renewable sources of energy; by minimizing the waste of water and by maximizing recycling and by controlling our population. A GM blight-resistant potato will require less agricultural applications, fewer tractor trips and less CO₂ emissions. No damaging effects have been documented for GM crops or GM food. Never before have such expensive and onerous regulations been established in response to purely hypothetical anxieties.

For organic farmers to rule out GM approaches to disease and pest resistance is irrational

Why are the so-called Greens opposed to a technology that substantially reduces the environmental impact of agriculture? For example, thanks to GM cotton, thousands of tons of insecticide have not been sprayed in fields, and fewer farm workers are poisoned by insecticides. Of the 8.5 million farmers growing GM crops in 2005, more than 90% are in developing countries, yet European consumers try to dictate to them that they cannot use an environmentally benign GM method to control insects. Insect-resistant GM maize means that levels of dangerous mycotoxins in the human and domestic animal diet have been reduced. This provides a very significant benefit for consumers as well as farmers. Golden Rice, which could contribute to alleviating vitamin A deficiency for millions, is being unnecessarily delayed - this delay causes real damage to human health.

or in the pipeline, are being delayed throughout the world. Nobody counts the considerable cost of NOT expeditiously deploying GM crop improvements.

GM agriculture is part of the solution, not part of the problem. I have been making transgenic plants for over twenty years. It is the most benign, ecologically sound new method for crop improvement in a century. The more I do it, the less I worry about it. Provided simple and obvious regulatory precautions are taken, there are no plausible scenarios for the technology to cause serious damage. There are some potential problems that can be tested for in any new GM variety, such as whether the resulting potatoes make elevated levels of poisonous alkaloids. But in twenty years of making transgenic plants, no hazardous, entirely unforeseen difficulties have emerged.

Organic agriculture was originally envisaged as a cultural practice to nurture soil health. This is fine. But for organic farmers to rule out GM approaches to disease and pest resistance is irrational, a matter of doctrine rather than logic. The arguments about contamination are about imaginary hazards; nobody has ever been hurt by eating a GM plant. It is as if a Protestant and a Roman Catholic church were next door to each other, and the Protestants objected to the smell of incense from the neighbouring church as "contamination". It hobbles the mind that the "Greens" are opposed to a late blight resistant potato developed with GM techniques when organic methods for blight control involving copper compounds are more toxic, environmentally damaging and less effective.

So back to potatoes. The organic movement has created rules for itself that it insists on imposing on others. It is perfectly legitimate for organic farmers to regulate how organic food is grown and to choose for themselves which crop varieties they want to plant. But organic potato farmers create tremendous problems for adjacent conventional farmers by failing to control blight and thus creating huge disease inoculum, and the conventional farmers have no redress when this happens.

Their real problem with GM crops is they can't stand the competition. Unlike organic, GM agriculture can combine reduction in chemical applications with maintenance of or increase in yield. We have a genuine issue of democracy here - our British tradition of "live and let live" is being betrayed. The organic movement's intolerance can no longer be tolerated.

Jonathan Jones is a leading plant geneticist and authority on plant disease resistance. He is head of the charitably-funded Sainsbury Laboratory at the John Innes Centre in Norwich.

superfood or super size?



FRANCES AIZLEWOOD unmask the extremes of twenty-first century food culture

THE FOOD CULTURE here in the UK is becoming increasingly polarised. Obesity, defined as having a body mass index (BMI) of thirty or more, is becoming more prolific year on year, and rates have more or less doubled in the last twenty years. Treating the problems associated with it costs the NHS more than half a billion pounds a year.

There have been many initiatives attempting to curb this worrying trend, such as the "five-

a-day" promotion, or Jamie Oliver's school dinners campaign. With obesity levels in this country set to follow the American trend, these initiatives seem well conceived. However, the message concerning what constitutes good food has been scrambled in transmission – or has at least been accompanied by more extreme messages, from the media in particular, concerning health and the health qualities of what we eat.

Our food culture has become one of extremes, with ever increasing levels of obesity and eating disorders along with the size-zero phenomena. In striving to obtain the body deemed desirable, or even just acceptable, by the media, our attitudes to food have altered to a significant degree even within the last decade.

The media is preoccupied with celebrity. Every aspect of celebrities' lives is under scrutiny, especially from gossip magazines,

which now constitute a multi-million pound industry. A celebrity's figure or dress sense is of more interest than their new album or film, or even their love life. As well as commenting on starlets' figures, the media is increasingly occupied with telling us how we can copy their style – and, more importantly, achieve the Hollywood figure needed to pull it off.

There are very few examples of positive body image: we are shown the highly overweight or vastly underweight

There seem to be just two extremes of figure: the thin, and everyone else. Even those celebrities who fit what most people would call 'normal' are scrutinized and criticised in relation to their meagre physical imperfections. There are very few positive examples of body image: we are shown the highly overweight or vastly underweight, and any praise of a 'normal' body is often undermined by a close-up of someone else's cellulite. Although the figures of vastly underweight celebrities – the size zeroes – are criticised, there is no alternative. Any critique levelled at their physiques is counterbalanced by the fact that every other aspect of their lifestyles is revered. Similarly, television schedules have become overrun with programmes showing extreme bodies at both ends of the scale.

This obsession has been coupled with the rise in the popularity of various fad diets, in which every few weeks a new method for quick-fix weight loss is proffered as the way to get that A-list body. These methods in particular, and the diet industry in general, have given us a false conception of the weight and shape we can actually achieve, with unrealistic weight-loss targets and false ideas about the ease with which they can be adopted.

Fad diets have also had a more profound effect on the way in which we perceive food generally. The Atkins diet, for example, although its popularity was short-lived, has left behind it the assumption that carbohydrates should be avoided.

Any praise of a 'normal' body is often undermined by a close-up of someone else's cellulite

Slowly but surely, our concept of what is healthy has been narrowed, and has in fact led to the demonisation of many foods which we would once have eaten without a second thought.

If one thinks about food on a continuum, with 'healthy' at one end, and 'unhealthy' at the other, foods have been pushed further

towards the two extremes. There are few foods to which we do not attribute some kind of health value. Indeed, the relatively new concept of the 'superfood', foods with extraordinary nutritional benefits, has further contributed to this polarisation.

The question of what is actually good for us has become a twenty-first century obsession, as

our diets revolve around ideas about 'healthy' and 'unhealthy' foods, or, as they have been labelled, 'good' and 'bad'. Given that the idea of 'you are what you eat' has become central to our culture, these labels have given rise to the fact that food has become linked with morality. This is not the morality of the kind associated with the organic issue, or food miles. Rather, these labels project moral implications onto food, and lead us to pass judgement on ourselves and others about our worth as people on the basis of what we eat.

Labels of 'healthy' and 'unhealthy' project moral implications onto food, and lead us to pass judgement on ourselves and others

Even the promotion of unhealthy foods has perpetuated this – think of 'sinful' chocolate, or the 'guilty pleasure' used in advertising campaigns. The idea that food can be 'good' or 'bad' is potentially extremely dangerous; we are judging ourselves as people by what we eat. Such unequivocal assessment of foods and body shapes risks creating an all or nothing mentality wherein, when perfection is not achieved, we lurch in the other direction.

The media has, without doubt, changed our attitudes to food, health and our bodies. Eating problems are more common as our relationship with food becomes more complex. In the first instance, the biological function of food and the fact that we need a certain number of calories in a day just to function has been replaced with the notion that calories should be avoided.

The information we get about such issues often comes from sensationalist media rather than actual medical opinion. We have stopped trusting our instincts as hunger is ignored, with the ability to skip a meal a badge of honour.

The demonisation of entire food groups and preoccupation with detox and dieting has also contributed to the fact that we adopt rules about certain foods without even knowing where they come from. For example, many have come to believe that bread and potatoes now belong in the category of 'bad' foods with feelings of guilt after having eating them are well documented among both men and women. Such rules, whether we are conscious of them or not, are often central to the formation and perpetuation of eating problems.

Eating problems are not limited to the better known, and undoubtedly serious, anorexia and bulimia, but also manifest themselves in binge eating disorders and distorted attitudes to shape, weight and food. It would be naïve to suggest that all eating disorders result from the images of health and the body perpetuated by the media, as the causes behind them have been proven to be infinitely more complex than the modern obsession with thinness, but this obsession no doubt reinforces the idea that a perfect figure can solve every problem. Even if these problems may not develop into full-blown eating disorders, they are no less of a concern.

These moral judgements also have wider

implications, as, in addition to assessing our own worth according to what we eat, we also assess others by the same principles. A parent will be judged if their children are seen eating 'bad' foods in public. The women who handed their children fast food through the school railings in protest against Jamie Oliver's healthy school dinners were judged to be bad parents, despite the fact that little or nothing was actually known about their lives or their relationships with their children. Similarly, it has become increasingly acceptable to stigmatise the overweight or obese.

As food takes an ever more central role within our society, and the body images portrayed by the media become more extreme, it is unsurprising that both eating disorders and obesity are on the rise. In perpetuating the mantra of 'you are what you eat', a sense of self-worth stems from our physical attributes rather than any real-life achievement or merit. By recognising that no food is intrinsically good or bad, we may begin to establish the balance which would be helpful in the fight against obesity, and could contribute to the prevention of serious eating problems.

Frances Aislewood is a 4th year undergraduate studying French and German at Exeter College, Oxford.



reap what you SOW

SIR IVOR ROBERTS recounts the history of the Iraq conflict - and asks whether Britain has an obligation to stay

JUST OVER FIFTY years ago, two Western countries invaded an Arab country without any kind of international sanction or support. At the time, the world's two super powers were united in their opposition to the events that had taken place, and the United States eventually forced the withdrawal of Britain and France from the Suez Canal area and from Egypt. Now, we have two Western countries invading another Arab country, without any international support or sanction and with no specific United Nations Security Council endorsement. The ex-super-power Russia has expressed its opposition to such activities, as indeed have other permanent members of the Security Council, China and France. But this time the United States is part of the invasion team, indeed its leader. *O tempora et mores.*

The origin of the invasion of Iraq was the so-called 'War on Terror'. After 9/11 the US adopted a position of pre-empting and preventing such terrorist attacks. On one level this has been successful as the United States has not suffered any attacks to the homeland since the events of 9/11. Other coalition countries have been less fortunate: the Australians in Bali, the Spaniards in Madrid and of course the British in London. At first the War on Terror seemed to be going well. It was originally limited to Afghanistan which was certainly the source of Al Qaeda's activities, and the source of shelter which they were offered by the Taliban government in Kabul. The Afghan operation received full United Nations and international support, being deemed an act of self-defence in light of what had taken place in New York and Washington.

By contrast and quite unnecessarily, a new front was opened in the war on terrorism against a regime, which while it had harboured terrorist elements in the past, was not currently doing so. It was previously involved in a programme of developing weapons of mass destruction, however it had not been doing so for some years. Nevertheless the Bush administration, carrying the Blair government in its wake, decided that the Saddam Hussein regime was a menace, not just to regional stability, but to the United States and that it must be eliminated. The policy, having already been decided upon, just left the problematic task of adjusting the facts to fit in with such a policy. With the greatest difficulty, President Bush was persuaded to press for UN inspectors to re-visit Iraq in an attempt to uncover a weapons programme. However the inspectors

found nothing and the reason was simple. There was nothing to find. This was the wrong result for the Bush administration who had been counting on either Saddam Hussein to refuse the weapons inspectors access to Iraq, or to impede their work once they arrived there, making their mission impossible. Either of these would have allowed the US to claim that the will of the UNSC was being flouted and thus justify an armed attack on Iraq.

Nevertheless, just as the Americans had pre-positioned a massive military force in the Gulf and were not willing to march their soldiers down the hill, they were again in this instance, determined to go ahead with the invasion, clutching at what straws they could extract from Hans Blix's report. In essence the report stated that Iraqi co-operation was not perfect, however there was still no evidence of weapons of mass destruction and more time was needed. In addition a congressional committee of inquiry has found that there was no link between Al Qaeda and the Saddam Hussein regime. This reinforced the sheer lack of legality and justification for the invasion. The alleged motivation for the invasion of Iraq was to deal a body blow to the war against terrorism. In actuality what occurred was the creation of a terrorist threat where none had previously existed. The consequences can be seen everyday on the streets of Baghdad, Fallujah, Mosul, Tikrit and Basra. 3,000 US soldiers and hundreds of British soldiers have died, but the real victims have, of course, been the Iraqi people who have died in hundreds of thousands. The average death toll over the last month or so has been approximately 100 a day, many victims have been of sectarian civil war with the bodies of the victims often showing signs of mutilation and torture.

Of course it all began well. Few would deny that the initial phase of the military operation was an outright success. On the other hand, part of the reason it was such a success was that a large part of the Iraqi military merely melted away. They took off their uniforms and went home, unfortunately taking their arms with them. The US administration installed after the initial victory, compounded the problem by dissolving the army and the Bath party. In essence, all the infrastructure of the old regime had disappeared and the void was only partially filled by the coalition forces and the civilian infrastructure they brought in with them. This was wholly inadequate to support a fully functioning administration of 20 million people.

without the reasonable assurance that one can go to the market, or find work without being blown up, what use is democracy?

There were two other notable failures in those initial weeks and months. One was the failure to secure borders, a lesson that might have been learnt from Afghanistan. Of course this depended on having the necessary military force to patrol the borders, to prevent malign foreign influence

from Syria, Iran and the like. Secondly, and this again betrayed a lack of manpower, was the failure to seal arms dumps. The US with its huge intelligence reach must have known where every major arms dump in Iraq was to be found. It should have been a first priority for the coalition once Baghdad was taken. It is these basic errors, which have made the second phase of military operations an unmitigated disaster. Perhaps the Bush administration believed their own rhetoric, that the coalition forces would be greeted as liberators. This is certainly what they had been led to believe by Iraqis in exile with axes to grind.

The overall impact is now so deadened in our imagination that reports of car bombs no longer resonate on our conscience

Even if the American administration had allowed themselves to be deluded in this way, we come back to a more basic question, which is why the US believed that removing Saddam Hussein would help the war on terrorism. Henry Kissinger was asked why he had supported the Iraq war. His answer was revealing: "because Afghanistan wasn't enough. In the conflict with radical Islam, they, the Islamists want to humiliate us. We need to humiliate them". Thus the American response was to send a wider message that the US was not going to be pushed around.

Kissinger was not the only voice being listened to at the time. Some of the so-called neocons argued that the United States was in for a long battle with radical Islam. Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Iran were all seen as too difficult for early treatment but Saddam Hussein was seen as weaker and more exposed. A gathering threat who needed to be removed in a manner which would serve as a demonstration to deter anyone thinking of threatening the United States. However at the same time acting as the seedcorn for the democratic transformation of the region which was at the heart of the neocons' project. The then Deputy Defence Secretary, Paul Wolfowitz, saw Iraq as being "the first Arab democracy": a secular, middle-class, urbanised, oil-rich country that could be a model for other Arab countries, and the key American ally in the

support for Hezbollah and other radical groups, thereby isolating Syria and reducing pressure on Israel. As a piece of idealism it has much to commend it. As a policy rooted in knowledge of the region it is a pipedream.

Instead we have several simultaneous low-level conflicts occurring, any one of which would be sufficiently detrimental for the future stability of Iraq. The overall impact is now so deadened in our imagination that reports of market car bombs no longer resonate on our conscience. What must it be like living in this hell?

The irony is that the United States has helped

into government some of the very people to whom it is most ideologically opposed. The current Iraqi government includes several prominent members of the Islamist Dawa party, which was behind a string of bombings resulting in the deaths of Iraqi civilians in the 1980s. It also had strong links to Hezbollah, who had in turn been responsible for the wave of kidnappings of western hostages in the 1980s. Certainly the influence of Iran is very strong in the Shia dominated Iraqi government. They are bound together by Shia solidarity and this in turn affects the lives of ordinary people. Previously Iraq was an extremely secular state, but now under growing Islamist influence, an increasing number of women cover themselves in the hijab. Absent a miracle, it seems highly unlikely that this country, a strange amalgam of three Ottoman provinces, Kurd, Sunni and Shia, can survive as a unitary state. The problems resulting from its partition would be enormous also, with the impact felt in Turkey and Iran. However the alternative, which is to hold the country together, after the bitterness of the last few years, appears even more daunting. With the withdrawal of coalition troops, one might hope that Islamic fighters from outside the country intent on waging jihad, might themselves melt away. However, the Kurds see themselves as having little or nothing in common with the Sunni and Shia and the Sunni seem increasingly destined to be under the cosh from the Shia, whom they oppressed for most of the Saddam Hussein period.

It was the British who effectively created modern Iraq after the First World War. Perhaps by way of compensating for the damage we have caused by opening this Pandora's box, we should now take the lead in trying to re-draw the boundaries of the state of Iraq to allow the people of Iraq to enjoy at least some measure of security. For without the reasonable assurance that one can go to the market, or find work without being blown up, what use is democracy?

Sir Ivor Roberts is President of Trinity College Oxford. He has served as the UK ambassador to Italy, Yugoslavia and Ireland.

re-making Iraq

FOULATH HADID gets to grips with America's 'New Realism' in the Middle East and the implications of the 'Surge'

ONLY HISTORY WILL be able to prove whether the so-called 'Freedom' adventure by America in Iraq was a work of visionaries or an act of monumental folly. The new 'Democratic Domino Theory' crafted by the neo-conservatives, and maybe inspired by Dr. Kissinger's 'New Realism' approach to US foreign policy, foresaw Iraq emerging as a beacon of light. One by one, all the other repressive regimes in the Middle East would follow suit, providing a sea of tranquillity for the region, for the US and for Israel.

Whether one agrees or not, the Americans attacked Iraq, imposed regime change and installed an admittedly hotbed of democracy. Their attack on Iraq has even been called, among other things, 'the most daring experiment in imperial idealism in history'. Their occupation of the country is a reality and they must now follow the route that other occupiers have taken either by handing over a successful new country (blue-print Japan, Germany) or cutting and running from a failed experiment (blue-print Vietnam).

The configuration of a future Iraqi government and the duration of a US military occupation can now only be determined by artful guesswork. The options for the US can be distilled into three scenarios:

First, a short-term occupation during which the US makes a serious effort to establish a functioning democratic system, leaving full sovereignty in the hands of a democratically-elected Iraqi government. The US can argue that this has been accomplished. Iraq has a new constitution and 12 million Iraqis have voted. They can vote again in less than two years. A democratic mechanism is in place, admittedly with catastrophic results, but according to this scenario American troops can pull out right now. Result: a major civil war and a wider regional conflagration probably necessitating the return of American troops on a much wider scale.

American elections go, the consensus thinking is that American troops will be in Iraq until at least 2009. That already makes it a stay of six years (and counting) since the invasion or half the average period referred to above.

Finally, a further short-term military occupation (say another 2 years) followed by the installation of a puppet regime and the withdrawal of US troops (blue-print Afghanistan, or for that matter, Iraq from 1921 to 1958, and a score of Arab client states in the region). This is another likely scenario but one which has failure written all over it.

If the long-term scenario seems far-fetched, consider the following. The US is building the largest embassy in the world in Baghdad, to open in June 2007. It will have 21 buildings, and will cover an area larger than Vatican City. It will boast its own power and water plants that can support a population of a small town. The grounds will have a huge swimming pool, a gymnasium, tennis courts, a cinema, restaurants run by major US chains and a recreation hall that can rival any in the world.

Further, hundreds of millions of dollars are being spent on constructing military bases for US troops. The largest is in Ballad, north of Baghdad covering an area of 13 sq. miles with a 13ft perimeter fence and a major road system. The base is being billed as the Americans' strategic air base for the entire region. The suggestion that the US is pulling out soon seems remote.

For those who are reluctant to accept a long duration stay for the US, I refer them to the British experience in Iraq. The British held two enormous bases (Habbaniya and Shuiba) in Iraq until 1958 and finessed the king and the government from their embassy. That means they were in Iraq for 37 years until a revolution forced them to leave.

For America to stay the course, it must begin to win the hearts and minds battle that was

victory was a disaster.

Bremer thought of himself as another MacArthur. He spoke no Arabic, and his knowledge of Iraq was gleaned during a ten day induction course given him before being sent there. According to General Jay Garner, his predecessor, he tried to 'wing it' by combining the worst elements of arrogance and ignorance. He was unpopular and was unceremoniously shuffled out of the country without as much as a goodbye from his Iraqi colleagues, whom he regarded with contempt. He once famously said that the Iraqis could not organize a parade between them, let alone a government!

