

OXFORD FORUM

Issue 9, Summer 2009

COMMENT

CAROLINE LUCAS • JAGDISH BHAGWATI • SIMON SINGH

WAR

LIAM FOX • BOB AINSWORTH

HAPPINESS

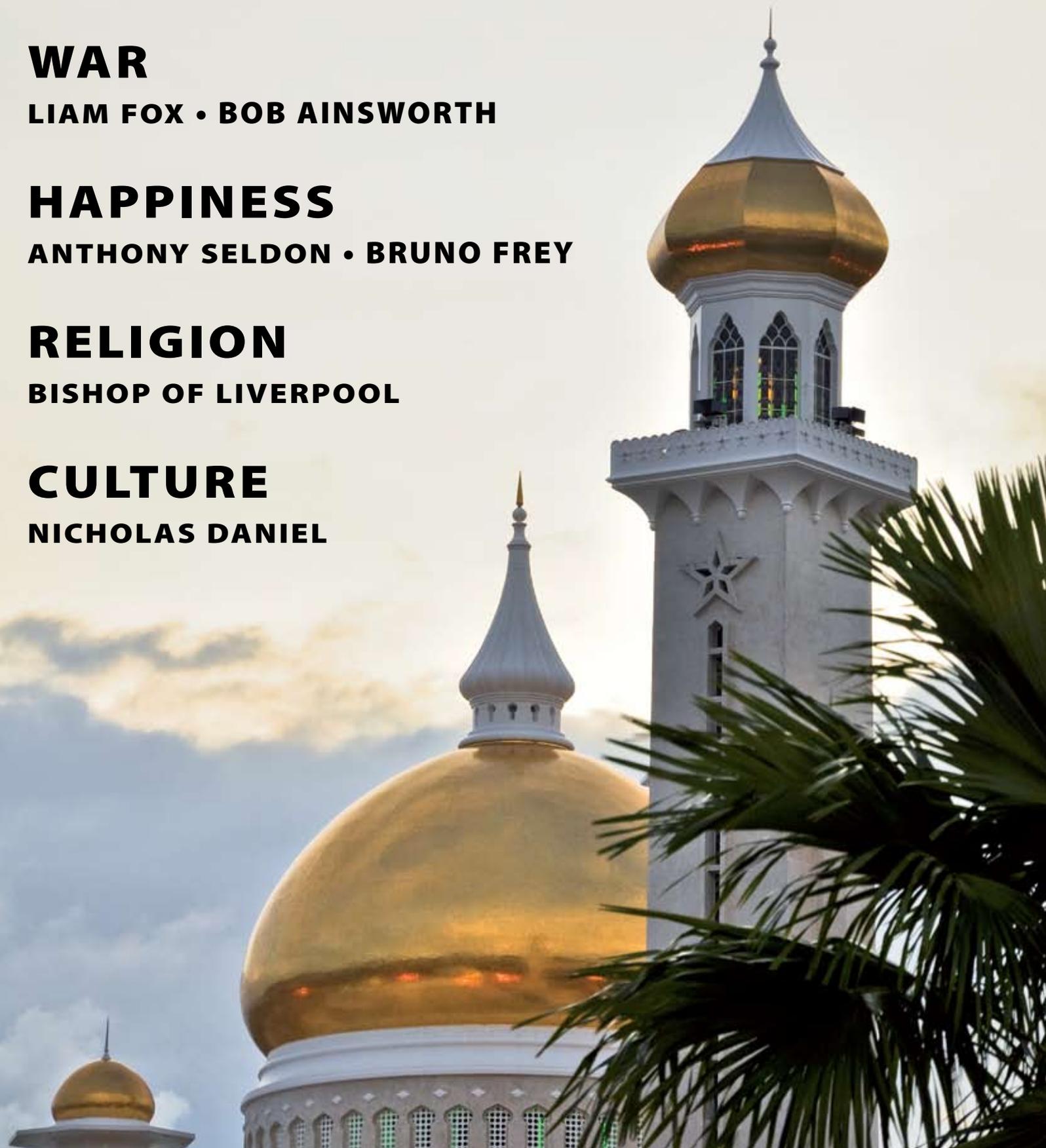
ANTHONY SELDON • BRUNO FREY

RELIGION

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CULTURE

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EVERYTHING SEEMS TO SHRINK during a recession. Wallets, bank balances, our love affair with capitalism...even the Oxford Forum has had to trim back.

Being smaller does not mean that this issue of the Forum fails to pack a punch. A wealth of insightful commentary begins with two heavyweights of the globalisation debate, Caroline Lucas and Jagdish Bhagwati. They assume two very different, and at times controversial, points of view. Rodney Bruce Hall provides his view on the credit crunch, and rounding off our comment section, science journalist Simon Singh holds the media to account.

Even in a recession, wars must be fought and nations defended. In our war and defence section, MPs Liam Fox and Bob Ainsworth

discuss the roles of the Armed Forces and NATO in modern warfare, whilst Kim Sengupta of The Independent provides a journalist's perspective. Finally, Tenelle Porter tells the hopeful story of recovery from decades of harrowing war in Liberia.

Section editor David Matthews then asks: what makes us happy? The good news is that money is not the answer. Bruno Frey, Nic Marks and Anthony Seldon discuss what putting happiness first might mean for democracy, the environment and education.