Iraq and Iraqis must themselves undergo a severe critique of their role in the disastrous decline of their country into such a state of chaos. Iraq has always been a fragmented country and has always grappled with the problem of a national identity. Its multiple ethnic, sectarian, and religious groups have never managed to either blend in the American 'melting pot' sense or in the Canadian 'mosaic' sense. Some wag called Iraq a 'boiling melting pot'.

Today this problem is at the very heart of the random killing and total mayhem in Baghdad that the government, itself torn by sectarian division, is unable or even unwilling to stop. Perhaps the most pressing issue facing the Iraqi government is the question of national reconciliation. If the government fails in this respect, Iraq as a country is doomed and is beyond help.

All previous Iraqi governments have faced this problem from the inception of the state. Each one recognized that the country had to be glued together in order to be governed. Each found that glue through a highly centralized government. Each eventually got unglued.

The last example was Saddam Hussein, the last ruler of Iraq. He harnessed this elusive quest for a national identity to promote his own legend. Existing ties of loyalty were shattered to be replaced by ties to Saddam himself via the Baath party, the goal was to lobotomise the Iraqi people, then reconstruct a glorious new vision of 'Iraqi man', a being that somehow transcended sectarian and ethnic divisions and that owed his allegiance primarily to the state of Iraq and its Great Leader.

This was an epic attempt to create a collective identity for the people of Iraq; a combination of social engineering on a massive scale and liberal doses of violence. Such attempts were bound to fail as they had failed with previous Iraqi regimes. The task of creating an Iraqi identity that could bind together Sunni and Shia while simultaneously accommodating the Kurds in the

As far as the democratic solution is concerned, this is Iraq's last chance saloon

Second, a long-term occupation (10-15 years) during which the US reconfigures Iraqi society in its entirety and makes a concerted effort to establish democratic roots in the country. This is probably the most likely outcome. However the

disgracefully lost in Abu Ghraib, the notorious prison in Iraq where activities occurred that the US Army - by its own admission - described as totally unacceptable. America had no post-Saddam strategy and its choice of Paul Bremer as



North has, so far, proved to be too daunting.

Today, and after the severe hemorrhaging suffered by the country due to the invasion, the future for Iraq is bleak. Both the invaders and their chosen men have failed to find a common vision for an Iraqi state. The constitution, which should have been the mechanism of unity, has only served as a negotiating tool for sectarian deals rather than the design of a blue print for a common state. Any notion that the constitution is federalist is totally flawed.

Most importantly, the failure of leadership has been blatant. George Bush is reputed to have said: 'Where are the leaders? Why aren't they stepping forward? Where is George Washington? Where is Thomas Jefferson? Where is John Adams, and he didn't have much of a personality for crying out loud?'

The future for both America and Iraq is nearing its endgame. It may be hard to predict but a future will happen and there is a limited time window for any on-going strategy to succeed, including the so-called 'Surge' strategy of upping troop levels. Certainly, as far as the democratic solution is concerned, this is Iraq's last chance saloon.

This solution must begin by the country adopting, at a minimum, what Francis Fukuyama has described as the normative features of a democracy. This is the stage where one must assume that the Iraqi people want a democracy as a legitimate system of government, as the Japanese did after 1945.

Having accepted democracy at this level, Iraqis will have to decide the kind of political institutions they want associated with their democracy. Most likely power would have to be shared between Shia, Sunnis and Kurds. The template for this is the Bosnia arrangement of 1995. The bad news is that the Bosnian constitution has been a disaster, serving only to heighten ethnic tensions as surely as the Iraq

constitution is likely to do.

The US government must re-assess its continuing involvement in Iraq. Its actions have tethered it to Iraq and to the region as never before. This is the first occupation of an Arab country in history by America and the cost has been sky-high in blood and treasure. Whether or not President Bush's vision of transforming the Middle East occurs, it seems unlikely that the US will be able to detach from the region any time soon.

experts in Washington are only now realizing that the best example was always staring them in the face right there in Iraq. The British occupation of Iraq in 1917 led to a massive insurgency that the British were forced to put down by an overwhelming use of air power. Chemical weapons – of the kind that the West was prepared to go to war with Saddam about – were deployed to incinerate entire villages, women, children and all. To justify British action, Winston Churchill, the then Colonial Secretary, declared that the use

America...must begin to win the hearts and minds battle that was disgracefully lost in Abu Ghraib

Tony Blair was right when he stated in a speech in 1999 that this was not a clash between civilizations. It was a clash about civilization. The crux question is this: Iraqis must be complicit in wanting what America envisions for them, otherwise the whole intervention is doomed like all others before it where the occupied did not share the same values as the occupier.

Comparisons with other insurgencies and occupations are understandably being made. One thing is sure: the average length of an insurgency, or counter-insurgency in the 20th century was nine years. The first American involvement in the Philippines in 1899 necessitated a stay for American forces that lasted for decades. The Algerian example, very popular with President Bush, comes closest to the US experience in Iraq in the eyes of many in the White House.

My own view is that you do not have to go far to look for comparisons. It is a pity that the

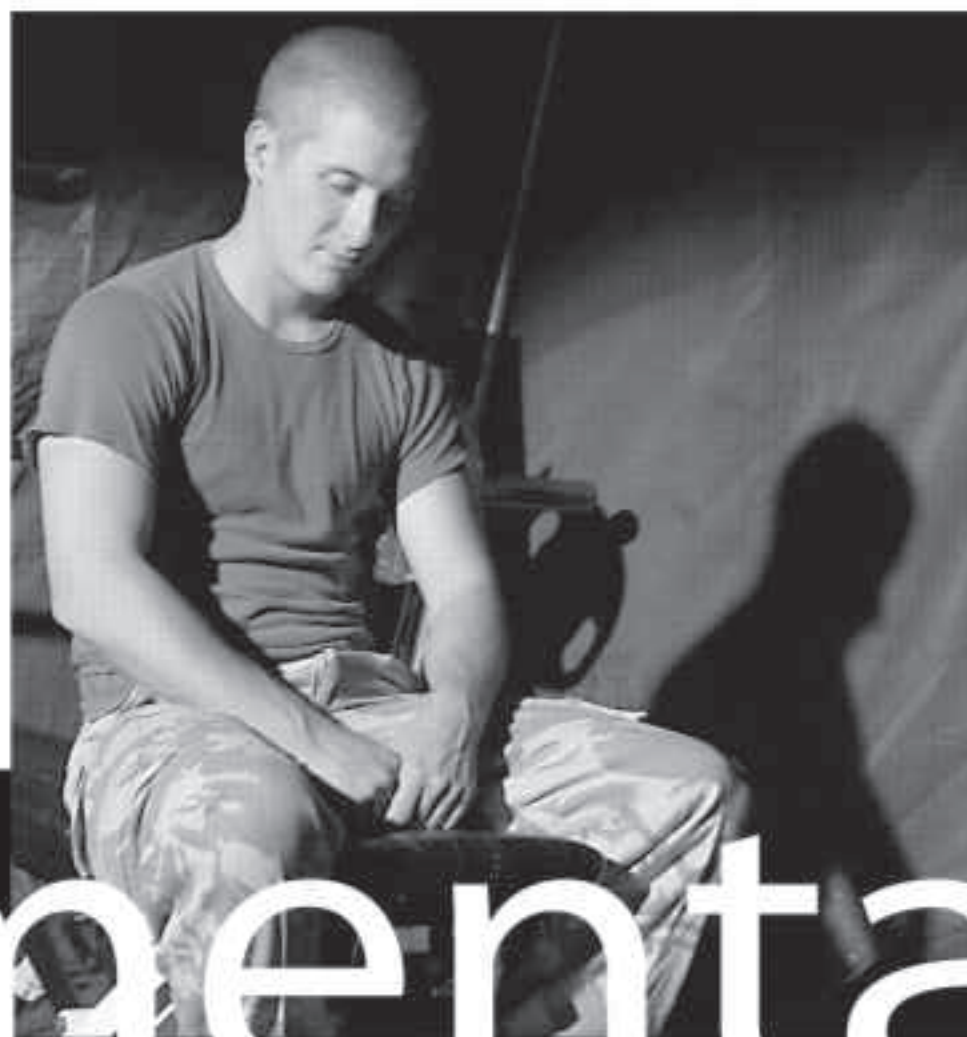
of such weapons was 'morally' acceptable!

For the US it has already been a long war. Historians will look at the US involvement as having started with the Gulf War in 1991. This was followed by 12 years of containment from the air, then another short battle in 2003. There is no reason to suppose that this will not be followed by another decade or more of containment.

The big conundrum facing the present and any future administration is this: if the 'Surge' strategy is successful and America were to stay the course and see a democratic solution through, will American resolve withstand such a scenario? It did in the cases of Japan and Germany but did not in Vietnam.

Only time will tell.

Foulati Hadid is an Honorary Fellow of St. Anthony's College, and editor of Mohammed Hadid: The Struggle for Democracy in Iraq



mental combat

More support should be given to combat veterans, argues SHARIF ISMAIL

There is something unutterably horrifying about the imagery of war trauma. Its currency pervades some of the most outstanding contributions to British literature over the past hundred years, particularly dealing with the First World War. From Vera Brittain's emotive biography, *Testament of Youth*, through Virginia Woolf's portrayal of war-veteran Septimus Smith in *Mrs Dalloway*, to Pat Barker's acclaimed *Regeneration* trilogy, published in the 1990s, the ordeals of ex-servicemen struggling to come to terms with psychological trauma are painted as very personal kinds of hell, from which escape – if it is ever possible – comes at an inordinate price to the sufferers, and those closest to them.

In part, this reflected the low regard with which sufferers of psychiatric disorders were held, both by the medical profession and wider society, at the time. Veterans were treated with contempt, their symptoms sneered at by disbelieving doctors and senior officers – who were more likely to castigate them as 'malingerers' and 'wastrels' than pay due attention to their problems. In this environment,

many veterans simply drew inward. For Septimus Smith, the only way out was suicide.

Medical consensus changed gradually, absorbing new developments in psychological treatment methods, but it was a slow process. There is a good deal of academic debate as to how much difference these changes made to psychiatric support systems for British servicemen, in ensuing conflicts. The wider significance of works such as that of Brittain and Woolf, then, was to help deconstruct the social stigma surrounding war trauma – to break down the illusion that to suffer from these problems somehow denoted weakness and lack of 'moral fibre'.

Cut to 2007, and the picture seems oddly familiar. With British servicemen and women now deployed everywhere from Iraq and Afghanistan (labelled 'high intensity deployments') to Kosovo and Sierra Leone ('low intensity deployments'), the need for adequate psychiatric and psychological support would seem to be greater than ever. In reality, it remains

limited. Though general medical understanding of psychological trauma – however defined – has advanced hugely over the past 30 to 40 years, both pre- and post-deployment follow-up systems for the UK Armed Forces are remarkably underdeveloped, responding in fits and starts to problems that should have been anticipated far in advance.

To begin with, figures for the psychological impact of current deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan are astonishingly hard to come by. It is estimated that roughly 20,000 servicemen and women may be suffering from various forms of 'war trauma', but only a little over 2,100 have formally received treatment from the Ministry of Defence. Over 300 of these were suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), the most widely recognised – but by no means the only – form of 'war trauma'.

A specialist data-gathering group has recently been established at the King's Centre for Military Health Research (KCMHR) in London to address this information deficit, which marks an

important acknowledgement of previous failings. But it has yet to deliver detailed findings from either Iraq or Afghanistan. Preliminary figures suggest as many as 20 per cent of all servicemen and women returning from these conflicts may be suffering from some form of 'mental disorder', though only 2 per cent of regular personnel and 4 per cent of reservists are classified officially as 'casualties'.

What kind of 'disorders' are included in the definition? Data collection is, in truth, hampered by the fact that symptoms and diagnoses vary hugely. Contrary to media suggestions, the incidence of PTSD is relatively low, at 3-4 per cent of all those returning from combat. But most disorders are not isolable. Servicemen and women frequently suffer from a combination of difficulties, ranging from unhappiness, anxiety and disrupted sleeping patterns, to clinical depression, phobic disorders and bipolar disorder. These manifestations often go hand in hand with alcohol and drug abuse. They are complicated further by problems at home or with relationships, and the rising phenomenon of homelessness: it is estimated that a quarter of all those living rough in Britain today are ex-service people.

Considering the conditions under which many British servicemen and women now operate abroad, much of this is unsurprising. In both Iraq and Afghanistan, soldiers work under conditions of perpetual and intense stress, exacerbated by the tactics employed by insurgents, and a sometimes profound sense of dislocation borne of operating in unfamiliar cultural surroundings. As deployments lengthen, difficulties increase. Many soldiers are now completing several tours of duty as the Army struggles to meet its overseas commitments, being exposed to severe cumulative stress, with little chance of recuperation between deployments.

Heavy reliance on members of the Territorial Army in support roles for the over-stretched regular forces – particularly in Iraq – adds a new dimension. Many are simply not trained adequately for the tasks they are required to undertake. Take one TA reservist – called up from civilian life to fix machinery in Iraq. Asked to repair a refrigeration unit, into which the victims of a recent suicide bombing were being loaded as he worked, he has since suffered from recurrent flashbacks and nightmares, and the almost constant memory of the stench of rotting flesh.

This particular reservist is currently receiving specialist assistance from the only independent charity in the UK working with veterans with psychological trauma: Combat Stress. The virtually front-line role this small charity is playing in helping ex-servicemen and women to overcome psychological trauma is demonstrative of how deep the problem of lack of support runs.

For all the anger directed at the US government for its handling of injured veterans at the Walter Reed Medical Centre in Washington earlier this year, the fact is that provisions for pre- and post-deployment psychiatric follow-up across the Atlantic are significantly more advanced than in the UK. In part, this reflects historical experience. The devastating impact of 'war trauma' on a generation of veterans from the Vietnam War left a deep, popular cultural mark in the United States. By the early 1980s, it had ensured wide exposure for PTSD, and the issues surrounding it, to the

general populace. The US government currently operates a network of some 200 Veterans' Centres – and more than 170 hospitals, 13 of them with specialist PTSD units, now treat war trauma victims from various conflicts.

In Britain, by contrast, PTSD and other forms of 'war trauma' continue to be regarded with a degree of suspicion, both within the armed forces and without. In theory, the British Army's in-house Royal Army Medical Corps provides specialist assistance, for issues of this nature, to service people in the field; but their coverage is uncertain. A specialist team was recently sent out to Afghanistan in support of service people there, fully six years after the beginning of the British Army's operation in the country. Despite evidence of significant improvements over the past few years in stress-management training for personnel and in-service medical provision, there remains no institutionalised system of pre- or post-deployment mental health screening for British service people.

many veterans are simply not prepared to open up to those without combat experience of their own

Once back in the UK, responsibility for psychiatric and psychological follow-up shifts almost exclusively to the NHS. Again, coverage is patchy at best. There are few specialists working in the health system who have expertise in handling war trauma, especially since the closure of the MoD's only specialist unit, the Duchess of Kent's Psychiatric Hospital in North Yorkshire in 2003. Those specialists that remain are heavily overburdened. In March, *The Times* reported that veterans suffering from various forms of trauma were routinely being asked to wait up to 18 months for a first consultation, on the NHS. In some cases, waiting times reached four years.

Much of the burden of support inevitably falls on veterans' organisations and charities, better able to provide specialist care – in particular, Combat Stress. Originally founded in 1919 to assist soldiers returning from combat in the trenches – and profoundly affected by 'shell shock' – Combat Stress currently caters for the needs of around 8,000 veterans, some as young as 19. Its Chief Executive, Toby Elliott, says that referral rates to the charity have increased by 27 per cent since 2005. The average age of the veterans they now assist has also plummeted to around 44 – from 60, as little as two years ago. Crucial though Combat Stress' contribution is in this field, the charity admits that, in the face of limited funding, it cannot by itself hope to deal with the gathering tide of veterans coming forward with symptoms of 'war trauma'.

This tide is likely to gather pace over the coming years. One of the most striking aspects of Woolf's portrayal of Septimus Smith in *Mrs Dalloway* was the fact that his personal struggle finally came to head in 1923 – a full five years after the end of the First World War. According to Toby Elliott, this is by no means exceptional outside the boundaries of fiction. In an armed

forces culture that denies psychological weakness on the battlefield, few service people will come forward for treatment for fear of compromising their prospects of promotion.

In fact, veterans take on average 13 years to come forward for assistance even after their discharge from the services. Limited NHS coverage does not help matters; many veterans are simply not prepared to open up to those without combat experience of their own. This helps to explain why a significant proportion of Combat Stress' current clients served in Northern Ireland, the Falklands and the Gulf War in 1991, rather than Iraq and Afghanistan today. But it also suggests that, with UK service people deployed abroad in considerable numbers and for lengthy periods, the time to put in place long-term arrangements for psychiatric follow-up is now.

Nearly 80 years after *Mrs Dalloway* was first published, it is difficult to escape the feeling that the efforts of many of Woolf's generation were in vain. Far from the post-Vietnam

experience in the US, which resulted in the establishment of a vast network of formal and informal support for ex-servicemen and women, collective amnesia in Britain threatens to create a new generation of veterans forced, by dint of repressed and unrecognised trauma, towards spirals of unemployment, alcoholism, drug abuse, homelessness and imprisonment.

In 2003, the MoD admitted that 107 veterans of the Gulf War in 1991 had committed suicide, compared with the loss of 24 in actual combat. 'War trauma' was a significant factor in many of the suicide cases. Over the past few years, the MoD has demonstrated a new willingness to draw constructive lessons from past failings, improving in-service 'operational stress management', and assisting research conducted by KCMHR into the psychological impact of deployment in Iraq.

But British servicemen and women returning from difficult tours of duty in Iraq and Afghanistan continue to suffer because of a general lack of treatment capacity – especially at home. This puts not only them, but their families, at risk: for the impact of 'war trauma' is rarely contained – marriages are put under strain, and children can be exposed to the sometimes violent changes in parental behaviour – leaving lasting effects.

A comprehensive and collective effort both to improve provisions for these veterans by supporting charities such as Combat Stress, and to remove the stigma that continues to surround trauma, substance abuse and homelessness, is now urgently required. It is a responsibility that no one – least of all this government, that launched headlong into the Iraq conflict in 2003 – can ignore.

Sharif Iqbal is an MPhil student at Wadham College.



at what cost?

SCOTT HORTON suggests that perhaps "saving" England from the Nazis was not the right thing for the USA to do...

MOST AMERICANS CAN'T believe that their government maintains an overseas empire of more than 1,000 military bases. US foreign interventions are always portrayed to the public as defensive in nature for the simple reason that Americans don't want an empire. We are brought up to believe that the nation was founded as an escape from the clutches of the first British colonial empire. American culture is obsessed with notions of individual freedom and our culture idolises those who stand for it, from George Washington to Luke Skywalker.

Americans believe they don't want empire, but they have one. Since the end of the Second World War, the United States, in theory a limited constitutional republic, has been unable to withdraw from the globe-spanning, war-making leviathan that it became in fighting the Axis powers to save countries like England from a brutal dictatorship. For a short time after the Second World War, as after every previous war, the US began to demilitarize, but the inheritance of so many foreign empires demanded a permanent state of military readiness. The only way to gain consent to secure this de facto world empire would be to "scare the hell out of the American people" - that is, to lie - as Republican senator Arthur Vandenberg advised President Harry Truman. The Soviet Union came to be seen as the new enemy and millions of Americans trusted the new anti-soviet crusade to be containment, not World Empire.

The Cold War, however, was merely a ruse, according to a former CIA advisor, Chalmers Johnson, once an ardent Cold Warrior and self-described 'speare carrier for empire. Today's

neoconservative doctrine of benevolent global hegemony is merely a new tag for a 60-year reality, driven principally by business, that encourages international interference. Former USAID attorney and international law professor Richard Cummings, in his explosive article for *Playboy.com* in March 2007, *Lockheed Stock and Two Smoking Barrels*, documented the decisive role played by the military industries in setting the policy of the United States, arguing, for example, that many of the biggest players in the run-up to the invasion of Iraq were closely connected to the firms Lockheed, Boeing and Northrop Grumman. In 2002, Lockheed executives actually set up an advisory board to come up with excuses for invading Iraq.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, America needed a new enemy to justify its hegemony. There were plenty of potential candidates, but Al Qaeda was the American hawks' dream-come-true: an enemy which admits to committing terrorist outrages around the world and which has wide support among radical Muslims, but at the same time is a vague, amorphous movement that, according to Vice-President Cheney, could last for decades. Whether by accident or design, the Iraq war seems to have helped Al Qaeda to survive; as the Royal Institute of International Affairs pointed out in 2005, "there is no doubt that the situation over Iraq has imposed particular difficulties...for the wider coalition against terrorism. It gave a boost to the al-Qaeda network's propaganda, recruitment and fundraising, caused a major split in the coalition, [and] provided an ideal targeting and training area for al-Qaeda-linked terrorists." Most people have noticed the ironies but dismiss

any suggestion that US neoconservative foreign policy might benefit from this new enemy as unsubstantiated conspiracy theory. Perhaps they should look again at the history of the Cold War - was the Russian 'Evil Empire' really bent on world domination for all those decades, or was this a construct for domestic US consumption? Today, while the people of Iraq, Afghanistan and Somalia suffer, the Bill of Rights is ignored and the U.S. government condones and uses torture, other serious questions emerge. Are these the last days of the American republic? Can we ever turn back?

Peace preserves liberty. America's founders knew this and advised their successors to stay out of political entanglements with the Old World. In my view, Americans should still listen to them. America would be much better served if we gave up "global hegemony" and fought only in defense of our own liberty - our true legacy as a country born in revolution and secession from empire. America entered the Second World War, so it said, to fight for freedom and to save innocent nations from slavery, yet became a Great Power in doing so. Europeans may still be grateful to us for helping them then - although some carp at our conveniently late entry - but many don't seem to realise that the blundering, bullying, interfering America they criticise now is a product of that war; perhaps saving England from the Nazis really was not worth it.

Scott Horton is an Assistant Editor for Antiwar.com and hosts Antiwar Radio in Austin, Texas.

focus:

homeless

II I worked all my life, from 14 to 48, but then I got made redundant. I lost my wife to cancer. I went to live in Spain... then I came here, did a stupid thing, went to jail...." Everybody has their story. And in many ways, Mick's is not an exceptional one. He has experienced the mundane, naturally: suffered cruel twists of misfortune, unquestionably and made mistakes, undoubtedly. But how did Mick go from a spoused and housed working man, to become one of the 10,000 people sleeping rough on the streets of Britain? What factors conspire to make this the reality for so many individuals in Britain today? And what, if anything, can be done to help?

the night shelter

"WE ARE AT the sharp end of the problem," says Lesley Dewhurst, director of Oxford Night Shelter, which for 20 years has been the first point of call for Oxford's homeless, offering a bed, a shower, food and daytime facilities for 438 people a year, many of whom spend up to three months there. Oxford has long had one of the highest concentrations of homeless people, due to its central geographical position, its shortage of affordable housing and its reputation as a good place to be

**"Almost everyone we see
has a drug, alcohol or
mental health problem"**

"Almost everyone we see has a drug, alcohol or mental health problem, and often a combination of these," explains Lesley. "It is a chicken and egg situation. People may develop these after they become homeless, or they may become homeless because of them." The Night Shelter charges three pounds a night, deliberately priced to be affordable for anyone receiving Social Security benefits. The Shelter has 56 beds, 35 of which are only available on a 'direct access' night by night basis. The remainder are reserved for those who are in need of longer-term accommodation. Each person is given a single room with a private shower and toilet, but must remove their belongings from the room each morning – day locker storage is provided – in an effort to encourage people to engage with the range of recovery and resettlement programmes on offer. If, after three months of the direct access scheme, a person has done nothing, the Shelter gives notice to quit. Exceptions are made for those who clearly are so chaotic that much further work is needed. "It is always difficult, but we want people to start getting back on their feet. We don't feel we are helping if the Shelter simply becomes a means to carry on taking drugs and living life on the street."

The Shelter also runs Julian Housing, 72 rooms

mainly in east Oxford, which offers supported housing for two years, and helps people to move on to stable accommodation – a mix of private rented and permanent council or housing association accommodation. It has a high success rate, with around 75% moving on within a year – 90% of whom manage to sustain that accommodation for at least a year after that.

Most Oxford residents have been approached by people saying, 'I just need 50p more to get into

the Night Shelter.' Should you give? The Night Shelter would prefer you not to. "We are trying to encourage people to begin to take responsibility for their lives, which are often very chaotic, and we often take people in if they really don't have the three pounds." If you do really want to give to people begging in the street, the Shelter sells a book of ten room vouchers for 30 pounds. Handing a voucher to someone rather than cash is a way of making sure that the money is spent on accommodation and not on drink or drugs.

Central government's new 'reconnection' policy now requires the Shelter to limit their services to people who have a connection with Oxfordshire. "At first we were against this," says Lesley. "We didn't want to see people being bounced around all over the country; but the system is actually quite benign. Travel costs are provided and people are met on arrival and helped in getting somewhere to live in their home area. In the last six months we have only had to turn away about 20 people from outside the area who have refused to take part in the scheme."

Oxford Night Shelter Main Office:
O'Hanlon House, Luther Street, Oxford OX1
1UL. Tel: 01865 304600



on the

Of course, ten thousand is the number of people at the painfully sharp edge of homelessness. In reality, the issue spreads its roots insidiously, far deeper and wider than the tangible, and often unwelcome reminders you see huddled in shop doorways, or under bridge arches. More than 100,000 people in the UK today subsist in temporary or inadequate housing. Indeed, Crisis estimate the number of 'hidden homeless' could be as high as 400,000 – twice the total population of Oxford. In a country we deem developed, based on a political framework we call independence; in this age of social awareness, and society we credit as 'civilised', it is natural to question how this situation arises, why it persists, and what's being done to fix it.

**"I don't think
I'm 'down
there' - I'm
just down on
my luck"**

The causes of homelessness in Britain are manifold, but there are certain key factors which rear their ugly heads time and again. These include abuse – sexual, physical or emotional, drugs, alcohol, mental illness, unemployment, and poverty. Worse still, many of these causes are interlinked: none can be tackled in isolation. Bearing in mind how widespread each circumstance is, they are all subject to deplorable degrees of misunderstanding and taboo. Many consider it within a person's capability to break free from the grasp of any or all of these adversities. It is unlikely that many who would say this have had the educating misfortune of personal experience. To paraphrase the wisdom of Atticus Finch, 'you can never truly understand a man until you've walked a mile in his shoes'.

As a student in the city of Oxford, the problem of homelessness is quite apparent. As

**In 2003, 438 pe
every thousa**

e streets

FRANCESCA RIVERS and JAMES BALL report...

Alan, a Big Issue vendor, says, "you see the dreaming spires - and people hanging from them everywhere". Indeed, the wealth and privilege of the University is sharply juxtaposed with an apparently vast number of homeless people, outside the college walls. "There's two sides of the city", voices Alan, "because there's a lot of the town, even in the city centre that you don't get to see, because it's all walled in - because the college owns it. And there is quite a big divide in Oxford between - not between the rich and the poor, but between people who are supported properly and people who aren't."

This said, Oxford appears to be an attractive city to those suffering homelessness, as exemplified by there being a Big Issue vendor, seemingly, on every corner. Though support services such as the Big Issue office indicate Oxford has about average numbers of homeless people for a city of its size, those we spoke to strongly believe Oxford has a reputation as a 'good' place to be on the streets. When asked why this is, we were told "I think because there are a lot of services here - a lot more than there would be in Reading, say."

"In Oxford, you can get food every day. The people are nice as well... In the morning there's a place called the Gap, by the train station; you go in there at nine o'clock when it opens, and you get porridge. You get coffee all day long - and you can get a shower. Then at 12 o'clock they do dinner, or the Night Shelter does dinner at half 12. There's a place on the Cowley Road called Stepping Stones that does dinner for £1.10, that's for an hour. Then at five o'clock there's a place called the Gatehouse, in the city centre. They issue sandwiches from 5 'til 7, and you can get a cup of tea, juice and a change of clothing - if they've got any. Then in the evening, three nights a week now the people in local churches give out sandwiches and cups of coffee."

Put like that, the array of services providing food, clothing and hand-to-mouth support seems staggering. In addition, the Oxford Night Shelter provides temporary accommodation (see feature page 28), and drugs rehabilitation and support service are provided by Smart (see page 29). These services, combined with the relative safety of Oxford compared to many other cities, make it possible to get by day to day - perhaps



more so than elsewhere.

Then there is the Big Issue itself: apparently a source of occupation and employment for many. The overwhelming response from its vendors and self-proclaimed representatives is a positive one. "It gives us money every day", say the vendors, "and stops us committing crime. It keeps us in society, keeps us among the public - and we're alright with the public and they're alright with us. Basically the Big Issue just makes us live."

those affected. "A lot of people who you find in the hostels have mental health problems, are drug addicts or drinkers. You'll find that a lot of those people, the only jobs they can do are quite limited skilled jobs. That's why you find quite a lot of people in Oxford do the Big Issue. You can also claim your benefits while you sell the big issue; you declare how many magazines you sell and how much money you've earned, and that weighs out how much money you get in benefits."

"If people buy the Big Issue to make themselves feel good, that's fine: at least they are buying it"

Many of the causative factors that lead to homelessness in the first place make the Big Issue the only form of employment possible for

So, how much money can actually be made from selling the magazine? Alas, the tales of £100-a-day incomes are indeed urban myths.

people were accepted as homeless in Oxford: for and people living in the city, 8.5 are homeless.

[Source: Oxford City Council]

Exclusion by family, relatives and friends is the top per cent. The next highest reason, at 24 per cent. Both are above national

the vendor

ALAN, a Big Issue vendor, gives his opinion on the core of the 'problem'...

// TO 'FIX' HOMELESSNESS, you need to destroy drugs. That's it, I think that's all there is. I'm a heroin addict. Not a using heroin addict. I'm on methadone - I have been for a while.

It's fucking horrible. I started by smoking dope, and thought it was cool. Then I was taking speed and pills and all that in clubs and being all... you know... and then I ended up using heroin. And, it's just so different. It takes over a part of you.

I've seen people who, you know, are dabbling, and they think they're really cool. Then I've seen them two years later - well, there's a young lad at the moment, and two years ago he was injecting, he was 18. He's twenty now, and he's got dirt under his fingernails, he's got a big beard - it's not a beard - he's picked his face from when he's been smoking crack and looking in the mirror. Where it's so dirty,

you know it's not going to heal up.

And you're watching your friends - I mean the amount of people who have died in Oxford in the past year, through just getting banned from the night shelter and not having anywhere else to go, not being able to get instant access to hostels, and then being out on the streets.

They increase their alcohol and drug intake because they're out on the streets. Being out on the streets, if you're not on anything, you usually are in a few weeks. And your use just becomes massive, it just becomes your whole life. Because it's the only thing that keeps you...

Homelessness is different now to how it was fifteen years ago - fifteen years ago, twenty years ago, you know, you had working men who drank hard and worked hard and had split up with the wife. That's why places like the Night Shelter were opened. If you go in the Night Shelters now the majority of people are 30 years and under, and heroin addicts or young alcoholics; 25 year old men that look like 40 year olds."



One vendor says "On a good day, I would make between ten and fifteen pounds. The magazines cost us 70p each, and we sell them at £1.50 - it says on the cover, 80p goes to the vendor. Some people will give you £2, not £1.50 - and then there are people who see you every day, and give you a pound, or a cup of tea, or something for the dog.

"And you get the people who give you ten, twenties, they're just one off, not everyday occurrences. They're nice when they happen - boost you along". Selling the magazine provides a sense of drive and purpose, too: "You get regulars by staying on the same place, day in and day out. If you're determined, like we are. You get what you'd call solid Issue boys - day in and day out, and that's how you build up your pitch".

On balance, then, it would seem the support and services - in Oxford, at least - combine to make life on the streets eminently more bearable. There is food, accommodation, means

of employment; all found in an aesthetic setting, pervaded by goodwill. However, life is rarely, if ever, that simple: and it is not difficult to draw people out on the failings of the services. Whilst providing a means of income - albeit a modest one - the Big Issue offers little else to its vendors in the way of support, or direction. As one vendor puts it, "You go in, you buy your magazines and you walk out of the door. There's no 'hey guys, come on!' - there's no facility to have a cup of tea, or anything like that".

Many students who will not give money to those on the streets, will buy the Big Issue. Where this is due to a belief that Big Issue sellers are receiving counselling and support as part of the scheme, this is sadly not the case. Though the foundation offers these services at its largest centres, Oxford is a long way from this. Accepting that, perhaps, the Big Issue is inherently a means of moving into employment, not a support institution, there are further

criticisms levelled at the implementation of this aim.

One of these is the number of vendors in the city; a complaint made by residents and vendors alike. One vendor asserts "There are too many Big Issue sellers, is one of the problems. Cos he's got so many people doing it. He should have had a proper system of recruitment". The 'he' to whom this refers is Simon, manager of the Big Issue branch in Oxford (located behind St Giles' Church). According to Simon, there are currently 60 to 70 badged vendors in Oxfordshire, which he says is about average for a city of its size.

There is some feeling amongst the vendors, though, that a system of preference should be in place, to ensure vending positions go to those in most need, and are not retained for too long. "There are people who have got flats who are selling the Big Issue - which it does say, in the magazine, that you can do - but not forever. This is about moving on. This is about being homeless; having no job because you've got nowhere to live, and having nowhere to live because you've got no job. So, you should do the Big Issue until you get to a certain stage - and then move on".

There is a dearth of organisations to help homeless individuals fill this employment gap. What should be a series of stepping stones back into work, with organisations providing support, currently requires more of a giant leap across

"Some people - supposedly educated people - don't even have the decency to say 'no, thank you'"

top reason given for homelessness in Oxford, at 43 percent, is loss of privately-rented accommodation. National and regional average.

[Source: Oxford City Council]

an employment chasm. There are initiatives designed to bridge this gulf but, as a vendor described to us in terms of one such company, they often fail to achieve their aim. "There's a company called Aspire [Aspire Community Enterprise Ltd], I used to work for them. It was supposed to provide primary, secondary and tertiary employment. So you put people who are homeless - maybe they'd done drugs, had alcohol or mental health problems - you gave them a basic job. This was delivering catalogues, picking them back up 2 days later. Then people could go from this basic stage on to a gardening stage - which started to work quite well.

"But they [Aspire] never managed to get any money, or get any other poor people employed. They never had anyone prepared to go round to factories and say 'We've got boys who want work, we've got this system'. That was almost three years ago, and they're still in the same position. They've had their fifth or sixth manager take over, in that time. They had idiots running it the whole time". It is debatable, of course, how clear a picture you can build up through anecdotal

"[With support services] You don't have to go shoplifting, or hitting old ladies for handbags"

evidence - Aspire claim to have helped over a hundred people into employment nationwide over the last three years. Unfortunately, this represents a mere drop in the ocean.

There is even some suggestion that the Big Issue itself is becoming outdated: that it was designed to solve a problem that has since evolved, and to help a different type of person than makes up the majority of today's homeless community. The average age of homeless individuals is decreasing. Where once the Big Issue guided people back into employment, some now on the streets are much younger: they

have never had chance to acquire these work skills in the first place.

Furthermore, there is a growing community of homeless individuals whose unemployment stems from substance abuse issues, and for these men and women, providing a means of earning money treats the symptom rather than the cause. Even some vendors seem unsure as to whether buying the Issue genuinely helps support homeless people. One said "You see drug addicts or an alcoholic, you give them free food and Big Issues to sell, and don't actually make the commitment... where does the money go? It's an easy ride. So a lot of people I know have been in the same predicament for a long time, for ages, for years." When asked about the policy of the Big Issue regarding drugs and alcohol use, Oxford branch manager Simon answered quite emphatically: "As long as they are not under the influence or drinking in public when they're selling... it's not any of our business what they spend their money on."

"There's still twenty people rough sleeping around the town - there's people you won't even see"

the mentor

When we spoke to MICK outside the Big Issue office, he told us about working as a drugs counselor:

The stereotypical image of a drugs counselor probably has little in common with the mental image of a Big Issue vendor. However, under an innovative scheme, they may be one and the same person.

Mick was a heroin user for 34 years. Having given up, he now has a council flat, and supplements his income by selling the Big Issue (he has Oxford badge number 001). He also mentors current and recovering addicts through a "Smart" scheme. He explains how the system works.

"If someone gets arrested, and goes to a police station, they test you [for drugs], and you test positive for class A drugs, you have to go to Smart." Those that refuse, he continues, are re-arrested and charged. There is always a Smart worker based in the cells - twenty-four hours a day. The scheme is innovative in that its mentors are all either ex-

users like Mick, or non-using addicts on controlled prescriptions. All mentors participate in the scheme on a voluntary basis.

Support is informal - users meet their mentors regularly, in coffee shops and similar, to talk through any emerging issues. They also attend sessions at Oxford's Drug and Alcohol Action Team (DAAT) offices. However, what makes the scheme effective, Micky suggests, is having a mentor who has gone through drugs rehabilitation himself.

Oxford DAAT, who administer the scheme, were unwilling to speak to the Forum. Mick's "pitch" is outside Clinton Cards, on Cornmarket Street.



straw poll: We asked Oxford students: Should you give money to homeless people?

YES: "Because having a home is a basic human right, isn't it? It's what everyone needs"

YES: "It helps them, especially when they're my age, and we're so priveleged"

NO: "I grew up in India, where people are enslaved and let loose on the streets to get money for the bosses, so out of that, well, I don't give"

NO: "It's a very temporary solution"

NO: "Not on the streets. I reckon if you give to homeless charities, it's more effective, and you know where your money goes"

While alcohol and drug abuse are undoubtedly highly prevalent issues amongst homeless people, it is impossible to definitively separate cause from effect. Even if, in individual cases, one problem clearly precedes the other, there is a damaging recursive interaction between substance abuse and homelessness. This said, it is clear that the attitudes of the general public towards substance abuse is something that bothers homeless people; both the initial assumption that they must have drug or alcohol problems, and the immediate correlation of these issues with deplorable character and behaviour.

Said one Big Issue vendor, "You do get members of the public who just think you're scum of the earth and what have you. They just class us as drug addicts, Drug users and drinkers and all that. But we're not!" This denial was not wholly reasonable, delivered as it was by a vendor taking his break, beer can in hand, having just minutes before made reference to his past heroin addiction. However, it would be fair to surmise that the true sources of contention are the prejudice and hypocrisy inherent in

"If you get kicked out of housing, you're right back at square one and have to go to the Night Shelter"

such a judgement. With regards prejudice, one homeless man astutely observes "You get that everywhere, where people pass judgement; as soon as they look at you they pass judgement - whoever you are". But this knowledge must be cold comfort when faced with such regular and predictable evaluation by those around you.

One vendor said "You'll see people come out [and sell the Big Issue], and then people walk past and just ignore them, and they'll only do it for 5 or 6 days 'cos they can't cope with the stigma - or you'll see people stand there and they'll just hold the magazine, and they won't say

anything, and people just pass them by". When asked how he himself deals with it, he said simply "You cope with that, don't you? You cope with that. It used to really bug me 'cos I used to think 'oh my god - they must think I'm a drug addict'. You don't know what they think. But you meet a lot of people you chat to during the day - really nice people - and they make up for the others".

And of those that seem to prejudge based on appearance, he considered "The only people they're insulting is themselves. Tarring everyone with the same brush - they're not being fair on themselves either, because they miss out. I know some of the people who sell it can be undesirable to look at - 'oh my god, he hasn't had a wash for a week, and he smells!' But, you know, I think people insult themselves by doing that."

A somewhat philosophical approach; the only alternative, perhaps, to the anger and frustration felt by so many others. Such feelings were colourfully expressed by another vendor, regarding the hypocrisy of the situation. "People say 'oh, the Big Issue people, they're drug addicts or alcoholics' - but there's drug addicts in the probation services - probation officers that are using drugs, there's alcoholics at work, doctors use drugs - are alcoholics because of the stress of being a professional - these problems are across the spectrum. But that gets hidden, and it just gets pointed out to us, like we do this - nobody else does it! Oh no no! But this is how society is. It's how it's always been. It's like a big black spider, you know - it scares you, they put it in a corner, in a cupboard, and they hide it away - 'in the cupboard's full and it bursts out and they go 'Oh, dear! We've got a problem!'"