Happy people are often religious, and so articles by Grace Davie and Callum Brown describing the decline of traditional religion, assembled by section editor Helen Caunce, are perhaps worrying. Peter Clarke explains the origin of new religious movements, whilst the

Bishop of Liverpool defends the elevated role of Christianity in the British political system.

Finally, as is traditional in the Forum, we end with some culture. Nicholas Daniel takes a critical look at music competitions and Micah Smith discusses the poetry of Daljit Nagra; both provide us with ample food for thought.

I believe that this issue of the Forum is, as ever, packed full of thoughtful, insightful and perceptive analysis; I hope you think so too. Comments and feedback, as well as letters directed at specific articles, are always welcome.

In the meantime, happy reading.

Matthew Powell
Summer 2009

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continent of greed

The EU advocates sustainability whilst adopting an unsustainable approach. CAROLINE LUCAS argues that Europe needs a new vision.

THE FEVERISH RHETORIC of economic globalisation and competitiveness permeates heated discussions in boardrooms and government offices throughout the modern world. In a post-Cold War era characterised by the pursuit of free-market capitalism and by the decreasing importance of national boundaries, the Holy Grail of increasing international competitiveness is the life blood which drives firms, and some say nations themselves, to achieve ever greater profit.

For the purpose of clarification, when we talk about “globalisation” we mean the ever-increasing integration of national economies into the global economy through trade and investment rules and privatisation, aided by technological advances and driven by the World Trade Organisation (WTO). The relentless effort to eliminate barriers to trade and investment has led to a loss of democratic control by nation states and their communities over their own economic affairs. This is very different from the process of “internationalism” or, to some extent, cultural globalisation – the often positive global flow of technology, ideas, and information, together with growing international understanding and co-operation.

Competition for power and wealth is as old as time itself, but the current obsession – intrinsically bound up with the rise of neoliberal economics – has considerable consequences for global governance and subsequently, for social justice and the environment. The economic landscape is dominated by the grapple for export markets and the emergence of trade blocs and trade-friendly packages created by governments to attract investment. For many years now, growing alarm has been expressed over where this narrow focus on business-boosting policies leaves public services, the welfare state and policies to fight climate change.

The inherent conflict between the WTO's international trade rules on one side, and the needs of the environment and development on the other, is one of the most important foreign policy flash points of the day. Unless the priorities of world trade are fundamentally altered, then the fierce opposition and protests that economic globalisation provokes will form one of the most significant fault lines in the politics of this century.

Simply put, a planet of finite resources and

increasingly unmet social needs cannot sustain an economic system based on ever increasing international competition and ever-greater free trade. Our economic system is a product of a single global development model created to serve corporate interests, which has increased polarisation between the world's rich and poor, and caused high levels of environmental degradation.

The reality is that economic globalisation poses an enormous threat to the environment and is on a collision course with attempts to control climate change. Trade accounts for a growing share of an increasingly fossil-fuel-hungry global economy, and the transport it depends on is one of the fastest rising sources of greenhouse gas emissions. Moreover, even at its optimum performance level, its long-term benefits go only to a minority of people who sit at the hub of the process, while the rest are left fighting over fewer jobs and less land, living

economic globalisation poses an enormous threat to the environment

in increasingly violent societies on a ravaged planet.

Such inequality is everywhere in evidence. As the World Development Movement reports, the 76 African Caribbean and Pacific Countries targeted by the EU for controversial regional trade deals, known as Economic Partnership Agreements, are home to 740 million people, 550 million of whom live on less than £1 a day. A further 34 countries in Latin America, Asia and the Mediterranean region earmarked for bilateral or regional trade deals are home to 2.2 billion people, 920 million of whom live on less than £1 a day. Many fear that such rampant promotion of free trade can only exacerbate inequality and increase poverty amongst the world's poorest.

The adverse effects of globalisation have long been apparent to those on the ground in poor countries. These range from Indian peasant farmers made bankrupt by cheap imports resulting from the dismantling of protective tariff barriers, through to rising death rates in Russia following the collapse of social infrastructure and the rise of gangster

capitalism. Richer countries are now also beginning to feel their effects, with the recent fall in the values of stock markets and house prices, and the resulting decline in consumer confidence bringing rising unemployment and insecurity as jobs disappear, share values are destabilised and pensions shrink.

The argument that free trade is the one-size-fits-all solution to the problems of the developing world is a deceptive and irresponsible one. While moves to cancel some African countries' debts are welcome and long overdue, the policy conditionality in the packages on offer, the enforced liberalisation and privatisation, can be as onerous as the debt it relieves.

Poverty in Africa is not the result of some kind of accident of nature. While corruption and political mismanagement play a role, it is largely the direct and logical consequence of the policies of the G8 nations and their

corporations, which have been driving Africa's accumulation of debt, selling weapons, stealing Africa's resources, enforcing neo-liberal economics, privatising public services and which have collectively impoverished so many millions of people.

On the other side of the coin, the rapidly growing trade between China and the EU is causing its own problems for EU citizens and businesses. It is having a significant impact on job security, while the ruthless competition with other developing countries on products like textiles and footwear is driving down social and environmental standards right across the world.