Oxford City Council spends £5 million each year on services to support homeless people

Accusations of hypocrisy and prejudice were, in fact, levelled at some of the providers of services for homeless people – including Oxford Night Shelter, whose staff were criticised for their methods of dealing with their customers. The Shelter requires its volunteers to restrict their interaction with clients – they cannot reveal details of their personal lives, their address, or even their surname. Much of this is related to undoubtedly necessary safety precautions. However, it's a tricky issue – how would you react if you were treated with such suspicion by all those around you?

Undoubtedly and unanimously, however, the homeless persons we spoke to highlighted the Council's Reconnection policy (which stems from a national initiative) as their major impediment, both in terms of getting by day to day on the streets, and in terms of moving into secure housing and employment. Time and again we heard the policy mentioned. It was often the first thing a vendor would wish to talk to us about – with great vehemence.

For many, it precludes help from a number of homeless service providers including Street Services, the Night Shelter and the Gap – we heard from one homeless man "You need a local connection to get in [the Gap] – I can't go in there because I've got no local connection. The Gatehouse don't acknowledge things like that. The Gatehouse let you in no matter what. Which is a good thing."

"It's just
so hard to
get of the
homeless
trap"

It seems that even without the obstacle of the reconnection policy, finding affordable housing is a struggle for most. Whilst there are adequate services provided to help homeless people through daily life, moving on to a more secure living situation is an almost impossible leap. "When you're in Oxford, once you become homeless, you stay homeless" one homeless man said. "Cos there aren't any bedsits or housing – there's one housing association that I know of, which means there's only the two hostels, which have high rents. It's very hard to get out of it."

Even under the Lued Mayor's Deposit Guarantee Scheme – which provides assistance in securing a permanent residence – removing the financial hurdle of a putting down a deposit for a property, we were told the financial support is not sufficient owing to the high housing costs in the area. Even if homeless people manage to find a deposit, there are precious few private landlords willing to take such a 'high risk'.



gotta get yourself connected

Thirty months ago Mick arrived, homeless, in Oxford. Within seventeen months, he had progressed through staying in the night shelter, into hostels and now has a council flat. Paul, who arrived six months ago, finds himself turned away from these shelters, and other services. He is now forced to live in a tent. The reason, he says, is the Council's reconnection policy.

The policy, which was implemented recently, is part of a national strategy to tackle homelessness.

The rationale behind the policy is a simple one. Homeless people are more likely to successfully rehabilitate if they have good support networks – friends, family and relations – become the key to "solving" homelessness. As such, homeless people can only receive services, including use of facilities like the night shelter, if they have a local connection to the area. The policy includes provision of means and support to help people return to their home towns. The main challenge is that many people don't want to.

Not one vendor we spoke to was originally from the city. Some had travelled from nearby, others from as far afield as Scotland – not to mention those who have arrived from overseas. When asked whether the new policy encouraged him to return home, one vendor said: "No, it doesn't. I mean, I don't wanna go... It just forces you to move on, or not get these services – shave, shower and all that – And

sex, really, they're making matters worse, aren't they?"

Part of the problem may be lack of coordination. Government guidance states that reconnection "must have agreement from local agencies to be effective." Many such bodies in Oxford do support the initiative – but not all. The Gatehouse, which provides food and clothing, will supply to anyone – and so will the Big Issue. Oxford's Issue manager, Simon, was firm in his opposition to reconnection:

"We would never do it. You won't find a single Big Issue office that would sign up to anything like that. Because a lot of our vendors travel around, so we would not sign up to it, it's completely against the ethos of why we're set up."

If co-operation of local agencies is essential, it's clearly not happening. The problem worsens when we assess the reasons why people become homeless. The top reason is breakdown of family connections. Another major cause is breakup of relationships. Many homeless people have no connections to return to.

The policy may be well intentioned, and the unwillingness of some agencies to support it may be compounding the problems. But any policy which leads to men and women having nothing better than a tent in which to sleep is clearly improving nothing – and it is when circumstances become this tough that people are most likely to resort to alcohol, drugs, or crime.

ear on direct
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[Source: Oxford City Council]

give me shelter

LYNN HANNAH reminds us that homelessness is just the tip of the iceberg - by highlighting the unnoticed plight of children in overcrowded homes

If you've been on the tube in central London recently you can't fail to have noticed a new digital advertising campaign running alongside the escalators. Moving digital poster screens flick through a series of startling images of children trapped in squalid housing conditions, banging and pushing at the screens in the hope of escaping their misery. These are just some of the one in seven children who wake up every day homeless or trapped in overcrowded or unfit accommodation - more than 150,000 in the South East.

Five year old Yusra is one of these children. She lives with her parents and 18 month old brother in a one bedroom flat. The family have been on the council waiting list for a bigger property for six years.

When you visit Yusra's mother, Bushra, in her house, you wonder how four people manage to live there. There is a living room with a kitchen off to one side, and one bedroom with three beds squashed side by side. Bushra stores her family's clothes under her bed and has to lift up the bed and the mattress to get to them.

"My husband and I both work, but there's just no way we can afford to rent a flat at today's prices", says Bushra. "The environmental health officer has done an assessment on the accommodation I am in and has said that the size and space of my living area is just a few inches off it being illegal."

The legal definition of when a property is overcrowded dates back to 1935. When deciding if a property is statutory overcrowded, children under ten only count as half a person. Kitchens and living rooms are deemed as acceptable places to sleep.

The result is that families with children must endure extremely high levels of overcrowding before the statutory threshold is breached. For example, a household with two parents and two teenage children of different sexes living in a one-bedroom home would be unlikely to breach the law, as the father and son could sleep in the living room and mother and daughter in the bedroom.

Last July, the Government announced that it was going to consult on the overcrowding standard with a view to updating it in line with acceptable modern living standards. Guidelines for such an update - called the Bedroom Standard - already exist. We are still awaiting developments on this consultation.

However, it is hardly surprising that the

Government are kicking their heels over updating the law. Under the Bedroom Standard, more than 500,000 households in England are overcrowded. Under the current legislation, there are only around 20,000 overcrowded households.

There is a fundamental problem here, and that is of a lack of supply of social rented homes. In the 10 years that Labour have been in power, there has been a 27 per cent decrease in the number of council and housing association homes built.

And it's not only that we have not been building social rented housing. In 1980, the Thatcher government introduced the Right to Buy policy, which gave council tenants the right to buy their council homes at a discounted rate. Since 1980, around 282,000 houses in London have been sold under the scheme, and only 119,000 social homes have been built to replace them.

Couple this with rocketing house prices and a booming buy-to-let market, and the demand for social rented homes is rising as the supply is dwindling. There are currently 1.6 million people on council house waiting lists.

And for people like Bushra, the chronic shortage of social rented homes means that there is no prospect of the larger property that she and her family desperately need becoming available.

The way I see it, housing is one of the most fundamental aspects of everyone's life. Children living in overcrowded conditions like Yusra are up to ten times more likely to contract meningitis and far more likely to suffer from asthma and other respiratory problems.

This is why Shelter are arguing that to improve the life chances of hundreds of thousands of children, the Government must make a significant investment in housing. We are calling on the Government to build 20,000 extra social homes each year - including 4,000 in the South East - to tackle Britain's housing crisis.

Please support Shelter's campaign to help children like Yusra by texting 'More Homes Now' to 87085 or by visiting www.shelter.org.uk. The way I see it, we have to start prioritising housing to give children like Yusra the chance of a brighter future.

Lynn Hannah is Shelter's regional manager for London and the South East

tenant.

It is almost exhausting to consider the situation at hand: the need for immediate services and employment, yet the requirement that these don't discourage or prevent movement towards a more permanent situation. The need for financial assistance, but the danger of simply feeding the habits which preserve the homelessness monster that you are trying to destroy. There is no doubt that even apparently damaging initiatives like reconnection are based on sound motives - but with such a complex problem, good intentions are not nearly enough.

"The most important thing to get back is an address"

As one homeless man summarised, "It doesn't matter how many infrastructures you put in, the people who don't wanna change before that, don't change, you know? You can't do anything about it, they're throwing money at it, but it doesn't mean that it's working." It would be easy to feel hopeless about the situation, when the cycle seems so obstinately unbreakable, and there is a concrete wall around every corner. But despite having a clear view of the faults in the systems which are in place, and the challenges facing a homeless individual today, there is abundant evidence of optimism and determination.

Alan explains: "You'll find most people are upbeat because...well, that's the way you've gotta be, innit? That's what you've gotta do - otherwise you just fail miserably" - adding, whimsically "the amount of people I see wearing knits and not smiling. If wearing a suit makes you not smile, I don't wanna wear one!"

And it is possible to forge your way to a more secure situation. Mick himself is proof of that. Having worked his way from living on the streets to living in secure council accommodation, he plans to move back to Spain in the near future. He says, of being homeless: "If you go through the system, night shelter, ECH [English Church Housing], Simon house - and you're determined, and you press the right buttons and you do the right thing, you will get there in the end, but it is a long journey. It's a long journey."

Reporting: James Ball and Francesca Rivers

Additional Reporting: Leo Gough
Photography: James Ball

The Forum would like to thank: Alan, Derek, Mick, Paul and the many other vendors who worked with us Simon and Pat at the Big Issue Oxford Night Shelter Shelter



disunion

THE SCOTTISH NATIONAL PARTY outline their manifesto for Scottish independence

WITH THE ELECTION of an SNP government, Scotland has reached a turning point. After eight years of devolution, the Scottish people have demonstrated that it's time to take a fresh direction, time for Scotland to make progress.

The SNP government has a firm belief that, while Scotland can do better within the limits of devolution, our country will do best with the full responsibilities enjoyed by similar successful independent nations.

We look off our east coast to Norway, the second most prosperous country in the world, off our west coast to Ireland, the fourth most prosperous country in the world, and off our north coast to Iceland, the sixth most prosperous country in the world.

All these independent countries represent an arc of prosperity and Scotland has more resources than any one of them. As well as our abundant natural resources, we have an educated and skilled workforce and a globally recognised identity

and reputation for quality and integrity. All the ingredients for greater success are there.

The 300-year old Union is no longer fit for purpose. It was never designed for the 21st century world

Successful modern nations are built on economic competitiveness. The SNP has set out our approach for a more competitive Scottish economy and to creating the firm financial foundations we will need to take forward our social democratic contract with Scotland - a contract that will see the results of more effective and efficient government and higher sustainable economic growth shared more widely across

Scottish society.

We will deliver fresh thinking and a new

approach so we can maximise opportunity within our nation. We will put economic success at the heart of our efforts to build a safer, healthier and fairer nation.

We've got the talent and ability in Scotland to make a real success of our country. By achieving more over these next few years we will persuade even more Scots to take the next steps to independence.

Devolution | Summer 2007 | OxfordForum 35

So why is independence necessary? Independence would give the Scottish Parliament full control over Scottish affairs, and the right to decide when to share power with others.

It would give Scotland the same rights and the same responsibilities as other nations. It would give us a voice on the world stage and a say in international bodies like the UN and EU. With an SNP government, independence would also bring greater freedom for individuals, families and communities within a society built on common interests.

Independence would bring home Scotland's share of North Sea oil and gas revenues.

The SNP campaigned for the Scottish Parliament because we believed it was a move in the right direction. But devolution is not enough.

Although the Scottish Parliament has brought a new level of democracy to our country, its powers are limited and therefore there is a limit to what it can achieve. With devolution Westminster keeps control of crucial areas of policy including the economy, taxation, benefits, pensions, immigration and asylum, broadcasting, defence and international affairs.

With independence the Scottish Parliament would have control of these policy areas, enabling Scottish politicians to take key strategic decisions in our national interest.

The 300-year old Union is no longer fit for purpose. It was never designed for the 21st century world. It is now well past its sell by date and is holding Scotland back.

The SNP believe Scotland and England should be equal nations - friends and partners - both free to make our own choices.

Independence would give Scotland what most other countries take for granted - the freedom to decide what kind of society we want to live in and how to interact with the world around us. In other words, normality.

We would not expect the people of Ireland or Sweden to ask another nation to take decisions for them because they didn't feel up to the job

As individuals, we value our own independence. We accept that it is entirely natural to make our own decisions, to earn and spend our own money, and to take responsibility for our own lives. Why should we settle for anything less for our country?

As a nation, we accept the independence of other countries as normal. We do not think it strange that the people of Norway and Denmark run their own affairs. We would not expect the people of Ireland

or Sweden to ask another nation to take decisions for them because they didn't feel up to the job. Why should the people of Scotland be any different?

Most of us also want our communities to have more independence. We want to have a greater say in deciding how our public services should be funded and delivered; we want to participate in decisions which affect the environment around us and we want to contribute more to the communities we live in. That too is normal - but it won't happen unless we start by taking control of our country and taking decisions for ourselves.

There is no question that the Scottish economy has been underperforming in comparison to others. Scotland's growth rate over the last generation has been one of the lowest in Europe - an average of 1.8 per cent compared to the UK's own 2.3 per cent and smaller European countries' 3.1 per cent.

We believe Scotland, with its tremendous assets - chief amongst which are our educated and innovative people - is capable of matching our neighbours' success. This ambition is our top priority. To achieve a step-change in Scottish economic growth, the SNP is determined to provide the necessary leadership and focus in government.

To accomplish this, an SNP government will enact policies representing the best strategies for success we have seen in action abroad in countries like Norway, Ireland and America and the best ideas for competitiveness we have heard from individuals, organisations and businesses here in Scotland. Some of these policies can be implemented under devolution but others require the full powers of an independent country.

The SNP will lead a smaller, more efficient government. We will lower business taxes and deliver a lighter regulatory touch, refocusing the business support network on key strategic tasks.

We will support innovation and increase access to capital, along with ensuring continued educational and research opportunities. We will provide a competitive alternative to PFI based on bond issue to support public infrastructure projects. We will develop a population strategy and invest more strategically in Scotland's creative and arts sector.

The SNP will also bring a new focus on positioning Scotland as a world leader in energy.





maximizing our vast renewables potential and supporting new clean carbon technologies. As well as benefiting the Scottish economy, this will enable us to play a major role in meeting the challenge of climate change.

Independence would bring home Scotland's share of North Sea oil and gas revenues. An SNP government will ensure the boon of the North Sea lasts in perpetuity by establishing a fund for future generations, following examples from Norway, Canada and other resource-rich countries.

Oil and renewables – along with a set of pro-Scottish business policies – can help transform our economic prospects over the next 30 years. Crucially, the SNP will ensure that economic growth is shared and sustainable.

But independence is not just about a more successful and sustainable economy. It is also about playing our part in the world around us.

The EU plays an important role in Scotland yet we have no direct voice in the decision-making process. To become part of the decision-making process in Europe, Scotland needs to become a member state. To become a member state, Scotland has to become independent. We will be in good company – seven out of the ten new EU member states have populations similar to or smaller than Scotland.

SNP: A BRIEF HISTORY

The SNP were founded in 1934 through a merger between the left-wing National Party of Scotland and the right-of-centre Scottish Party. After resolving ideological conflicts between these two parties, the party had become traditionally left-of-centre.

The party won its first Westminster seat in 1970, 36 years after its inception. Alex Salmond, now First Minister of Scotland, has led the party since 2004, and also between 1990 and 2000. He is both MP for Banff and Buchan, and MSP for Gordon.

Scotland's devolved Parliament, whose first elections were in 1999, has power over taxation, health affairs, education, health, Scots law, agriculture and environmental policy. However, the UK Parliament retains the power to extend or reduce the chamber's terms of reference.

independence would bring greater freedom for families and communities in a society built on common interests

Independence would give Scotland a voice on the international stage; a voice we can use to promote peace and reconciliation, and fairness. The SNP will always uphold the rule of international law. An SNP government in an independent Scotland would never send Scottish soldiers into an illegal conflict, like the Iraq war.

Independence would also enable us to honour our commitments to international development aid. An SNP government would meet the UN recommended aid contributions level of 0.7 per cent of national income as well as supporting reform of international trade bodies like the World Trade Organisation to create a more level playing field between developed and less developed nations.

With independence Scotland would be able to choose our own priorities in defence. The majority of Scottish people are opposed to having a new generation of nuclear weapons stationed on the Clyde. The SNP agrees. We think that nuclear weapons are the wrong choice for a successful Scotland.

An SNP government in an independent Scotland will negotiate the safe removal of nuclear weapons from Scotland's land, sea and air space. We will make Scotland nuclear-free. Not only would this benefit Scotland, it would greatly assist the international struggle against nuclear proliferation.

So how will Scotland gain her independence? Scotland will become independent when the people of Scotland vote for it in a democratic referendum.

If a majority of those who vote in an independence referendum vote for independence, representatives of the Scottish Executive will then begin negotiations with Westminster to agree an Independence Settlement.

While negotiations are under way, a written constitution for an independent Scotland will be drafted, which will guarantee rights for Scotland's citizens and set out how Scotland will be governed.

Scotland is closer now to independence than she has been since 1707.

The election on May 3rd saw the SNP gain the biggest share of the vote in our history. In addition to parliamentary success, the SNP also gained the largest number of councillors, elected in local authority elections held on the same day.

The SNP is working hard to earn the trust and support of the people of Scotland and we will trust Scots to take the decision on Scotland's future in an independence referendum. The choice will be theirs. That is the fair and democratic way.

The Scottish National Party lead a minority administration in Scotland's devolved Parliament. They have pledged to hold a referendum on independence during their time in office





at what price freedom?

WILLIAM HYNES considers whether
Scotland can afford independence

PRIME MINISTER GLADSTONE once argued that home rule (devolution) could bind the nations of the United Kingdom together by recognising "the distinctive qualities of the separate parts of great countries". Yet after seven years of Scottish devolution and following the results of the Scottish Parliament elections of May 3rd, a referendum on full independence in Scotland is likely. The SNP case for separation is not based on religious freedoms, linguistic separatism or freedom from English repression but on a simple economic proposition – an independent Scotland within the EU would be able to reach its full potential increasing national income and living standards.

Three hundred years ago, ambition and aspiration led to economic disaster which undermined attempts to establish Scotland not only as an independent nation but as a world power. The success of small nations around Europe is cause for optimism. Ireland

in particular, itself once part of the United Kingdom, is a successful example that the Scottish nationalists would wish to pursue. Most media commentary on Scottish independence has focused on the short term fiscal consequences and the balance between the costs in terms of financing public spending and the benefits from oil revenues. All else equal this is an important issue, but the case for independence is based on the assumption that Scotland would be transformed economically.

An important difference from the debate on Scottish nationalism in the late 1970s is globalisation. Globalisation creates opportunities for small nations and in an apparent contradiction has been accompanied by the rise of regionalisation with separatist movements in Lombardy, Catalonia, and Quebec gaining prominence. This article will attempt to address some of the issues surrounding the economics of an independent Scotland, being informed by

history and recent experiences of globalisation and the size of nations.

For centuries the United Kingdom has been under threat – a political experiment began in 1707, augmented in 1801 and partially dissolved in 1921. The English had for centuries attempted to homogenise the population by stamping out the Irishness and the Welshness of those parts of the United Kingdom. Yet there was a different approach to Scottishness – an affectionate disregard, but now the menace posed questions about the continuation of the Union. The Scottish had only originally relinquished their national sovereignty because of a failed venture to colonise part of Panama – the Darien expedition was a disaster in human terms but also determined the fate of the nation. This attempt to play a dominant role in the first era of globalization was perhaps flawed from the start.

The Union proved to be relatively prosperous during the time of Empire as the Scots played a

disproportionate role with clear benefits accruing to them. However, cracks have emerged in the post-war period as the Empire slowly ceased to exist and with it perhaps the rationale for the Union. The political arrangement may now be out of step with the modern global economy – the nation state is in decline. For the Scottish, there may be a better economic arrangement.

Salai Martin, Professor of Economics at Columbia University and supporter of Catalan independence, has refuted the main arguments made against the viability of a Catalan State. The basis of his argument is that economic progress is achieved with a creative population willing to work, a legal system that guarantees investors property rights, incentives to companies to innovate and to adopt new technology, an educational system which helps the population to be more productive, a good government that encourages internal and external trading and never sinks a productive economy with excessive taxes, and a fair bureaucracy which maintains fiscal and monetary stability.

The question then is can a nationalist government put in place the right policies and incentives to make economic progress a reality? Certainly a government catering to local needs with a homogenous population can better design policies which are fit for purpose. Also, one can evaluate the extent to which the UK government is currently matching these requirements. Complete autonomy and policies designed for local conditions would seem to be a more efficient outcome.