And it isn't just the EU that is feeling the strain. Unrestricted trade in textiles threatens economic catastrophe in Bangladesh, the Philippines and Cambodia and is already causing some poorer countries to roll back workers' rights in a “race-to-the-bottom” attempt to compete with the Chinese on price.

In the Philippines, the government has ruled its minimum wage will no longer apply to the textiles sector. In Bangladesh, where almost

it is necessary to set out an alternative proposal for a radically different way to organise the world's economy

90 per cent of all industrial goods exports are produced by a textiles and clothing industry which employs 1.8 million workers, the government recently announced that it would increase authorised overtime hours and reduce restrictions on women's night work.

China increasingly has an absolute advantage in many areas of economic activity, based on a combination of artificially low labour costs (since its non-unionised work force face low pay, long hours, and safety laws are routinely violated) and increasing expertise in hi-tech areas.

Thus, the beneficiaries of this kind of globalisation are primarily transnational corporations, not the Chinese workers who, as well as suffering from some of the worst labour exploitation in the world, are themselves also losing jobs at a phenomenal rate.

The EU needs to adopt a global trading system based on high social and environmental standards, with quotas where necessary, that would be both fairer and more sustainable for workers in both the North and the South.

Globalisation is not driven by irrefutable economic laws or inevitable market forces, nor did it fall from the sky. Despite the public relations efforts of some to convince us otherwise, the WTO system is just one design for the world's economy. It is not inevitable. The establishment of the WTO and its global trade rules was the deliberate result of political choices. If we do not like the outcome, we can choose alternatives to it.

It is both necessary and timely to set out an alternative proposal for a radically different way to organise the world's economy. The process of “localisation” is beginning to be

increasingly advocated in both North and South. In essence it means that the purpose of a country's economic policy is to protect and strengthen its local and regional communities by producing as many goods and services as feasible and appropriate from within its own borders. This obviously does not mean putting an end to all trade. It simply means trying to meet more of our basic needs from closer to home. Anything that cannot be obtained locally is then sought in the region or continent.

Localisation differs from the closed economies attempted by communist regimes in that internal competition, the international flow of ideas and technology, and the introduction of resource taxes, will ensure that the stagnation and environmental degradation so often found in these closed-off regimes will not be repeated.

It can reduce inequality, improve the basic provision of needs, and fully protect the environment. Its end goal must be to support and increase the democratic control and involvement of citizens in the rebuilding of sustainable regional and local economies worldwide.

Over a period of time, there would be a gradual transition away from dependence on international export markets (with every country trying to compete with each other, leading to a downward spiral of social and environmental standards) towards the provision of as many goods and services as feasible and appropriate locally and nationally. Long distance trade is then reduced to supplying what cannot come from within one country or geographical grouping of countries.

This has the environmental advantage of no longer transporting so many goods over unnecessary distances. It would allow an increase in local control of the economy, and offer the potential for its benefits to be shared out more fairly.

This is the very antithesis of globalisation, which emphasises a reduction of controls on trade and contorts all economies to make international competitiveness their major goal. Localisation involves a supportive internationalism where the flow of ideas, technologies, information, culture, money and goods has, as its end goal, the protection and rebuilding of sustainable regional, national and local economies worldwide. Its emphasis is not on competition for the cheapest, but on co-operation for the best.

The EU has said we should embrace increased globalisation in order to deal with the economic threat from China and India – but it has failed to acknowledge that the very same economic globalisation was responsible for the threat in the first place. It has talked up the need to engage in the fight against climate change, and yet subscribes to the continuous growth agenda of the globalisation cheerleaders, putting ever more pressure on our natural resources and pumping ever more carbon emissions into our air.

Just last year, Commissioner Peter Mandelson launched the Commission's new Global Europe Strategy. At its heart is an aggressive agenda of corporate self-interest. Gone is all the friendly rhetoric about a Doha “development” round, and in its place, a new language of forcing market opening, gaining access to resources by all means, ensuring the competitiveness of European corporations, whatever the cost.