The SNP rightly points to Ireland as a potential model for economic success. There are important insights too on the decline of the Northern Irish economy within the UK framework. Buckwell (1979) argued that too much and too little interference by London has created a 'Factory of Grievance' – a province completely dependent on British resources. Buckwell blames the devolved system for creating incentive problems, concluding that there really is no halfway house between union and complete separation.

The SNP case for separation isn't based on religion, language or freedom from English repression; but on economics

Crafts (1995) goes further maintaining that continued British involvement in the Northern Ireland economy was doing significant damage by the 1950s. The weaknesses in the Northern Ireland economy were 'sustained by the incentive structures embedded in British Institutions.' (Crafts 1995) Northern Ireland is firmly wedded to the UK, having a bloated civil service and high public spending coupled with a weak economic dynamic. As an independent country facing international competition and a hard budget constraint, Scotland would have to manage an incentive driven economy with appropriate policies and mechanisms. It took the south sometime to get this balance right – in fact it could be argued that it took almost 70 years – but

Scotland has a lot more to work with.

An interesting way to think about Scottish independence is to consider the economic theories of optimal size. Motivated by the creation of new countries after the end of the cold war and growing economic integration associated with political disintegration, many economists have attempted to show that economics is important in the determination of the distribution of the size of nations. Alesina and Spolaore (1997) and (2003) have presented a useful economic framework. The economic viewpoint goes a long way toward simplifying a complex issue, weaving together aspects of political science, history and philosophy. The authors discuss relationships between the equilibrium number of countries, democratisation and economic integration.

Ultimately the Scots will have to decide where their preferences lie

Important issues raised include answering the following questions: Does size of a country matter for economic prosperity of its inhabitants and are small countries economically viable? The framework is based on the assumption that the benefit of size stems from the economies of scale in the provision of public goods. The limits to this advantage come from increased heterogeneity. This trade off is influenced by the trade regime.

The ideal size for a market would be the whole world. While trade barriers were high – between 1920 and 1939, for instance, when few new countries were born – a large country was the best approximation to a global market, and so size was a source of economic strength. Now, markets are more open and technological changes have cut the cost of transport and of conveying information over large distances. 'As the trade regime

The growth in international trade and globalisation makes it less desirable to belong to a larger political union like the United Kingdom. As globalisation progresses, the need of one's industry to depend on a large local market is reduced. The gains from being small, on the other hand, remain the same. Hence, the optimal size of a country is reduced. Therefore the globalisation of recent times has created the right conditions for Scottish independence and assuming Scotland seeks membership of the EU, it is not only viable but there are also many potential benefits.

National Debt and liabilities and assets were a controversial issue in separation of the south of Ireland from the UK. The First World War left the UK with a war debt of £8,000,000,000. During the Westminster debates on the Anglo-Irish Treaty a

disgruntled MP felt that the treaty was allowing Ireland escape 'her proper share of taxation' estimated to be, proportional to population, £800,000,000. The large expense was as much for the defence of Ireland as Great Britain. Ireland was effectively able to shirk responsibility for the debts of the UK. Dail Eireann counter-claimed that they did not have any liability to the UK and furthermore they informed the US Congress that the imperial treasury owed substantial amounts to the Irish people.

The calculation was based on emigration: The loss of man power, £3,152,000,000 put down against Britain for everybody who ever emigrated and for the over taxation by £2.75 million a year for 120 years, a total of £330 million. Finally they claimed that Ireland was over taxed in the war to the extent of £102 million. This amounted to a final liability of £4,584,000,000! National debt is not a large issue today but the defence issue is important with UK defence spending among the highest in the world. In a world of peace and security, small nations do not have to spend large amounts on national defence and could cut public spending in this area substantially. The extent to which military bases and assets would be divided would be interesting.

We have examined the micro reasons why Scotland would benefit from policies which were 'closer to the people'. Also the macro environment is very favourable for small independent countries. There is a lot of potential for an independent Scotland to thrive and prosper. Still it would be a risky endeavour – the extent of the budget deficit is unclear but even with total oil revenues will have to lead to either an increase in taxes or decrease in spending in the short run. The basic idea of an independent Scotland is viable but there is a trade-off to be made. Ultimately the Scots will have to decide where their preferences lie: they may be willing to pay a price for independence.

William Hynes is an economist based at Trinity College, Dublin. His thesis relates to the economics of Irish independence.



an english voice

PROFESSOR JOHN CURTICE examines why England is lagging behind Scotland and Wales in democratic representation

There can be little doubt that the asymmetric devolution settlement put in place by the creation of the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly defies all logic. In the case of Scotland and, increasingly, Wales, key domestic policy areas such as health and education, are decided in Edinburgh and Cardiff by Scottish and Welsh politicians alone. But the equivalent decisions for England are decided at Westminster where MPs from Scotland and Wales still have a say.

The solution to this so-called 'West Lothian question' would seem simple. Stop MPs from Scotland and Wales (and now that devolution has been restored there, Northern Ireland too)

from voting on laws being passed at Westminster that only apply to England. Ideally too, stop MPs from Scotland and Wales becoming ministers in departments such as the Department of Health that are effectively English only. Then England would be able to run her own domestic affairs in just the same way that Scotland and Wales currently do theirs.

But two questions need to be asked about any anomaly such as this. First, what are the full implications of adhering to the principle that the anomaly in question appears to break? Are there other ways in which that principle is being offended that need to be dealt with? Second, what sentiments are at stake? Political institutions and

arrangements are not just a question of logic. They are also an expression of affect and identity. People's willingness to accept the authority of any set of political arrangements rests in part on whether they feel those arrangements represent and symbolise the community of fellow citizens – such as a nation – to which they feel they belong.

The importance of sentiment in deciding how best to deal (if at all) with the West Lothian question is immediately apparent. The most straightforward way of ensuring that England, Scotland and Wales all have the same ability to run their own affairs would be to create a parliament for England that has similar rights and responsibilities as the devolved institutions

elsewhere in the United Kingdom. Trouble is, there does not seem to be the same appetite for a parliament in England as there is for separate institutions in Scotland and Wales. The British Social Attitudes survey has asked people in England on a number of occasions to choose between having an English Parliament, a system of regional assemblies, and the status quo. When it last did so in 2005, still only 18 per cent backed the idea of an English Parliament while no less than 54 per cent were content for 'England to be governed as it is now, with laws made by the UK parliament'.

There is little doubt that the asymmetric devolution settlement created by the Scottish Parliament defies all logic

There is perhaps one simple explanation why England does not feel the need for its own parliament - the House of Commons is already widely regarded as an 'English' institution. After all when it emerged in the thirteenth century it was a purely English institution to which representatives from Wales, Scotland and finally Ireland were only subsequently admitted. According to the 1999 British Social Attitudes survey, as many as 30 per cent of people in England regard Parliament as primarily an English rather than a British institution, while another 27 per cent think of it as equally English and British. We should then perhaps not be surprised that even amongst those people in England who think of themselves as being English rather than British only 20 per cent back a separate English parliament. For many the House of Commons evidently already adequately represents and symbolises their sense of feeling English.

We can thus already see why the West Lothian question is not just one of logic. Our ability to answer it is constrained because England does not feel the need for distinctive political institutions in the way that Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland do. Yet at the same time many a survey has ascertained that a clear majority of people in England feel that Scottish MPs should not be voting on English laws (a sentiment, incidentally, with which many people in Scotland concur). So it seems that some way has to be found of recognising the dual role of the House of Commons as partly an English institution, and partly a British one. Only allowing MPs from England to vote on laws that only affect England would seem a good way of delivering that.

Not that this would be straightforward. Much legislation passed at Westminster is often neither purely English or purely UK in scope. Often some clauses apply to England, others to England and Wales, yet others to Scotland as well, while the same or different regulations may be being introduced for Northern Ireland. This means that when voting for or against bills as a whole, as happens at second or third reading, MPs can be dealing with legislation that is partly English,

partly not. Consider for example the legislation that introduced 'top-up fees' for university students in England but not those in Scotland, a legislation that only secured its second reading thanks to the votes of Scottish MPs. Trouble is, this same legislation also created a new Arts and Humanities Research Council that had a UK-wide remit. If only English MPs are to vote on English laws then Westminster will need to change the way it legislates so that it is much clearer what is an English law in the first place.

But we still have to ask ourselves whether only having English MPs voting on English laws is

the details of the English legislation that it passes is correct than it is inclined to do at present. No longer would it be able to rely on the Lords to sort the difficult detail out for it.

But even if the Lords no longer have a say in English legislation, we are still left with a problem. If people in England are to have the same ability to influence their domestic policy as do those living elsewhere in the United Kingdom, then how people vote at election time needs to have a similar degree of influence on who is elected to decide on that policy. And that at the moment is clearly not the case.

The Conservatives actually 'won' the 2005 general election in England. They secured 35.7 per cent of the vote to Labour's 35.5 per cent. Nevertheless thanks to the way the first past the post electoral system operated, Labour still ended up with an overall majority of 43 seats. The distinctive voice of England is not currently being muffled by MPs from Scotland and Wales, but rather by the operation of the electoral system within England itself.

The contrast with what happened in Scotland in this year's devolved election is striking. There 73 of the 129 seats in the Edinburgh parliament were elected using first past the post. Labour won a majority of those seats, 37, even though the party trailed the Scottish National Party by 32.9 per cent of the nationwide vote to 32.2 per cent. But the proportional part of the electoral system in Scotland 'corrected' this anomaly and ensured that the SNP ended up with one more seat than Labour.

So if the people of England are to have the same influence over their domestic affairs as those in Scotland and Wales now do over theirs, then we have to examine not only which MPs are able to vote on English laws but also how they are elected. The process of electing English MPs is very different from that used to elect the devolved politicians in Scotland and Wales. And it is a process that fails to ensure that those MPs adequately reflect public opinion within England.

sufficient to ensure that people in England have the same degree of influence over their affairs as do the people of Scotland and Wales on theirs. There are at least two reasons why it would not. If the West Lothian question is to be answered properly more sweeping changes to be made than simply stopping Scottish and Welsh MPs from voting on English legislation.

The first issue is the position of the House of Lords. The creation of the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly not only removed the ability of English MPs to influence domestic policy in Scotland and Wales - it also ended the right of the House of Lords to have any say in Scottish legislation too. Laws passed in Edinburgh are now decided by a single chamber, the Scottish Parliament, sitting on its own.

The distinctive voice of England is not being muffled by MPs from Scotland and Wales, but rather by the operation of the electoral system itself

This divergence of practice has made a difference over the last eight years. Foxhunting was 'banned' in Scotland before it was in England because the Lords were unable to obstruct the relevant legislation in Scotland. For the same reason too the equivalent of Clause 28 in Scotland, that is the law that barred local authorities from 'promoting' homosexuality, was removed from the statute book in Scotland before it was in England.

So if England is to be put on a par with Scotland and Wales then not only should Scottish and Welsh MPs be stopped from voting on English laws, but so also should their Lordships. That of course would mean the Commons would have to exercise much greater care in ensuring that

In focusing on 'English MPs for English laws' critics of the current asymmetric devolution settlement have failed to pursue the logic of their case to its conclusion. The settlement does not just raise questions about the role of Scottish and Welsh MPs. It also raises more profound questions about the constitution, including the role of the House of Lords and how MPs are elected. Unless these are addressed as well, England will continue to find itself in an anomalous position as compared with Scotland and Wales.

John Curtice is Professor of Politics, Strathclyde University



devolutionary strife

ORLA BYRNE on the difficult history of power-sharing in Northern Ireland and renewed hopes following the historic DUP-Sinn Fein meeting in March

// THE HAPPENINGS HERE today represent a fundamental change of approach with parties moving forward together to build a better future for the people that we represent. These were the words of Martin McGuinness, Northern Ireland's newly appointed deputy first minister, as he articulated the emotions of this momentous day in Northern Irish politics. 8th May 2007 marked the long awaited return of Home Rule to Northern Ireland. "It's a day that many people thought would never come", the coming together of two politically opposite poles was like "the lion laying down with the lamb".

Northern Ireland's politicians have struggled for the past five years to restore devolution, and after three failed attempts to revive power sharing many thought the events of the 8th May unimaginable. Leading members of the two prominent political parties in Northern Ireland, the Rev. Ian Paisley (leader of the DUP) and Martin McGuinness (leading member of Sinn Féin) agreed to work together in a power-sharing government. In committing his party to the deal, Sinn Féin leader Gerry Adams acknowledged that there would be challenges ahead, but added that the deal marked the start of "a new era of politics on the island of Ireland".

Northern Ireland was created as a political entity in 1921. The plantation of Ulster by Scottish and English colonists resulted in it following a different economic and religious trajectory to the rest of the island. This political separation of Northern Ireland from the rest of Ireland was impelled, as Protestants and Catholics were divided over the issue of Home Rule. Most Irish Catholics desired complete independence from Britain; Irish Protestants, on the other hand, feared living in a country ruled by a Catholic majority.

As a result, the British government passed the Government of Ireland Act in 1920. This

Act artificially divided Ireland into two separate political entities. The Act was advocated largely by the Protestants of Ulster but was met with condemnation from the southern Catholics who continued to demand complete independence for a unified Ireland. Subsequently in 1921, a treaty was signed creating the Irish Free State (known today as the Republic of Ireland), comprising the 23 southern counties and three counties in Ulster. The remaining six counties became known as Northern Ireland and remained part of the United Kingdom.

Armed hostilities had largely subsided after the 1921 agreement, but violence erupted again in the late 1960s, with fierce rioting in Derry in 1968 and in Belfast in 1969. Many unsuccessful attempts were made to bring about a resolution to the conflict during the 1970s and 1980s. However violence was still prevalent in the early 1990s and the unrelenting presence of the British troops remained. A significant attempt to bring the conflict to an end was made in 1985 when the British and Irish prime ministers, Margaret Thatcher and Garrett Fitzgerald, signed the Anglo-Irish Agreement. This agreement was a fundamental step in attempting to resolve the situation in Northern Ireland, in recognising for the first time the right of the Republic of Ireland to have a role in the affairs of the north of the country. Unfortunately, the implementation of the Agreement was blocked, due to the opposition of the unionist politicians.

Attempts to launch further talks between rival officials and the British government took place again in the early 1990s. In August 1994, the peace process was reinvigorated when the IRA announced a cease-fire. This announcement and subsequent efforts towards a peaceful resolution made by the IRA made it possible for Sinn Féin to participate in multiparty peace talks (up to this point Sinn Féin had been excluded from such talks).

Northern Ireland. As such, full-scale peace negotiations began in Belfast in October 1997. The talks culminated in the signing of the monumental Good Friday Agreement by the main political parties on both sides on 10th April 1998.

The Agreement called for many new structures to be implemented including an elected assembly for Northern Ireland. As a result, the minority Catholics finally gained a share of the political power in Northern Ireland, and the Republic of Ireland exercised a voice in Northern Irish affairs.

At long last people will be allowed to "clash constitutionally instead of violently"

Although it was disputed for decades, many unionist leaders now admit that the Northern Irish government in the period 1922-1972 was discriminatory. One unionist leader, Nobel Peace Prize winner David Trimble, openly described Northern Ireland as having been a "cold house for Catholics" during this time.

With the signing of the landmark Good Friday Agreement, many people believed that lasting peace could at last be a reality for the north of Ireland. International recognition and support for the peace process came in October 1998 when the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded jointly to John Hume and David Trimble, the leaders of the largest Catholic and Protestant parties. The following June, the hopes of the Northern Irish people were dashed once again as the peace process was stalled following the

Real hope was restored on July 28th 2005 when the IRA released a statement announcing that it was entering a new era, and unequivocally renouncing violence. The statement expressed that the IRA pledged to assist in the development of purely political and democratic programs through exclusively political means, and that "all IRA units have been ordered to dump arms" and "to complete the process to verifiably put its arms beyond use".

This statement represented real hope for a democratic means to attaining lasting peace

in the North of Ireland. As a result a meeting described as being a milestone in Irish political history was conducted between the party leaders Ian Paisley and Gerry Adams. The meeting, which was the first in which the two men had met face to face, resulted in an agreement for a power-sharing government. The new administration was scheduled to take control on May 8th.

As a result of that meeting, power-sharing and thus local government have returned to the north of Ireland. The people are now finally exposed to a local government whose issues and concerns are concentrated on them. Paisley stated: "I believe we are starting on a road to bring us back to peace and prosperity" - a thought shared and hoped by many. The historic relevance and importance of this decision will be overtly apparent in the everyday lives of the ordinary people of the north of Ireland. Finally politics has taken over from violence. The voice of the people, their issues and concerns will be the focus of debate and at long last people will be allowed to "clash constitutionally instead of violently".

Tony Blair, whose presence has been greatly appreciated and felt throughout the long process, praised the historic deal and paid homage to its significance. He stated that power sharing offered a chance for Northern Ireland to escape "those heavy chains of history" that had left it "pockmarked by conflict, hardship and hatred". Aherm also paid tribute to the British prime minister describing him as a "true friend of peace and a true friend of Ireland", and praised him for "the true determination that he had, for just sticking with it, for 10 tough years".

The next few weeks and months will be "the greatest and most exciting challenge in the life of Northern Irish politics". At last the chains of history that have weighed down and stifled the process of peace in the North of Ireland have been cut away. The foundations for lasting peace and equality that have been missing from Northern Irish politics can finally be laid down.

Orla Byrne is reading for a BA in Law at St. Anne's College.

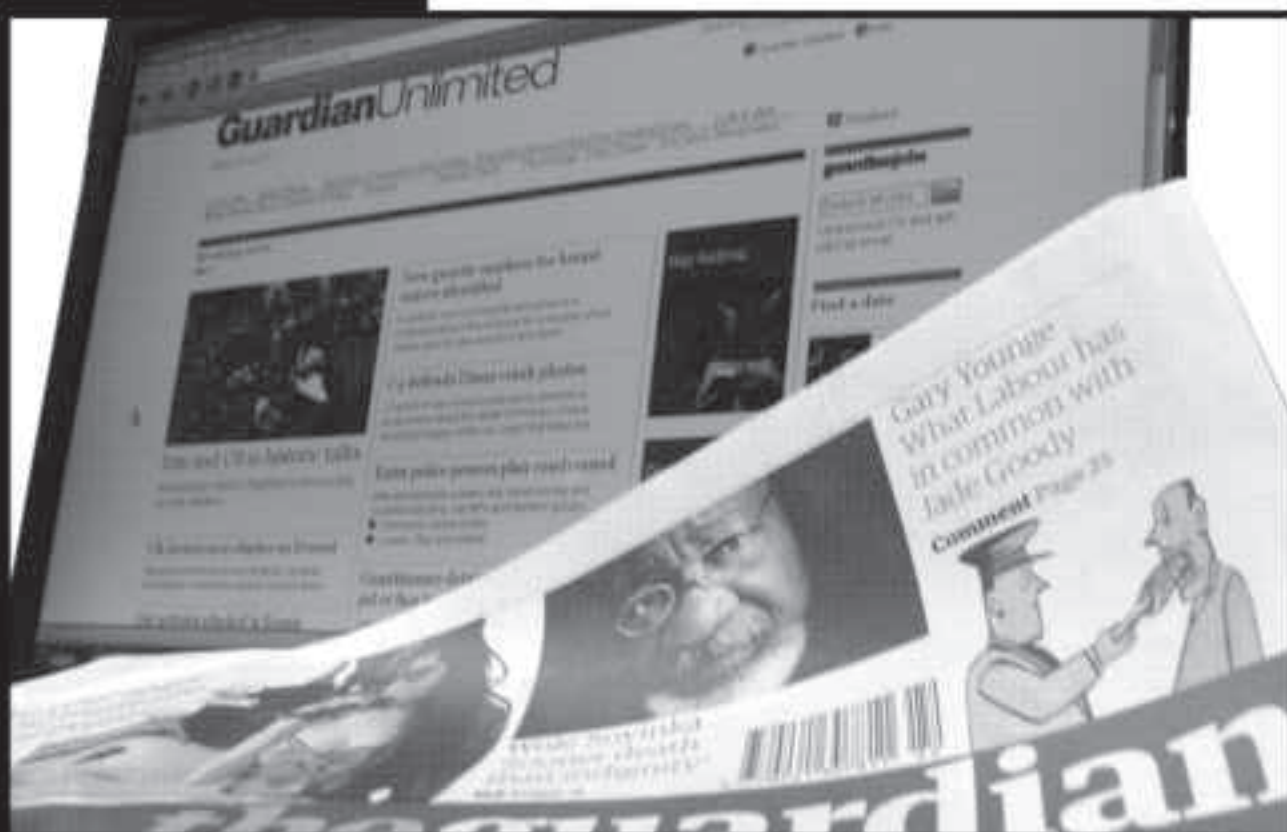
The people are now finally exposed to a local government whose issues and concerns are concentrated on them

Thus in December of that year, the first official talks took place between Sinn Féin and British government. Sinn Féin demanded a British withdrawal from the north of Ireland and Great Britain countered that the IRA must give up its weapons before Sinn Féin would be allowed to negotiate on the same basis as other parties. However the issue of IRA disarmament continued to be a stumbling factor for the talks and subsequent negotiations.