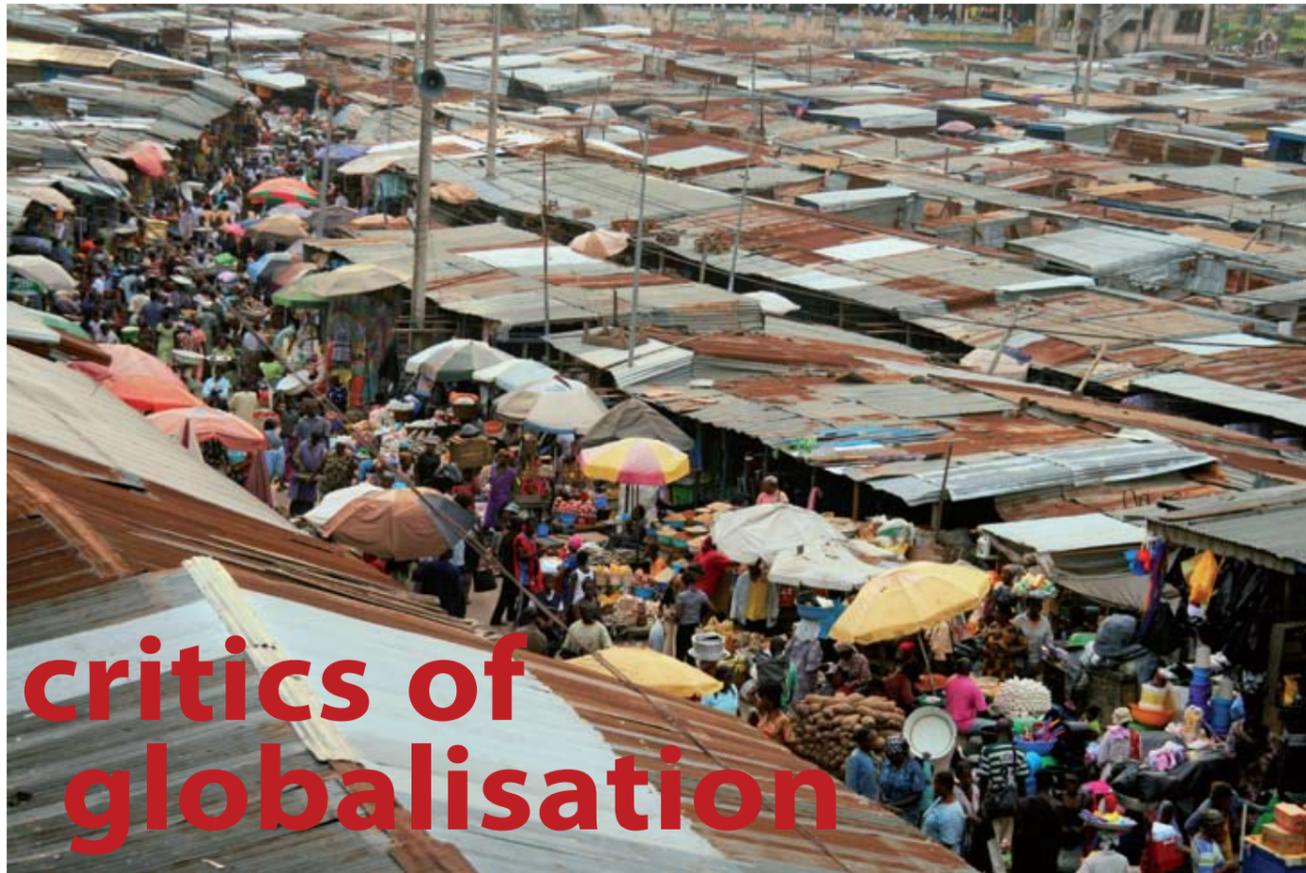
Free trade has now become an end in itself. The EU, centralised and bureaucratic with a neo-liberal agenda at its heart, is currently unable to effectively confront the real problems of today, such as climate change, the threat to democracy from multinational business, or the global injustice that is leading to mass migrations of people and the rise of violent fundamentalisms across the world.

Clearly a new “big idea” for Europe is required. For Greens, that idea means a bolder, more ambitious vision of genuine security and co-operation in which nations and regions reclaim control of their economies and communities through localisation. A Green Europe, and a Green world, means unity-in-diversity, achieved by popular consent, not centralised uniformity at the behest of corporate power.

Dr Caroline Lucas is the Green MEP for the South East of England. She is a member of the European Parliament's Committees on Trade and the Environment, and a Director of the International Forum on Globalisation.



[Illustration: James Aber]



critics of globalisation

JAGDISH BHAGWATI sings the praises of globalisation and questions the anti-free-trade views of some of his colleagues

There are asymmetries, not just similarities, both economic and political, among different elements of globalization such as trade, short-term capital flows, direct foreign investment, short-term capital flows, international flows of humanity and diffusion of technology. Most critics divide broadly into two camps: those who are (conventionally) worried about the social implications of globalisation; and those who are (increasingly) fearful of its economic consequences. The former critics cut across the North-South (rich-poor) divide, though many NGOs that subscribe to these views tend to be more in the North. The latter are overwhelmingly in the North, especially in large countries like the US, France and Germany.

I addressed the many social concerns in my 2004 book, *In Defense of Globalization*. When I went to Seattle for the November 1999 WTO Conference and a joyless-Woodstock happening broke out, most of it consisted of protests by groups who seemed to think that free trade was a malign doctrine and the WTO its church. To put it in the language of Tony Blair and Bill Clinton, both discredited in their own countries for different reasons, these groups believed that globalization lacked a human face. I went systematically through various concerns and concluded instead that globalization has a human face, and that by and large, it advances rather than retards the social agenda.

Take for instance the effect on inequality of pay for women even when equally as qualified as men. When the pressure of competition is intensified, as happens with free trade, the ability of firms to indulge in prejudice-driven payment of higher wages to men will be crowded out. As it happens, there is evidence in the US data for just that: over a 20 year recent period, the inequality of pay for women reduced faster in traded compared to non-traded industries. Trade clearly helped.

While I deal in my book with numerous issues raised by environmental critics of trade, let me consider here the belief of some NGOs that remain adamantly opposed to trade, and their contention that we ought to go “local” and buy from closer to home because of the considerable CO2 emissions involved in international trade. The British agency, DFID (Department for International Development), commissioned a study comparing the price of cut flowers from Africa and from Rotterdam. It turned out that the total CO2 emissions for flowers from Rotterdam were higher because the greenhouses in which they had to be

grown emitted CO2 as well.

I daresay that the certitude with which many embraced the social critiques has fallen, perhaps because their case has been examined by those such as myself, and found to be wanting. But now many among us are concerned less with these social issues and more with the notion that trade with poor countries is holding our real wages down. They would like to close the door as much as possible on trade, on the outward flow of investment by firms and on the inward flow of unskilled labour.

Thus, if you followed the recent presidential debates among the Democratic contenders for the high office, they were all having to buy into the trade unions’ fear that trade has cut into their wages: after all, labour is a principal constituency of the Democrats. But when you consider the evidence for this fear, it is terribly weak.

Many recent studies, for example that by Robert Lawrence of Harvard and Robert Feenstra of UC Davis, among others, show that trade is not a culprit. My own empirical

globalisation has a human face - it advances rather than retards the social agenda



work of some years ago shows that, in fact, trade may have moderated, not accentuated, the fall in real wages that seems to follow inexorable and acute labour-saving technical change. Yet, the fallacious laying of blame on trade persists, even to the point where my distinguished student Paul Krugman, an impassioned opponent of President Bush (who happened to be very good on trade and on immigration), has decided to retreat into the position that trade “may” have harmed wages, though he is unable to produce any real evidence to support the existence of an adverse effect.

Sadly, even *The Economist*, long a champion of free trade, fell victim last year to this fallacy and devoted a cover story and three pages to suggesting that the working class was a “loser” from globalization, again without any evidence whatsoever, though its latest *Economic Focus* column on Krugman (the quality of whose work on this subject hardly deserves any attention) was somewhat more sceptical.

I should add that, on illegal immigration, whereas the unions were keen on employers’ sanctions and sympathetic towards tough

enforcement against illegals, their position has changed in recent years. Of course, if you believe (as they do) that trade with the poor countries lowers your real wages, then the influx of unskilled labour is a direct way to lower your wages just as trade is an indirect way of doing so. Largely due to an intuitive understanding of this parallel, which trade theorists have explored systematically, the trade protectionists were also immigration restrictionists, and free traders were for freer immigration, as was the case when enactment of the first national restraints on immigration in 1904 was being debated in Britain.

The changed attitude of the American unions represents a changed appreciation of two facts: you cannot really control illegal immigration; and, if so, it is better to turn them into legals through an amnesty and to have them join unions and to support better wages. The Roman Catholic church of course, sees in the amnesty of many Hispanics the prospect of filled churches, so that altruism and self-interest point in the same direction! And, so we have a strange situation: broadly speaking, the Democrats hate trade but will vote for immigration; the Republicans like trade but are alarmed by immigration.

But, there also seems to be in the American media a general susceptibility to the strange view that the consensus among trade economists over the virtues of free trade has collapsed.

Among the economists who are cited on “the other side” are the macroeconomist Alan Blinder (whose argument simply boils down to the fact that we have more tradeables now and therefore the need for adjustment assistance has gone up, an argument that brings him belatedly into the free traders’ fold), Paul Krugman (with his unsupported “maybe” and other ambivalences that please faithful Democrats) and Paul Samuelson (whose famous article some years ago argued that in a global economy, exogenous changes could reduce one’s gains from trade but that a protectionist response would only make matters worse). I have already debunked the claims of the loss of consensus on free trade

for the rich countries in a forthcoming article, “Do Not Cry for Free Trade”, on my website www.columbia.edu/~jb38.

But the assertion of the vanished consensus on the benefits from free trade for poor countries is also to be found in the same media relying on the anti-free-trade arguments advanced by my colleague, Joe Stiglitz, and my former colleague Dani Rodrik. But when you probe these arguments, they turn out to be hollow. For instance, Rodrik warns against a “one size fits all” strategy, implying that we must tailor trade policy to suit different circumstances. Well, you do have to choose whether you want to move towards freer trade or towards greater protection: after all, you cannot have ad hoc remedies!

Or to put it in terms of shoe sizes, you must decide whether you want to go barefoot or you want to wear shoes. Rodrik’s argument is akin to saying that if you do wear shoes, then the shoe size will inevitably adjust towards the specific case! Stiglitz perpetrates other fallacies, such as stating that unemployment means you cannot have gains from trade. That issue was examined by trade theorists in the 1950s and even a Nobel Prize cannot shield you from ignorance and folly.

There is indeed a new epoch where fierce competition in trade and acute labour-saving technical change have created a “fragility” of jobs and corresponding anxiety. Merely saying that we must globalize and embrace free trade is simply not an adequate answer. This fragility does require a holistic institutional response if we are going to reap the upside gains from trade while coping with it downside difficulties. I have tried to sketch an answer in the afterword written for the 2007 edition of my globalization book, but I am writing a full-length book on the subject, to appear in the early spring of 2009, for the new President of the United States to read and act upon.

Jagdish Bhagwati is a University Professor, Economics and Law, at Columbia University and Senior Fellow in International Economics at the Council on Foreign Relations.



lesson unlearned



Ten years ago, East Asia was heavily criticised by the West for inducing a regional financial crisis. But, as RODNEY BRUCE HALL argues, the large western financial institutions have failed to practice what they preached

WHAT A DIFFERENCE a decade makes! Just a short decade ago the global economy was at risk of imploding due to financial crises in the developing world. Today, we find financial stress in the developed world in the form of the global credit crunch. What happened? How can the world lurch from one financial crisis originating in Bangkok, Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur, to another emerging in New York and London, separated by a scant decade?