Talks resumed in late February 1995 when the British and Irish governments released a proposal for talks on the future of Northern Ireland. The talks were to be conducted between the political parties of Northern Ireland, the Irish government and British government, and would focus on the establishment of a form of self-government for

failure of the IRA to completely disarm. Sinn Féin insisted that the IRA would only give up weapons after the new government was assembled.

As a result, the new government failed to form on schedule, bringing the entire process to a halt. Following further complications relating to the apparent failure of the IRA to disarm and other factors namely the "pulling out" of the agreement by prominent politician David Trimble, the British government suspended the Northern Irish parliament on February 12th 2000 and once again imposed direct rule from Westminster. Further attempts were made in the forthcoming years however all efforts proved futile and direct rule was imposed on Northern Ireland by the British government once again.



guarding the blogosphere

JAMES BALL interviews the Guardian's director of digital content, Emily Bell, about the new page design, Comment is Free and the future of new media

// THE MOST DANGEROUS thing is not to innovate when you're ahead' says Emily Bell, the Guardian's director of digital content. She's referring to Guardian Unlimited's new front page, which has received a mixed reaction from the site's regular users.

'People asked 'why have you redesigned it, when it wasn't broken?' It was broken: some

of our loyal patrons just hadn't noticed.' The site had remained largely unchanged since its 1999 launch, and was beginning to show its age; 'becoming quite hard to navigate'.

The relaunched page aimed to fix this, featuring a wider, column based design, making it easier for video, audio and other multimedia content to be accessed. Navigation

has been altered and optimised in response to user feedback. The wider, column-based design, makes the site look more similar to other newspaper websites, such as the Times or Telegraph.

Defending this, Emily pointed out that, though all newspapers put news on the front page, all newspapers are not alike. Readers want

certain features laid out in certain ways, and this is what works. "When I look across the site, at the pictures, character and story choice, it is still distinctive."

The new look launched on the day Tony Blair announced his 'long goodbye'. The story allowed the site to showcase some of its new features, including a much larger main picture, and easier access to a huge range of background on the story. Emily insists, though, that the launch wasn't deliberately timed to coincide with the PM's departure. "We would have looked like right Charlies if we'd launched it and it had immediately fallen over - that was really high risk! That said, it's better to do it around a big news event that you know is going to happen rather than launch it and have a big story suddenly drop into your lap."

The relaunch went well, especially compared to those of its rivals. Times Online was inaccessible for several hours after its launch. However, this is largely because only the front page has been updated - on the site's other pages, the old design remains.

"If you're confident that you can cope with [all the problems], then I think it's a good idea to do what the Times did and launch all at once. If you're not confident, when you've got very high traffic, then you have to do it in a slightly different way... The upside is that we've now had two releases, which have, touch wood, gone without any major technical hitches. That's the really important thing."

Another recent innovation of Guardian Unlimited is the 'Comment is Free' site, which gives users the ability to freely comment on and debate posts from over 200 regular contributors. All comment pieces published in the newspaper also appear on the site. The site, though successful, has received some criticism - in particular, that the users who post comments are biased, and that the site generates poor-quality debate. Both criticisms are rejected by Emily.

"We did an exercise marking all the comments across a range of threads: no stars for offensive, bad comments, ought to be deleted; one star for rude and unhelpful; through to five stars: actually better than the article. What we discovered is that seventy per cent of all comments were remarkably high [quality], and the majority of the rest were three stars."

"The most dangerous thing is not to innovate when you're ahead"

Reading comments can prove painful for the writers, though. "Some people find it a very bruising experience. However, on the whole, I think we found it incredibly exhilarating: we think it's completely changed the way we need to think about liberal debate and how we present our journalism."

"Comment is Free" marks a significant trend towards interactive content online - websites have shifted from something presented to readers, towards user-generated content - exemplified by YouTube or Facebook. As Emily

says, "it's got a hell of a lot more interactive than it used to be". Animated, she expands on this.

"You need to engage the audience, because they're your partner. Some just want to read; some want to leave a comment to correct it; some want to leave a comment to praise the author; some want to leave a comment to deride the author; some want to tell other people."

"Guido Fawkes and Richard Littlejohn are not so different. Bloggers hold up a mirror to the commentariat"

Sir Simon Jenkins, whose columns appear on Comment is Free, is less convinced of the merits of interactivity and blogging. Indeed, in an interview in the last issue of the Forum he criticised blogs as producing material which is "rarely considered and often illiterate". Unsurprisingly, Emily doesn't agree, arguing (after praising the quality of Sir Simon's column) that columnists and bloggers, though regularly in conflict with one another, perform much the same function, and are subject to the same variation in quality.

"Guido Fawkes [a famous political blogger] and Richard Littlejohn [popular newspaper columnist] have an eight hundred thousand pound difference in their salaries, but actually maybe they're not so different. Bloggers do hold up a bit of a mirror to the commentariat."

Particularly when looking at specialist content, for example from professionals in law or media, Emily argues blogs are often excellent sources of information due to the expertise behind them. Blogs without informative content, she suggests, fail to attract readers. "There are seventy million blogs, which are subject to the same power law as everything else: eighty per cent of the really good stuff resides in ten to twenty per cent of the total. But you can't deny that it has completely liberated a whole generation of literate, interested and engaged people."

freesheets, against the backdrop of five radio stations, rolling TV news and online competition - the UK news market is fiercely competitive.

If newspapers are struggling to be noticed in the clamour of this crowded marketplace, can online publications hope to stand out? Emily naturally argues they can - and indeed that they have the upper hand.

"Online news has enormous advantages; it means that you don't have to fill dead air time. If you're running Sky News or News 24, every day you have to pay the same number of correspondents the same amount of money, you have to run the studios even when not very much is happening. On the web, when a big story breaks you can fill space exponentially, but you don't always have to do that much. You're free from the sort of economic treadmill that mainstream broadcasters are on with linear streams."

You can make your content work much harder because people can find it through search. I think that online news is a fantastic opportunity, particularly for newspaper organisations that feel that they've been pretty much trumped over the past fifteen years by radio and television rolling news. It really is our chance to get back in the game, and take them on with something that we can do just as well, if not better."

Looking ahead, Emily predicts the 'disappearance of a couple of titles' as the newspaper market contracts. This does not, though, signify a loss of interest in news itself. "There'll always be a market for people to find out what's going on in the world right now - people are endlessly fascinated by that."

Emily has ambitious plans for the next few years. Not satisfied with an apparently 'substantial' lead over rival quality UK newspaper sites, Emily wants the Guardian Unlimited to chase the New York Times.

"You feel that they're there to be caught, and we can maybe do that. I think that in five or ten years' time we will be the world's leading liberal voice in terms of online output. Our lead in the UK market is going to be important in the short-term, but by the short-term I really do mean within the next twelve months. I think beyond that the international market is much more important."

Whether this ambitious target is achieved or not, it is clear that the Guardian Unlimited site plans to continue adapting in the brave new world of online journalism - and its rivals had better get moving if they plan to keep up.

Emily Bell is Director of Digital Content for the Guardian Media Group. She previously edited mediaguardian.co.uk.



news values

STEVE HERRMANN,
editor of BBC News
Interactive, discusses
his challenging role
with the *Forum*

Ever since television first cracked into existence in 1929, the BBC has been at the forefront of the medium. The original broadcast of Logie Baird's invention forged technological history via the BBC, transmitter in London, and since the BBC production company as we know it today took up the mantle in 1932, it has built and maintained a solid reputation. And there is no element of the BBC less consistent and recognisable than BBC news – right on universally deemed a British institution. Through the changing faces of society, and the progression of technology, the BBC has adapted and endured, maintaining its position as one of the most recognised and trusted media corporations in the world.

But news is changing as the worlds of digital and online begin to take over. At the forefront of the BBC's online team is Steve Herrmann, Editor

of BBC News Online – the most popular news website in the UK. How has the website remained so popular?

"One of the reasons", explains Steve, "is that we – the BBC, that is – saw the potential of the internet fairly early, and invested in a fairly confident way from the outset. So, going back to 1997, which was when this website was set up, John Birt [then Director General] put some quite serious editorial and technical resources into online. So we made a very strong start, and audiences grew quite rapidly. And as the audiences grew, the confidence from the BBC senior leadership that they had made the right decision with the investment grew as well. I think that is one of the key reasons; not the only reason, though."

Of course, not everybody considers the success of BBC News Interactive to be wholly

attributable to shrewd assessment of the market, and adaptation to changing demand: a common bone of contention among the BBC's rivals is that its public funding gives it an unfair advantage over its commercial competitors. Considering these accusations, Herrmann reinforces the basic aims of the corporation: "I think it depends on what you see as the role of the BBC. [The BBC] is there to provide a public service; it's there to inform, educate and entertain, in the famous Reithian phrase – and news, in my view and the view of many people, is right at the heart of that public purpose. And in order to get our news and information out to people first, we are making use of the latest technology and platforms. So, what we're doing on the internet with our news website, I would argue, is an extension of what we do on television and radio; it's bringing the news and the best of the BBC's journalism to the widest possible



audience to the benefit of all. So it's returning value to the licence fee payers."

He also points out the BBC's other strengths when it comes to adapting to new media: "We're used to delivering rolling news when the need arises, and for continuous news channels, the broadcasting culture is not a newspaper one of specific publication time in the day, so it was much easier for us to take on that sort of 'breaking news' mantle consistently right from the outset. And I don't think you could say the same about newspaper websites - although they are making inroads into that now - and that's clearly an area where we cannot afford to be complacent. I think the other area where it's been, up until quite recently, easy for us to maintain a lead is on the multimedia and video, because obviously, as a broadcast organisation, we have got lots of it to offer - and it's good quality and it's hang up to the minute." He does, though, acknowledge that these advantages are dwindling: "The other online news publishers and newspapers are absolutely in that business as well, and now they're either partnering up to provide very good video, or else they're doing it themselves."

ultimately rather similar: "What you're really then talking about is the difference between sitting back in a settee and watching a big screen in the corner of a living room, or hunching over a smaller screen at your desk, in the office or in your study. And at that point, I think, the two things are almost the same."

To quench the public's thirst for up to the minute information, BBC News Online is increasingly taking a cross-medium approach, as exemplified by their coverage of the recent elections, which included on-air blog updates by political correspondent Nick Robinson. "We think that is the best possible way of using the different media to the best advantage, and pointing up the complementary nature of what they can do," explains Herrmann. "So, for example, if during an election news programme, you are able to say from time to time that you can see the full results by going to the clickable map on the website, that's a fine thing to be able to do - because you can't do that on television."

"And equally, on the website, to reflect the fact that there's live commenting going on by your top political correspondent in a blog also feels like

website risks blurring the line between news and comment. "I think," muses Herrmann, "To be honest, we have been caught out by that. I remember one occasion, we were rightly taken to task for running a piece that was quite clearly opinionated in what could easily have been construed as a news slot. So I think it is very much about the labelling. It's about clarity of the proposition, and I think if you are clear about what you're doing in any single piece, then it's fine. I think it is a challenge, though, because in a conventional newspaper, for example, there are pages and a comments page looks different from a news page: it's just really obvious where you are. On the web it's not necessarily so obvious, particularly if you come in at a story level, from Google or another search engine - which many people do."

News is an odd business - the 'public interest' and what the public are interested in are not always the same thing - signified by the huge popularity on the BBC website of certain stories. These include Britney's shaved head, 'gay' teletubby scandal, and of course the tale of a Sudanese man who married a goat. As to who should decide what makes the headlines, Herrmann said "We believe that one of the things that people come to us for, as BBC news, is to hear our idea about what is most important in the world, our synopsis of the world's events, and our editorial agenda. The difference now, though, is what we also give them is a mirror, so that they can see a reflection of what all of their fellow news readers everywhere are actually looking at, and I think that's a very instructive comparison to make. And I can't say that we're not informed by those reflections of what people are reading. I think we are, and we do take those on board. But if they were to dictate our editorial thinking, then we would simply lose any vestige of editorial voice and identity."

Though faced with the challenge of standing out among hundreds of news organisations, and thousands of 'citizen' journalists in a cluttered online world, the picture painted is rosy. The utilisation of new-media platforms for the extension and expansion of its news services has offered the BBC new modes of expression - a new 'voice', if you will, without any cost to its reputation or popularity. It remains to be seen, however, whether the role of the journalist in general will ultimately diminish as these technological advances promote and facilitate 'citizen journalism'.

With respect to the role of the professional journalist, Herrmann says "I don't think it's diminishing, but it is changing, and I think the role of citizen journalism is posing a range of interesting questions and challenges to the traditional role of the journalist. I think, though, there is probably a fruitful partnership to be made with citizen journalism."

It is impossible to predict in what direction news broadcasting will be ultimately taken, led by technological advances and growing audience interaction. Whatever direction is taken, it seems Herrmann is confident that the BBC will be able to keep pace, and not get lost along the way.

Steve Herrmann is editor of BBC News Interactive, managing BBC news online, and 'red button' services. He was previously World editor for the site

Online, people look for trusted names and brands within that sea of information, of which the BBC - BBC News - is one

The BBC has moved from the sole UK broadcaster to one of many. Herrmann is cautious as he assesses the implications of this - while he acknowledges that one the one hand the 'proliferation of news sources' shrinks the BBC's significance relative to the whole, he argues that this overwhelming array of news sources could lead users to 'look for the recognisable landmark: the kind of trusted names and brands within that big sea of information, of which the BBC - BBC News - is one. So, it kind of works both ways for us, I think."

New media evangelists are confident that the internet will obsolete television. Herrmann is less sure. "I don't have a crystal ball: the way in which people consume their news will increasingly be on demand - and that sort of seems to me to be a no-brainer. The idea that you need to wait until a specific hour of the day for your daily update of news is definitely something we're moving away from. But does that mean that people will entirely migrate to online? I'm not sure that it does."

What may be happening instead, he argues, is a less blurring of the line between the two. "When you've got digital television - where you've got a much wider range of channels, and you've got the ability to time shift - that's blurring the lines slightly between what you can do on the internet and what you can do on TV. And if, for example, TV over the internet really takes off - IPTV - and there are plenty of successful pilots out there - then the boundary has more or less gone."

However, despite the obvious differences between television and the internet as media formats, Herrmann considers the two to be

a very intuitive thing to do. We hope to do more and more of that sort of thing."

The internet community is by now firmly in the grips of the blogging 'craze', and blogs, of drastically differing tones and quality are everywhere. What is interesting, though, is to see professional journalists adopting the device. "I think one of the key advantages about blogs is that they are less formal and structured than a typical 400 word online article - let's say a piece of analysis or a comment piece - or a television package. They are much more flexible; you can do a very short blog entry, you can do a longer one. You can say something very long and thoughtful or you can say something just very off the cuff. In terms of BBC news, I think one of the things that we need to be better at doing is having different tones of voice, and being a little bit more conversational sometimes in the way we approach subjects. And I think blogs help you to do that."

Steve also argues that blogs help keep the BBC transparent and accountable, allowing explanation of "how we've come to the conclusion we've come to, or how we've come to get the story, or why we've told the story in a certain way - or what's going on behind the scenes as we try and tell a story. I think increasingly there will be an expectation for that sort of approach. And I think that's partly about building trust with your audience, and having a relationship with the audience - not behaving as though you're behind some sort of glass wall, and that what you say is immutable and can't be questioned."

It does seem that the infusion of blogs and comment pieces into what is intended as a news

life 2.0

ZOE FLOOD tells us about her hyper-connected 'second' life -
and its implications for her privacy



For a self-confessed internet junkie, I am surprisingly reluctant to launch myself into the wonderful world of the interactive web. I may spend more hours than I would care to think about hypnotised by a 13-inch glossy display, which feeds me news, information, entertainment and social contact. I may flit, disloyally, between at least five email accounts. I MSN, I gChat, I skype, I even iChat. In my Google Reader over fifty news and blog feeds update themselves at ten times the speed that I can even read the headlines, and I follow the lives of friends and acquaintances through the increasingly ubiquitous Facebook.

Yet I approach the majority of Web 2.0 services with caution. These online services, including social networking sites, sites with other forms of user-generated content, such as Blogger, YouTube and Flickr, and wikis such as Wikipedia, go beyond mere connectivity. They are so called because of the role users play in creating the data. Web 2.0 could be the latest revolution in online activity, enabling collaborative activity and sharing on a major scale (Wikipedia being a leading example), and further connecting our increasingly hyper-connected world. With the May 2007 launch of Facebook's Platform – providing users with an ever-increasing choice of applications that can be loaded into their profile, enabling user generation of a wide range of content – online social networks look set to become platforms for social software. As versatile as Web 2.0 may be, however, I still cannot escape my nagging reluctance to bare myself online for all to see. Even with my Facebook friends – all of whom I actually know from my 'first life', as the web-based virtual society, Second Life, would call it – I am careful to limit the information I broadcast.

Yet even for a slightly more circumspect hyper-connector, I cannot deny that online networking has drastically changed my social life. I unashamedly 'Facebook' someone after meeting them, and often before; I know far more than I would otherwise have done about both those who are on the 'periphery' of my social network and those to whom I am closest – from their cinematic predilections to the party they went to at the weekend. Living abroad, I find being 'linked in' to communities of which I am geographically not part particularly meaningful, and I interact more frequently and easily with members of my extended network.

Social networking online – first enabled by vladegrees.com from 1997, but significantly advanced with the launch of sites such as Friendster, MySpace, Facebook and Bebo from 2002 onwards – was originally expected to result in the creation of virtual friendships, initiated and sustained purely in the online, and as such unimpeded by spatial or temporal barriers. As a result, sites were criticised for promoting 'empty' virtual relationships that held no genuine social meaning. But as Dannah Boyd, an American academic dubbed the 'high priestess of Internet friendship' by the Financial Times, observed, most users of these sites were reinforcing their 'real-life' relationships. She came to characterise the sites as 'digital public spaces', replacing the traditional public spaces in which people, and in particular teenagers, would have interacted.

As the recent explosion of social networking has demonstrated – reportedly, Facebook receives 150,000 registrations a day, putting its current member base at close to 25 million, from 7.5 million in 2006, while MySpace attracts 230,000

registrations daily – virtual connections are not simply fit the lonely and isolated. We see social relationships mediated by a computer screen as somehow less meaningful than those conducted in the flesh. Yet studies have shown that in many cases online social networks are based on, and promote, existing social ties. The greater interaction permitted by the virtual arena enhances and deepens these extant relationships, increasing social capital – that is, the value of social networks and the inclinations that arise from these networks to do things for each.

A crucial aspect of this interaction, beyond creating and maintaining the initial connection, is the sharing process, and this is where my Web 2.0 life falls over. From sharing information about one's life – from mundane details to personal thoughts – to sharing images, video and music, all forms entail a certain degree of intimacy to online, and thus offline, relationships. However, with the emergence and rapid success of sites such as YouTube, Blogger and Flickr – all of which feature in the UK's top 20 most visited sites, according to the traffic-monitoring website Alexa, along with four other Web 2.0 sites – sharing has become a much more public phenomenon. Such sites give user-generated content an unprecedented public platform. New services such as Twitter – the new micro-blogger through which users can broadcast 'updates' on their activities, via the web, instant messaging or text message – produces a public log of users' activities, while the news site Digg contains stories written or shared by members, tracking interests and opinions.

Wherever we go on the web we leave an often indelible and potentially traceable digital footprint

The growing obsession with recording of the details of one's life – in the manner of Microsoft's Gordon Bell, 'the Frank Lloyd Wright of computers', who in 1998 went paperless and whose personal electronic archive is the most extensive in the world – and publishing them online has attracted much criticism. While Barack Obama's Twitter may give a fascinating real-time account of the campaign experiences of a US Presidential hopeful, Joe Bloggs' eating habits arguably do little more than contribute to the information overload.