After an unprecedented level of investment in East Asia in the 1990s, East Asian economies melted down rapidly following

a botched devaluation of the Thai baht in July 1997. Suddenly western investors demonstrated a crisis of confidence in East Asian economies, and rapidly withdrew over \$100 billion in capital from the region. FOREX market actors bid down the Thai baht, the Korean won, the Indonesian rupiah and the Malaysian ringgit to paltry levels, demolishing the balance sheets of East Asian firms that had borrowed in western currencies at short term maturities to finance debt. Most East Asian nations were forced to go to the IMF for financial bailouts that featured stiff conditionality. The IMF imposed both orthodox stabilisation and structural

adjustment measures on East Asian nations suffering financial distress.

Orthodox stabilisation measures, ostensibly designed to restore confidence in the currency and access to global capital markets, required Asian governments to hike domestic interest rates, raise taxes and slash government spending, severely deflating these economies with severe regional and global effects. The structural adjustment measures required East Asian governments to restructure their domestic economies and financial institutions to enhance financial oversight. They were sternly lectured on the consequences of the sins of “crony capitalism” (bank/firm/state

cooperation) and required to restructure financial institutions to ensure exercise of due diligence in approving and apportioning domestic credit.

A vast literature has developed apportioning blame for the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997 and the years that followed. Much of this literature suggests that while the IMF might have been offering good advice to developing countries newly vulnerable to the effects of rapid global capital flows, developing countries were badly advised when they had been pressed to open their capital markets to western portfolio flows prior to developing a financial institutional infrastructure capable of ensuring that the investment capital was used productively. Debates sprung up over the question of how to develop a New

market goose also good for the mature market gander? What has happened in developed world markets to generate the current credit crisis? The short answers are monetary profligacy and financial opacity.

Developed world financiers have failed to exercise the due diligence in lending that they advised to East Asia a decade ago. They have not practiced what they have preached. They have made hundreds of billions of dollars of very bad loans, particularly in residential housing. This asset bubble is now bursting globally with double digit plunges in property values in the United States, Ireland, Spain, and Australia, with more of the same projected for New Zealand and Britain. Massive defaults and banking losses have followed and will continue to follow.

financiers have failed to exercise due diligence in lending that they advised to East Asia a decade ago

International Financial Architecture (NIFA) that would dampen the volatility of global capital flows and arrest the recurrent, periodic financial and banking crises inherent in an environment of global capital mobility.

While the various positions on a NIFA have ranged from anti-globalisers, to financial stabilisers, to transparency advocates, to laissez-faire liberals, among policymakers (in the developed world) debate largely narrowed to differences among the financial stabilisers and transparency advocates. Financial stabilisers argue the current global financial system is inherently unstable. They argue that institutional fixes – such as a global lender of last resort or bankruptcy court, regional currency arrangements or a tax on portfolio capital flows – must be developed. Transparency advocates argue that financial crises arise due to inadequate transparency. They argue that due to “crony capitalism” and attendant inadequate banking and financial institutional regulation, risks are inadequately clear to investors. Greater financial transparency, coupled with adequate financial regulatory structures to limit risky financial behaviour among counterparties, has been their preferred solution. Apparently not even this has been accomplished.

Today the global financial system is suffering a global credit crunch brought on by highly risky financial behaviour by financial institutions in the developed, rather than in the developing, world. The preference of the laissez-faire liberals for untrammelled capital flows and lightly regulated global capital markets have thus far prevailed. Their calls for greater transparency have gone unheeded – in the developed world. Recall the stern advice (nay, the stern commands) imposed upon East Asian nations a decade ago regarding the importance of institutional and regulatory structures of fiduciary surveillance and restraint. Is not what is good for the emerging

Some of these problems have arisen in the wake of the bursting of previous asset bubbles, most notably of the Asian Crisis bubble economies of the 1990s and the “dot com” bubble in equities. Since the bursting of these asset bubbles the world’s central banks, particularly the U.S. Federal Reserve, the European Central Bank, the Bank of Japan and the Bank of England, have lowered interest rates and printed money to flood the global financial system with liquidity to ensure that the global payments system did not seize up – as it is doing now even in the face of unprecedented efforts on behalf of central banks to provide nearly unlimited liquidity.