In addition to the grumpy critic's lambasting of the 'average' user's perceived self-importance, there are more serious privacy implications of user-generated content. While we are all busy creating and sharing our own content, do we ever think about just how much information we are revealing, and to whom? Wherever we go on the web we are leaving an often indelible and potentially traceable digital footprint. When we create with Web 2.0, we are providing those who run the applications we use with a massive amount of unique data about ourselves. Some technology commentators note the immense value of these services that essentially generate no revenue, and remark that their innate value lies in the precise and extensive nature of the information they gather about every user. Should we be worried about what they might be able to do with it?

The collecting of both personal information about consumers from store loyalty cards and footage of citizens from CCTV recordings has provoked uproar, yet many of us are actively publishing, or releasing, similar private data. Already, there have been numerous instances in which posts or online activity by students has resulted in disciplinary action by college authorities. Reportedly, employers regularly background check potential employers by viewing various forms of generated content. And the backlash against the media's inevitable sourcing of information about and images of victims of tragedies from networking sites came after the Virginia Tech massacre, when in memoriam groups posted pleading messages to visiting journalists to leave the site.

The automatic harvesting of data about users has also begun to provoke controversy. Google's tracking of user activity has come under scrutiny – a European Union panel is currently investigating whether the search engine abides by European privacy laws, which are generally stricter than those in the States. Google's April 2007 announcement regarding the acquisition of DoubleClick has further prompted concern, notably over DoubleClick's use of user-tracking to target ads. In 2006 Google resisted a U.S. Justice Department subpoena to provide information to the government regarding users' search requests, but three other major search engines – Yahoo, MSN and AOL – did surrender some material. While awareness of human reviewing of user-generated content is growing, the majority of users

are much less aware of the automated, and more covert, systems that can be used to trace their online activity.

Will user-generated content and the Web 2.0 era force us to re-examine our notions of privacy? The web has already led us to question our understandings of intellectual property rights and authorship. The music industry has been struggling to keep up with technological developments that facilitate the sharing of music – efforts to cope are reflected in Amazon's recent announcement that it will launch a digital music store selling music that is not protected against digital copying. Increasingly, authors seem willing to share their knowledge and work for the benefit of all, without copyright, as demonstrated by Wikipedia. If we are to continue to project more of our lives into the digital realm, more of the time, we will also have to readdress our notions of where our public selves and our private selves begin and end. Perhaps the advent of these technologies will demand that our world becomes one in which everyone does know that little bit more about everyone else.

Additional Reporting by Anna Maybank.

Zoe Flood has worked for the UN's global news service, IRIN news. She is the founder of the Oxford Forum.



do "dreaming spires" inspire dreams?

RICHARD GRIFFITHS
ponders...

This is a partial, prejudiced, probably pompous and perversely unjust piece for which a good alternative title would be "Don't Put Your Daughter On the Stage, Mrs Worthington".

From time to time I am trapped into conversing with bright-eyed, bushy-tailed young persons who fondly imagine that there may be something I am in a position to say, or to do, which will set them off on a fighting start to a glorious career in theatre.

My response, much to the dismay of said bright young things, is a sad compound of courteous impatience, resentment, and sorrow.

Of course, this will not arise today because you, gentle reader, by reaching into the top of tertiary education's greasiest of poles (getting in to Oxbridge) are already guaranteed a flying start to whatever career path you may choose to follow. No, the remarks herein are aimed at those who toil amongst those particular dreaming spires which house nothing more exciting than bats, cobwebs and grimoires.

When they say things like "can you advise me on how best to get started on a career in theatre?" or any of the other six million ways their aspirations are couched, I am thrown instantly

into a complexity of analysis, because the question is almost never the thing that is being asked. Let me explain.

"Can you advise me?" In short, yes! Does there exist an ambitious young person who seeks advice which in any way may not fit in with their heart's desire? No, of course not.

Jean Paul Sartre once nailed this canard to the mast. In 1940 a young, self-proclaimed, acolyte of his begged Advice. "I am my mother's only relative and her sole means of support. General de Gaulle has called upon all French men to rally to his flag, in London, and forge an army to Free la France."

from the Nazis. I cannot do both. What should I do? Stay, and be a coward, or join De Gaulle and the Free French Army? Please advise me." And Sartre's magnificent reply was "What have you decided to do?"

Advice is never really sought. What is actually yearned for is approval.

in an unproductive mimeshaft with nothing more than an unattractive burro for companionship.

Most farmers don't.

Does an undergraduate near you harbour dreams of being an 'A-list' superstar? If so, any attempt to disabuse them of the possibility of achieving their dream is bound to fail. So don't

again they will tell you how they dreamed of standing on the podium, or of being the first to understand some new scientific principle, or to get a ticker-tape triumph, or, swim in a sea of £50 notes, or, to step onto the red sand of Mars, or to traverse the floor of deepest oceans, or to create a fantastic work of art, or, to feed the planet's starving millions or any other vast and improbable undertaking that comes to mind. Be assured, no matter how crazy and unlikely a dream may be, it represents a core idea which may seem impossible...but...who knows? Just because everyone around you will say you are wasting your time, that is no reason for you simply to acquiesce and abandon your dream.

Years ago James Burke presented a heavily criticised TV series on the rise of scientific knowledge. The heart of the criticism was that he offered an overview that was too fast, with too much data to digest and too much "Gee-Whizzery". I think the real complaint was that it assumed the viewing audience was more intelligent than media types could accept. In the concluding piece, "To Camera", Mr Burke summed up the story of science something like this...

"At every point in human history the world about us was a place of commonly understood and agreed realities. Then an individual came along and said, "That's wrong. It is actually like this."

Eventually, when enough people saw the good sense of a New idea, the world view altered to accommodate it. When people thought the Earth was flat, the brilliant Greek Logicians who used the arrival of ships from beyond the horizon to show the surface of the sea was curved, thus

anyone whose work is seen by the paying public can have no possibility of a 'career'

And as for the claptrap about a career in theatre...well, really. My lip once curled so much, on being earnestly asked this question, that any passing surgeon would have thought I'd suffered severe relapse of an operation to correct a hare-lip.

There is not, never was, nor never shall be, a Career Path in Theatre. Actually, strictly speaking, that is inaccurate. There are 'career prospects' for every branch of theatre and film and TV and indeed radio. BUT (and as you can see by the capitalisation) it is a big BUT, there is no way that any of these apply to performance. Singers, actors, dancers, musicians and mimes and (Gordon Bennett!) presenters, in fact anyone whose work is seen by the paying public, can have NO possibility of a career.

If you want to be a performing artist you cannot have a plausible achievable career. The pathways for a career simply do not exist. What you can have as a performer is A Life. The two things are further apart than you are from the rings of Saturn.

Backstage abounds with Careers prospects. Assistant Stage Managers (ASM) or Floor Managers (AFM) in TV or runners in movie-land are entry level jobs, which lead to Deputy SM and stage managers, then production managers or stage directors (theatre) and the same applies to radio and TV.

In cinema the equivalents have much more responsibility and concomitantly greater rewards. Third Assistants are do-it-all 'gophers' and crowd and traffic control people who can aim at becoming Second Assistant Directors. The latter are administrators who also run the unit base and the production office. Beyond that lie the real powerhouse jobs of First Assistant (Director's right arm who advises with the filming) and the top backroom job of being production manager. These are jobs for top expertise and top salaries. Compared to actors and other purloiners their work is regular, well-paid and offers possibilities of wealth, fame and power in the industry.

This can not be said of performers who, nowadays, are referred to in showbiz jargon, not intentionally unkindly, as, "The Talent."

The difference between performers and non-performers, from a career point of view, is similar to the difference between gold prospectors and farmers. The lucky gold prospector enjoys the ongoing possibility of finding a seam of precious metal that makes him rich and famous beyond the Dreams of Avarice. The farmer's life is far less volatile but the pay is regular and the food is good. Most prospectors wind up dying of thirst

do that.

I'm told it takes most actor "wannabes" about eight to twelve years to get past their denial regarding never being good enough, or successful enough, to have the earning power to make a living in 'theatre.' Imagine being in your thirties before admitting the need to start all over again. Unpalatable, innit, as Boris might say.

Am I suggesting that your dreams are worthless? On the contrary. Dreams are of crucial importance, but sharp distinctions should be drawn between what are real dreams; passing fancies; and just fun fantasies. The last should be spent on improving one's sex life, the penultimate on exercising the imagination, and the first in something to give shape to some extraordinary thing which is held as dearly as it should be secret - and thought about - whenever day-to-day living permits.

Advice is never really sought. What is actually yearned for is approval

Cyrus the Great, who created the greatest empire the world had seen before the arrival of Alexander of Macedon, started out as a goatherd. Where you begin is as nothing to where you might arrive...on second thought, I ought to point out that 'ending up' is where a lot of unfortunate individuals actually terminate their journeys. It is a tricky business altogether.

Most people experience the dream of flying like a bird but without the need for any supportive apparatus, like wings. Neil Armstrong, pilot of Apollo 11's Lunar Lander, back in the summer of '69, was obliged to assume manual control when the onboard "Landing Computer" crashed. All 64 kilobytes of it. Suddenly, he experienced the most intensive feeling of *deja vu*. As a boy, his use recurring dream was not of flying as much as hovering in a standing position. The hovering above the dust of the Sea of Tranquility, and landing safely, was a greater memory for him, probably, than actually being the first human to set foot on the moon.

Talk to champion athletes, artists, scientists, entrepreneurs and any outstanding achiever in just about any field of endeavour, and again and

implying a spherical world, were dismissed as cranks. It took mariners like Columbus to prove the point. From that moment the Flat-Earthers have been reduced to a lunatic fringe.

Today, science grapples with theories about unimaginably tiny strings, the human genome and etching computer data upon molecules of hydrogen. None of this seems peculiar to today's undergraduate. To my grandparents, any of those examples would be seen as the ravings of a sectioned madman.

You change the world by describing it from your point of view - even if it is only a dream you have - look at the record of any individual achievement that merits your deepest respect. You will see that they did or said something New; surprising and uncommon. James Burke concluded with this. "The world is whatever you say it is - so say." Good luck. You'll need some of that, too.

Richard Griffiths is a highly acclaimed British film and theatre actor. Credits include Equus, the History Boys, the Harry Potter films and the cult classic Withnail and I.



jackboots on whitehall

JAMIE ENGLISH interviews ED MCHENRY, writer
and director of Jackboots On Whitehall

Jackboots On Whitehall will be a feature-length blockbuster war movie. It has a top-notch cast, which includes a couple of bona fide Hollywood stars, an Academy Award winner, and over one thousand extras – and with a props department to rival Saving Private Ryan. So who's in the director's chair? Spielberg? Coppola? Stone? Not exactly; it is Edward McHenry – aged 24, and only recently graduated from Exeter College, Oxford, and the Ruskin School of Drawing and Fine Art.

includes Ewan McGregor, in the lead role as Chris the handsome farm boy, and Richard E. Grant, as the local vicar. Alan Cumming, Richard O'Brien, Tim Wilkinson and Richard Griffiths play Hitler, Hammler, Goebbels and Goering respectively. The stellar cast was very complimentary about the screenplay, which was a great boost for the young director. "It would have been unbelievable to imagine such an incredible cast when we began writing," says McHenry. Looking back over the process, he

the head of the Punjabi Guard. Voice recordings started in December, and we had them completed just after Christmas. However, we still didn't have a lead role. We couldn't decide who to go for – and after a couple of rejections, it was beginning to become a bit of a headache. Eventually, we decided to pluck up the courage to go to Ewan McGregor. Debbie sent his agent the script when he was on the way back from the Miss Potter premiere – and a week later, we had our confirmation."

The sudden success of his first feature-length screenplay was not something that McHenry or his brother had been expecting. "I was really thrown into the deep end. It was almost like a three week intensive of British actors. I was initially terrified of the prospect of directing people I had looked up to so much, but after our first session we all relaxed, and it was just really good fun."

Having recorded nearly all of the voices, the film is now in the initial stages of pre-production – before filming will take place. The heads are being sculpted, and the action sequences storyboarded. There is a huge amount to do – and the team's ambition has grown from a small film of tiny budget, to something which could actually make an impression on a national, or even international stage. An epic war movie has been crammed into an hour and half of action, love, death, romance, Nazis and Scots. "The great thing about shooting all on 1/8th scale," says McHenry, "is that we can have bigger war scenes than a multi-million dollar movie. We can have our six German Tiger tanks blowing the hell out of Downing Street, and our thousand SS Volksgrenadier Guards on parade in Parliament Square. Hadrian's Wall is going to be a big set, though; we want it to have the look of the Great Wall of China, crossed with Helm's Deep from Lord of the Rings."

Clearly, McHenry and his team are no longer

The voice cast of the project includes Ewan McGregor, Richard E. Grant, Alan Cumming, Richard O'Brien and Richard Griffiths

"I started writing the screenplay for Jackboots On Whitehall in 9th week of Trinity term last year," explains McHenry. "I had already written a treatment with my brother Rory, for 'Swipe Films', a production company that was introduced to me by a friend who had done an internship with them before Oxford. The producer, Frank Mannion, liked the treatment – and asked me to turn it into a screenplay. He then set me a deadline which seemed ridiculous – something like 11 days for a first draft...with the possibility of the script being made into a feature film, to sweeten the deal."

The success of this first full-length screenplay is perhaps more understandable given that the film is not live action; Jackboots On Whitehall is to be made with action figures, and film sets built to 1/8 of life-size. This will enable the movie to be made at a fraction of the budget of most war films – an approach that will allow genuinely funny screenplay, from first-time writers and directors, to be brought to the silver screen.

McHenry had created something similar while at Exeter. "The idea was to make a feature film out of a series of shorts that I had made while at Oxford, called A Baptism of Fire, which were made entirely with Action Men and Barbie dolls." These original short films were set in Vietnam, spoofing films like Apocalypse Now and Born on the Fourth of July. Mannion, the Jackboots on Whitehall producer, had thought that in order for people to be able to relate properly to the movie in this country, it needed to be about a really British experience. The McHenry brothers came up with a WWII epic: "It had to be a war film because the dolls look great under fire, and fantastic when their limbs get blown off and burnt. We wanted to set it in the Second World War, so we came up with the idea of a revisionist history story; the RAF loses the Battle of Britain, and the evacuation of Dunkirk is a failure. The Nazis invade England and take over London. Our young hero Chris, a local farm hand, leads the farmers of England in the final and decisive victory of the war – the Battle of Hadrian's Wall – and struggles to win the heart of Daisy, a local girl from the village."

The voice cast that the project has attracted

recalls, "I wrote the first draft in ten days, with Rory writing at home and myself in Oxford. We sent each other sections of the screenplay over the week, and worked through the treatment bit by bit – fattening it out into a ninety page script. When it was finished, it read terribly! It was disjointed, badly structured – and really, really unfunny. However, fourteen drafts later we had a completed script, which was ready to go into production in November of last year."

"We decided it would be a wise idea to record the voices before the shoot, so that we could impress financiers with a great-sounding radio play. A friend who was looking to part-finance a small-scale film of some sort liked the script so much, that he decided to back the voice recordings – this meant that we could 'green light' the project just before Christmas.

Jackboots On Whitehall is to be made entirely with action figures

"We needed a really hot casting director to get the word out to the best agencies and actors. Debbie McWilliams is a well-known casting agent who had just finished Casino Royale when we approached her with the script. Her reaction was: 'I can't promise you anything, but let's try.' We had several meetings where Debbie asked us about our ideal cast. I didn't really have a clear idea then, as I didn't know how ambitious I could be without sounding presumptuous. I said I really wanted someone like Rosamund Pike (who played Bond Girl Miranda Frost in Die Another Day) for Daisy, our female lead. Debbie simply asked us why we didn't go for the real Rosamund Pike. Our confidence boosted, we laid out an ideal cast, and Debbie sent it out to the agencies."

"Rosamund Pike, to our delight, agreed to play our female lead. At around the same time, Pam Ferris agreed to play Matron Rinty – our battle-axe – and we managed to cast Sanjeev Bhaskar, of Goodness Gracious Me fame, as Major Rupee,

looking to make another student film. The success of his series of short films, A Baptism of Fire – which premiered in the Magdalen College auditorium – and the quality of his screenplay has brought McHenry a cast of astonishing calibre, which he could not have dreamed of when he started writing his script. Soon, the filming will begin – and along with it, many difficulties and obstacles to be overcome. McHenry is optimistic, however; "The cast we've recorded has been so perfect, and their performances so genuinely funny, it will be nerve-wracking doing them justice on the screen. As long as we keep in mind the concept of the film – to be funny, without being pretentious, and to turn our action figures into real characters – we should produce a film we can be proud of."

Jackboots On Whitehall will be released in 2008.



stars in your eyes

LEO GOUGH asks:
should you go to film school?

MANY GRADUATES WHO are trying to decide what to do with their lives consider a career in film and television; it's understandable, given the massive influence they have on our lives, and the apparent glamour and riches to be had if you are successful. Film-making in particular is highly attractive. For a well-educated humanities graduate, what could be more satisfying than a life spent creating sophisticated works of art and achieving fame and fortune in the process?

Appearances are deceptive in most industries, and no more so than in the film business. The problem starts before entry if, like thousands of others, you intend to get your training at a film school. On the face of it, film school makes a lot of sense, especially one with a strong vocational element that provides real training in

cinematography, script-writing, direction, editing, production management and all the other skills that go into this vastly expensive enterprise. The leading schools in the UK – The National Film and Television School, the Royal College of Art, and the London Film School – all offer a thorough grounding in the mechanics of the various technical disciplines which you will need if you want to obtain employment in the 'real' film industry (films with multi-million pound budgets that hire large crews).

Schools such as these do their best to turn out well-trained people who are employable, rather than theorists and film-buffs, who tend to be disparaged by insiders in this very cliquey business. The best vocational schools, here and abroad, boast numbers of famous alumni. Martin Scorsese, George Lucas, Roman Polanski, Mike Leigh, Ridley Scott (and, curiously, Jim Morrison, the lead singer of The Doors) all went to film school. What they don't tell you is that many, if not most, film school graduates do not manage to

Once you want to make
it as a director, showbiz
psychosis takes over

make a life-time career in the film business.

This is the uncomfortable fact that nobody wants to hear. Film production, which for most people is the area in which they must want to work, does not usually offer full-time employment. Usually, a separate limited company is formed for every film, and technicians are only hired for the time that they are needed, which may be a matter of a few weeks or months. Fees are high, and established film technicians often manage to move from one production to the next without much time out of work; all of them, however, will tell you of occasions when they were jobless for six months or more. Secure employment is available in other areas, both prestigious and obscure – for example, film production executives in large companies, distribution executives, archivists and projectionists all tend to be employed full-time – but the budding film student tends to reject these as dull (which is not necessarily the case). Usually what the film student wants to be is a director, producer or a cinematographer; in other words, to be a star.

Once you have bought into the idea that you want to make it as, say, a director, the usual showbiz psychosis takes over. You must make your first film, no matter what the cost in terms of time (often it takes years), money (many first-time film directors invest everything they have) or psychological distress (budding film directors tend to have chaotic personal lives). It is not impossible to achieve the goal of directing your first film, especially if you are independently wealthy or are a monomaniac, but what then? Usually the first film will lose money and will not gain the critical success you hoped for. You are now, in some ways, worse off than you were before, since potential financiers will be looking dubiously at your track record; yes, it would have looked a lot better if you hadn't unavoidably run out of money, and yes the honourable mention you received at some obscure film festival is better than nothing, but the kind of financier who wants to take a chance on a young director (and they are rare) is liable to prefer a completely untried wunderkind over the second-time director whose first film was... well, not that great.

'Film-makers eat bitter bread,' said the great director Sergei Eisenstein more than half a century ago. That's not what they tell you at film school, or if they do, no-one wants to listen. Films are glamorous, and are promoted by a remarkably sophisticated commercial hyperbole: we grow up bombarded with stories about the wonderful lives and fantastic successes of those who make it in films. Usually, we are told, this is because of their great talent, although it is not always clear to a dispassionate observer what that talent might be. The hype has worked: today, there are more than 150 film schools around the world, producing thousands of graduates each year whose overwhelming ambition is to make it big in the movies. It is all uncomfortably like the TV show *Pop Idol*, where a handful of people get massive exposure and the vast majority queue for a long time, make fools of themselves, and have to go home and get on with their lives.