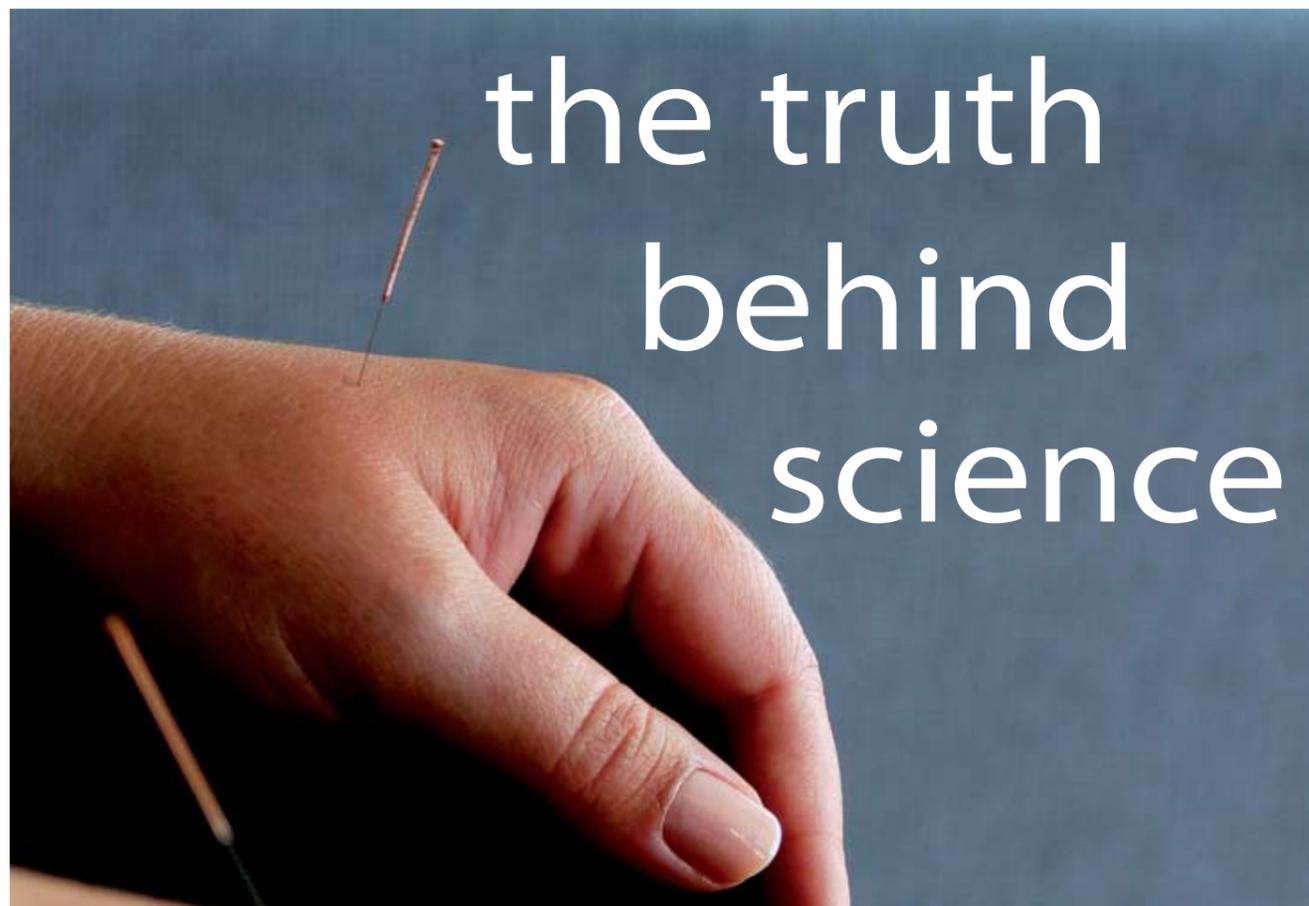
This excess liquidity has been chasing a limited pool of assets for what returns might be had around the globe. Banks have loaned at historically low rates, and people have bid up property to absurd prices with cheap credit, denominated in badly debased currencies. Creditors loaned to increasingly un-creditworthy borrowers, and to those who overestimated the appreciation and rents they could glean from “buy-to-let” ventures. The ever innovative financial markets “securitised” these mortgages, packaging complex tranches of variable quality, but high yielding mortgage debt into collateralised debt obligations (CDOs). These securities were awarded AAA credit ratings by global credit rating agencies. Irreverent “Barrons Financial Weekly” editor, Alan Abelson, might call this “buddy capitalism.” These securities were purchased by yield-hungry investors as diverse as investment banks, insurance companies and pension funds around the globe. Defaults from un-creditworthy borrowers are now sending shocking losses rippling throughout the financial system, as the CDOs booked as assets on the balance sheets of investing firms must be written down as losses. Uncertain of the extent of un-revealed counterparty

losses, banks have hoarded the liquidity made available to them by their central banks. LIBOR (British interbank) rates remain as high as 6% at the time of writing. Collapse of trust in the financial credibility of financial counterparties means banks won’t even lend to one another.

Irrespective of the regulatory oversight of financial institutions provided by central banks (though in some countries, such as the UK, financial regulatory authority resides in a separate Financial Services Authority), at root the financial system remains a confidence game. Confidence and trust are social institutions. Money is itself a social institution. Money is a promise. A resurgence of headline inflation in the developed world is not unrelated to the current crisis. Because central banks execute their monetary policy through open market operations, private actors (especially in the bond and FOREX markets) are delegated authority to adjudicate the value of the promise that money constitutes. They deem the credibility of the promise of the ECB to avoid printing too much money and guard against inflation superior to that of the Fed or the Bank of England. Thus the FOREX markets are bidding up the euro against the dollar and sterling, and the bond markets are bidding up long term rates they will accept to purchase US and UK sovereign debt. Structural budget and trade deficits and loose monetary policy in both countries render the promises of their central banks to protect the purchasing power of their currencies less than credible to bond and FOREX market actors.