Leo Gough graduated from the International Film School in 1986. He is now reading Modern History at Jesus College, Oxford.

pan's labyrinth

ELENA MANRIQUE, EXECUTIVE

Producer of *Paris Labyrinth*, the Oscar-winning film of 2006 about a child's enchanted fantasies in Franco's Spain, is one of the new generation of European film-makers who have managed to make their mark internationally – even in the US, a notoriously tough market for 'art house' films. *The Oxford Forum* caught up with her at the Cannes Film Festival to ask her what advice she had for would-be cineastes.

Paris Labyrinth was a special case," explains Elena Manrique, a producer at Telecinco Cinema, the production arm of Telecinco, a major Spanish television company. "It was a personal project that came with a well-established Hollywood director, Guillermo del Toro (director of *Hellboy* and *Blade II*) who we knew to be both highly marketable and extremely efficient as a director. We financed the film, positioned it in the distribution markets and oversaw the production itself. Guillermo's efficiency on the set was very important, because of the large number of special effects involved in creating the fantasy creatures in the movie – an inexperienced director can easily blow the entire budget in the first week of a technically demanding film like this one."

Most of Telecinco Cinema's output is in Spanish, which, as with most non-English films (known in the international business as 'foreign language' films), means that most of the income is derived from 'domestic' sales in the country of origin. 'With Guillermo's track record we knew we had a chance to break out into the rest of the world, but we were very lucky; the film has been our biggest success so far, we sold it worldwide and it did very well in every territory. Obviously, winning Oscars for best photography and best art direction really helped.'

But why would a Hollywood director want to make a foreign-language film outside the US studio system? 'Guillermo is Mexican, and he really wanted to make a Spanish-language film. He also wanted the creative freedom that you rarely, if ever, get when you are working with the major US studios,' explains Manrique. 'As Spanish producers, we were natural partners for the project, and could offer him a relaxed, director-friendly environment. This project was very atypical of our productions – most of them are lower budget and more problematic.'

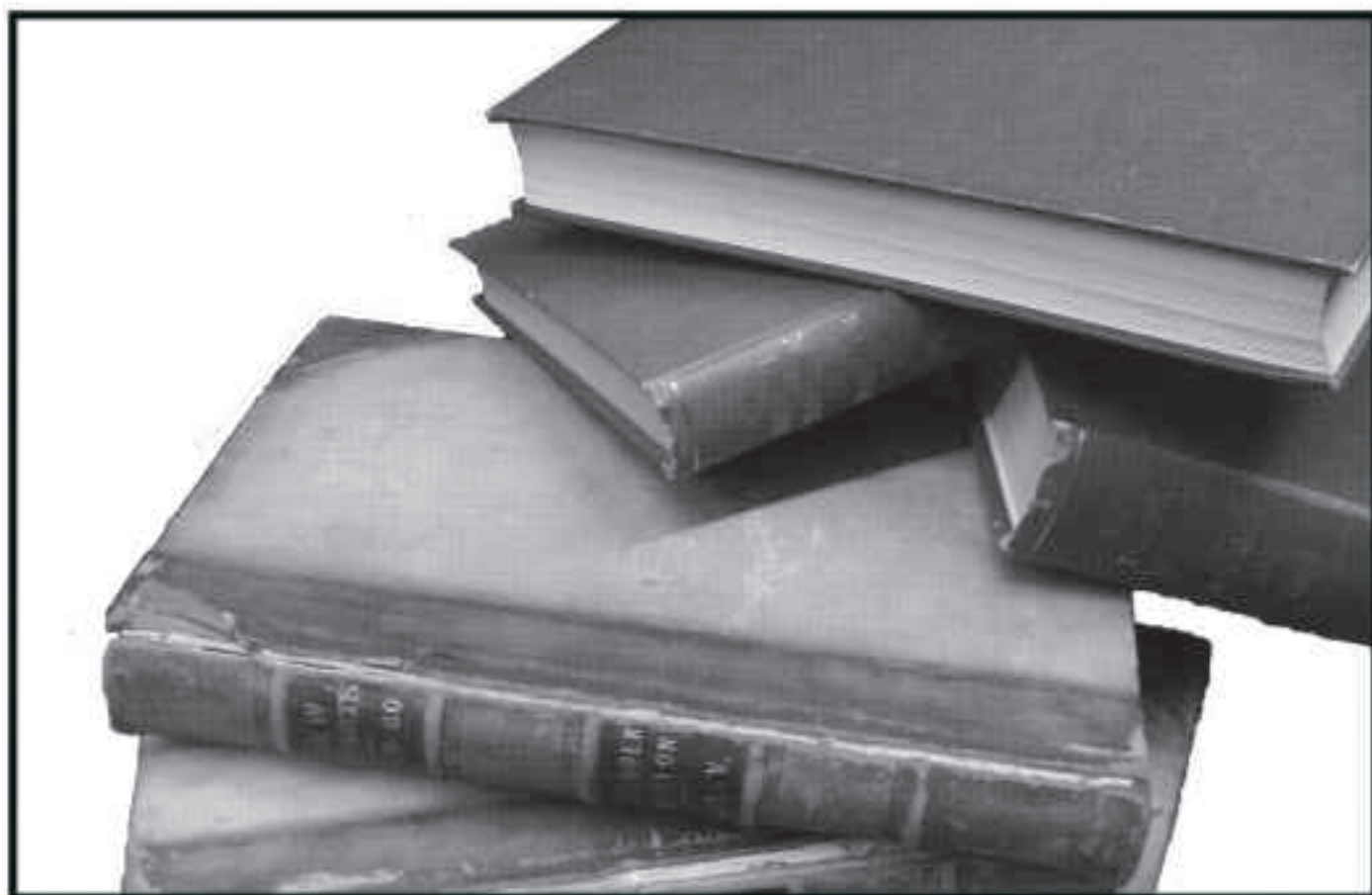
Many of Europe's domestic film industries are heavily subsidised and have limited opportunities for international release. 'If you think about it, only a handful of foreign language films get a really high international profile each year; they are an unrepresentative fraction of European

productions, which are mostly released for a short time in their domestic cinemas before going to TV and DVD. We need these films, of course, to nurture new talent, but in the end not many directors find a truly international audience. It is always great for producers like us when a high-profile, commercially successful director like Guillermo wants to make an art-house film because we get the best of both worlds.'

Every aspiring director and producer aspires to a career like del Toro's, but realistically, what are the chances? 'I really have only two pieces of advice,' says Manrique, who has herself worked as an independent producer. 'For producers, I would say: don't expect to make any money at all unless or until you become established. That means you need to be very cautious, both financially and in choosing the projects you undertake – don't just grab the first project that comes along and spend years of your life trying to finance a non-starter. For directors, the name of the game is to become an auteur early, so be original and develop your own style. At the same time, it is important to remember that nobody wants to work with an enfant terrible – you are not, unless you are financed by a major Hollywood company, likely to be able to exceed your budget, so you are going to have to work within the financial constraints and make the best of it. That's essential, but so is having a story that really is different. As a production company we have seen it all – nobody is going to be impressed with something that isn't really outstanding; we don't want to see more of the same old stuff.'

'There is one final thing that both producers and directors need to think about seriously: who is the audience for the film they are planning? We see some very talented directors, for instance, whose interests and themes are really very local to their own country or even their own region; that doesn't mean that the film cannot succeed in a small way, but it is important not to try to turn it into something else in an attempt to widen the market – a lot of worthwhile projects get bogged down in endless co-production deals across several countries, and when they do finally get made, they have lost the qualities that made them unique and stimulating in the first place. That's why having a clear vision for a project – and finding producers that share it – is so important.'

*Elena Manrique currently has a film, *The Orphanage*, co-produced by Guillermo del Toro, at the International Critics' Week at the Cannes Film Festival.*



in his own words

SIR PETER STOTHARD talks to the Forum about editing two of Britain's leading publications, the Dan Brown phenomenon, and the rise of new media

THE SWEEPING POWER of new media is everywhere. From the humble website, to portals, blogging and - over the past few years - 'Second Life', the advance of virtual information exchange seems relentless. So how do will 'traditional' media firms keep up with these changes? And what kind of space does it all leave for national institutions like the Times Literary Supplement? For that matter, what space does it leave for literature? We talk to Sir Peter about whether change is encroaching on the immutable world of the TLS.

You edited The Times for ten years before moving to the Times Literary Supplement (TLS). How have you found the literary supplement different from your time working as The Times editor?

Every paper has its own character. Papers are

like human beings: they have their own histories, they have their own interests, they have their own passions, they have their own purposes and they have their own relations with the people who work with them, for them and on them. The difference between working for - or editing - the TLS or The Times is that they're different beings, with different characters, and you succeed, I think, if you adapt to those different organs - unless, of course, you're trying to turn them upside down.

I was editor of The Times through a period of enormous change, when newspapers really had lost touch with society. The Times used to be a paper of privilege, it was a paper of tiny circulation, and it was a paper of telling people what to do. That was what the world was like, in those great 19th century days of The Times,

and I think it would be fair to say that some of those ideas survived in The Times rather longer than they survived in society as a whole. I was involved, in twenty-odd years on The Times - ten as editor - in helping The Times stick to what was really important about itself, but becoming part of this more open, modern culture. So that was, as it were, like changing a person, and I was involved heavily in changing The Times.

The TLS is a different proposition. The TLS sells to people who are prepared to deal with difficult ideas and complicated issues, all over the world. That purpose is a quite fixed one. Obviously the paper does look different to the paper of twenty years ago - but it isn't as different as The Times is, or as different as many other things are, and that's because the constituency that we serve are people who are concerned

with literary criticism, philosophy, art criticism, historical theory and writing in general.

The essence of their world – historical theory, Plato, Aristotle, Heidegger, Leonardo, Jane Austen – are the same as they were. And people may be getting to grips with them in Iceland, Poland, Peru or Croatia... we're a purely international paper, we look for excellence and interest wherever we can find it. But I like to think that less has changed in the essence of the *TLS* because the essence of what we're doing has changed less than the social and political structure of the society in which the newspaper operates.

What gets reviewed in the *TLS* is very different to what sells in popular fiction. Is this divergence between literature and what actually gets read a new phenomenon?

Well, we know it's not new. There's a very fine book which we reviewed a few months ago by a great Oxford scholar, Phillip Waller, who wrote a book about what was actually read at the end of the 19th century, as opposed to what we now remember, or think was read.

All the best sellers of the post-Dickens era are books which hardly anybody's now ever heard of, and certainly very few of us have ever read, and so he's devoted a lot of his life 'rescuing' the best sellers of their age – and they really were best sellers – the quantity of time and money spent on reading was particularly strong at the end of the 19th Century. We also know that during the Romantic period, hardly anybody ever read the Romantics. So the answer is that this divergence is nothing new – I expect in the future scholars will still be interested in the difference between the books that are selling huge numbers in Tesco and some of the books that we review in the *TLS*.

Do you think people will be reading Dan Brown in a hundred years time?

I've no idea. I personally find Dan Brown impossible to read. I think that the phenomena will certainly be studied. Anything that sells that amount and clearly touches a chord in our present time, people are extremely interested in. There's a kind of irrationalism abroad. The age of reason – the belief that reason can solve problems – is running out of time at the end of the 20th Century in lots of people's minds. Studying religion had almost gone off in every respect: people were thinking that the study of religion was becoming extremely specialist.

The age of reason is running out of time at the end of the 20th Century in lots of people's minds

We're now seeing an end to that – people are now realizing that people's religious beliefs are an extremely important way of understanding them, and open up a whole area of meta-beliefs. If you're going to understand how people are thinking you have to grapple with this. But I hope you don't have to read Dan Brown in order to do so.

You've talked about the character of publication. Do you think that books, or papers, as entities, can survive if they stop being physical things, if they're a computer file?

The technology of presenting words to people has always changed what artists do. The books

of The Bible are the length that they are because they fitted in with a particular kind of papyrus – the length of a papyrus roll, I think. Certainly the construction of 19th Century novels is heavily dependent on the fact that they were first printed in magazines in sections, and this affected the words that Dickens and others wrote.

Technology has always changed the content and the substance of publications

Technology has always changed the content and the substance of publications. *The Times* was invented to promote a printing press. No-one had the idea of a wonderful, challenging, thundering paper and then searched for someone to print it: the printing press came first and then the papers filed out. So, since that's always been the case, I think you have to think that if people are reading and writing on a completely open medium, with fewer intermediaries and more interaction, then that will have an impact, just as it always has done in periods of technological change.

How does this increased 'interactivity' change the dynamic of *The Times* or *TLS*?

I'm not sure it changes it quite as much in the two papers that I've been talking about as you might think. *The Times* was predominantly a reader's paper – more than most papers. The letters page of *The Times* was one of the most famous things about it. At a time when the BBC, for instance, just basically broadcast out, *The Times* was very much a paper that was characterized by the 'feedback', as it would now be called, of its readers.

Now in the internet page and on *The Times Online* you see that that feedback is now a much greater part, but actually it's still very close to the core character of *The Times*.

The *TLS* too: the letters page of the *TLS*, at a time when other magazines were not so concerned with that, has always been a very potent part of the paper. And our readers and our writers – and a lot of our readers and writers are the same people – have always come back to us,

though sometimes quite slowly. We might write an article about Jane Austen and get a reply from someone who's read it in a very far away place, in several weeks or months time, and we would publish that.

The effect of the material being online has been to speed up that conversation, but while it will obviously make changes to it, I think that, curiously, both the papers I've been talking about have the idea of communication set more deeply into their psyches than a lot of other institutions.

How successfully do you think newspaper websites at the moment replicate the identity of

the actual paper?

With a great deal of difficulty, I think. If you look across the set of American websites, if you look at *The Washington Post*, *New York Times*, look at *The Times*, *The Guardian*; those papers if you saw them on a newsstand would look much more different as press products than they do on

the web. That's not to say they don't look different on the web, but they don't look as different. And because the web encourages you to look at individual bits of them rather than to take the whole thing, they have less opportunity to be different.

Obviously the *TLS* is unique; there's nothing like the *TLS* in the world. There are other papers that write about books and ideas and news but they're all very different in the same way the *New York Review of Books* is unique too. I'm not saying that we're better – it's just that we're strikingly different, and therefore I don't think we have quite that problem.

We have other problems, like finding the people around the world who appreciate us, but the web helps us to do that: the web is enormously useful to the *TLS*, because the web helped us to find our readers in Borneo, Peru, Mexico, Poland and in parts of America where they may be miles from a bookshop or a newsagent that would stock the *TLS*.

The web allows us to find those people who want us, with our very distinct identity. But I think there is a problem for many news and comment papers that basically offer the same thing as everybody else – though they would like to say better – there are problems of identity, but I'm sure they will be solved.

Where do you see the *TLS* going in the next five or ten years?

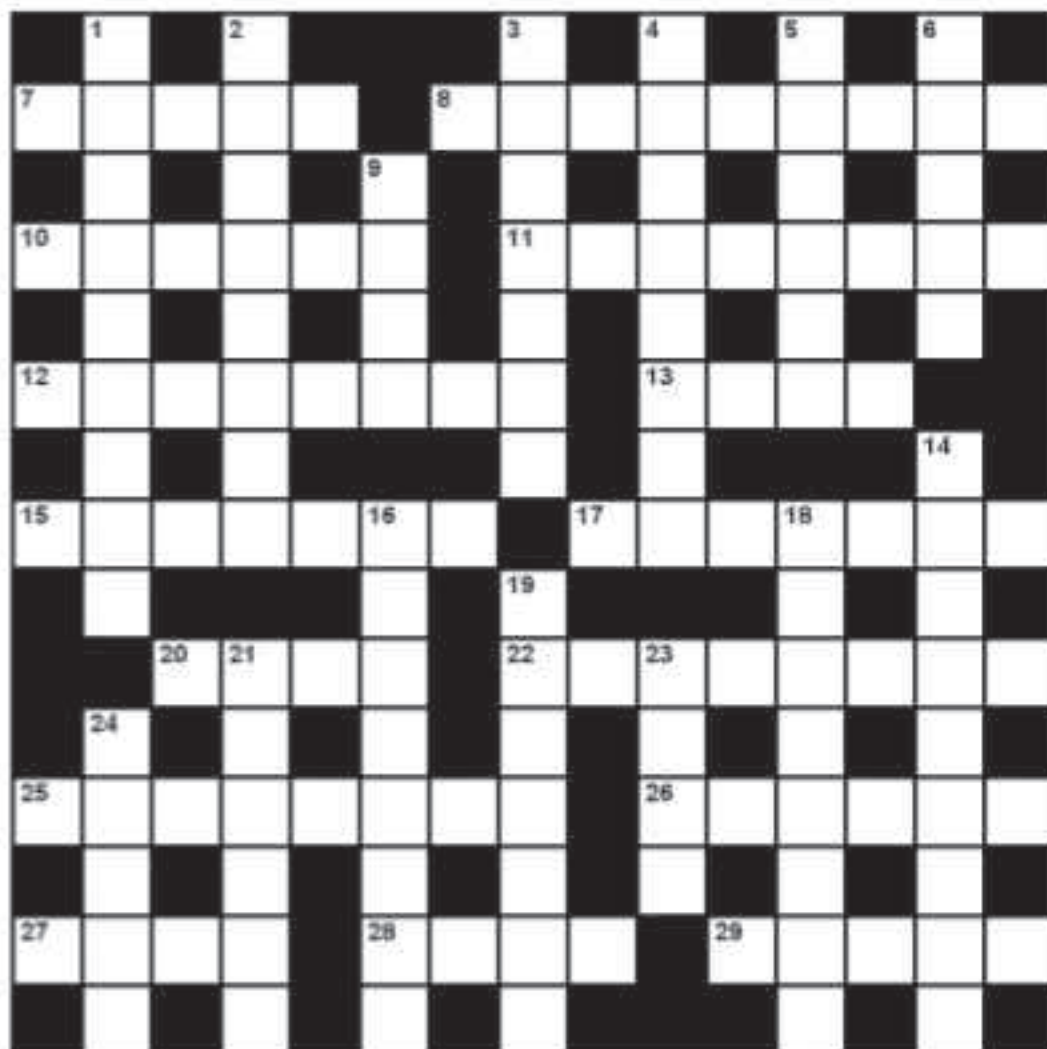
I think our role is to represent some very permanent and much-needed tasks of explaining difficulty. There's no question that some of these trends that we've been talking about make simplicity more attractive. People can cut corners, they can sometimes feel that they understand something when they don't. There are fewer teachers and more people who are self-taught: there's more scope for people perhaps mistaking semi-comprehension for comprehension.

In the *TLS*, I think, there has always been a role for people who take things more slowly, are more prepared to comprehend and embrace difficulty when necessary, and there are people like that all over the world. I think that the world needs people who are doing that, and we will continue to do that, in whatever form – electronically and on print – certainly for the next five years.

Sir Peter Stothard is editor of the *Times Literary Supplement*, and was editor of *The Times* from 1992 to 2002. He studied Classics at Trinity College, Oxford. He received a knighthood in 2003 for services to the newspaper industry.

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ACROSS

- 7 Twice working around second light bulb (5)
8 Uneven ruler with rag 1 destroyed (9)
10 Takeover left half of pair (6)
11 Exhaustive act taking in story, say (8)
12 Alights, and becomes depressed? (4,4)
13 Vessel in diva's exhibition (4)
15 Raid over - that is before Shanghai's first journals (7)
17 Final entry into short picture that's mouldable (7)
20 Skilful bit of brewing shown in drink (4)
22 Put back position in colour (8)
25 One vehicle in another as companies

travelling together (8)

- 26 District of Shanghai with bad smell around a third of udders (6)
27 Fire bag (4)
28 Candid work directions (4)
29 Without English leader, joins lowest subdivisions (5)

DOWN

- 1 Moving on inside a country (9)
2 Settle with Russia's first musician, perhaps (8)
3 Doing business with Chinese snooker player after art is brought up (7)
4 Celebration - it's rising in iron values - not half! (8)

- 5 Openings of digital universities take intelligence, effort and sense for the things one must do (6)
6 More secure fears, perhaps (5)
9 Nothing in prize rodeo (4)
14 Hate to include one Swiss city, as some animals do (9)
16 Lift - to the next level? (8)
18 Upright status (8)
19 Lightly touches painting implements (7)
21 Cartridges without bullets found lying initially in financial institutions (6)
23 Bursts musically quiet operations (4)
24 Chinese leader with an aluminium waterway (5)