We live in a world in which a great deal of authority for monetary and financial governance lies in the hands of market actors, who adjudicate with their market bids the credibility of our financial institutions and policies. A decade ago East Asia suffered the consequences of a loss of credibility of their financial system in the eyes of these market actors, these “private authorities”. We in the developed world are suffering these consequences now. When the earlier asset bubbles burst, our central banks printed money to bail us out. The result was new asset bubbles. We purchased highly overpriced property, now plunging in value, with badly debased currencies, now plunging further in value. Now many of us will pay higher mortgage debt servicing costs on these devalued assets in order to help self-mutilating banks to recapitalize. Perhaps our governments could help our financial institutions properly define “due diligence in lending”? We might practice what we have preached to East Asia.

Dr. Rodney Bruce Hall is University Lecturer in International Political Economy and Course Director of the MSc in Global Governance & Diplomacy, Dept. of International Development, Queen Elizabeth House, University of Oxford. He is a Fellow of St. Cross College. His most recent book, Central Banking as Global Governance: Constructing Financial Credibility, has recently been released by Cambridge University Press.



the truth behind science

Author and former documentary maker SIMON SINGH argues that the media's representation of science is not as truthful as it could be and urges both the public and the scientific community to keep an eye on rogue reporting

A 1999 SURVEY of British newspapers sampled four broadsheet newspapers on eight separate days and discovered 176 articles relating to medicine. 150 articles covered mainstream medicine, with a majority (60%) being critical or negative, whereas the 26 articles concerning alternative medicine were unanimously positive – it seems that alternative medicine is almost beyond criticism. This finding is in keeping with other similar studies.

For example, Canadian researchers scanned nine publications for articles that appeared between 1990 and 2005, looking for any that linked CAM (complementary and alternative medicine) to cancer treatment: “CAM therapies were most often described in a positive fashion, and CAM use was most often (63%) described as a potential cure for cancer. The majority of articles did not present information on the risks, benefits, and costs of CAM uses and few provided a recommendation to speak with a health care provider before use.”

Alternative medicine covers a large range of therapies, from acupuncture to zero balancing. The scientific evidence tells us that these alternative therapies cannot cure cancer and, apart from a few important exceptions, their other claims are bogus or grossly exaggerated.

Therefore, it is clear that the print media tend to present an overly positive and simplistic view of alternative medicine, providing accounts that all too often fly in the face of the evidence.

Similarly, there are numerous examples of uncritical and overly positive coverage on television. *The Wright Stuff*, for instance, is a largely reputable morning show on Channel Five, but it often misleads its viewers with its regular slots for alternative practitioners. Jayney Goddard, President of the Complementary Medical Association (CMA), appears frequently on the show, usually promoting homeopathy. Although there is a vast body of scientific evidence that shows that homeopathy is nothing more than a placebo, innocent viewers of *The Wright Stuff* are generally left with the impression that it is a powerful form of medicine.

It is interesting to note that the CMA's website claims that “thousands of people have contacted the CMA and *The Wright Stuff* about some of the products mentioned on the

show by Jayney Goddard in the last few weeks.” There is a conflict of interest, inasmuch as Goddard admits that she helped to formulate a brand of supplements which were promoted on the programme and which are sold on the CMA's website. Such conflicts of interest turn out to be the rule and not the exception.

The programme's producers probably feel that they are simply filling fifteen minutes of airtime with some harmless medical chat, but they are actually encouraging a market in unproven treatments. Moreover, *The Wright Stuff* is indirectly promoting some rather peculiar views, as Goddard is the author of “The Survivor's Guide to Bird Flu: The Complementary Medical Approach”, which claims to offer “information about a specific remedy for the precise symptoms of H5N1.” There simply is no alternative cure for bird flu, and to say otherwise is irresponsible.

It might come as no surprise that daytime TV is promoting disproven therapies, but it is disappointing when the world's most respected

homeopathy is nothing more than a placebo

The print media tend to present an overly positive and simplistic view of alternative medicine, providing accounts that all too often fly in the face of evidence.

broadcasters stoop to similarly low standards. In 2006, a BBC2 series entitled “Alternative Medicine – the Evidence” contained a sequence in which a young woman underwent open heart surgery in Shanghai. According to the presenter, she was “still conscious, because instead of a general anaesthetic this twenty-first century surgical team are using a 2,000-year-old method of controlling pain – acupuncture.”

When I contacted the Royal College of Anaesthetists, they confirmed that the patient did not receive any general anaesthetic, but they believed that there was strong evidence that she did receive two powerful sedatives: a pain-killing drug that is considerably more powerful than morphine, and large volumes of local anaesthetic. Viewers would not have been aware of this, and would not have realised that the use of the acupuncture needles was merely cosmetic. Similarly, the national press followed up on the documentary and further promoted the misleading idea that acupuncture has miraculous pain-killing powers.

Having worked as a TV director for seven years and as a science journalist for almost twenty years, this documentary was one of the saddest examples I had ever seen on media distortion, and it goaded me into embarking on two projects. First, I co-authored a book with Professor Edzard Ernst, the world's first professor of complementary medicine. Our aim was to examine all the available scientific evidence and provide the public with accurate and unbiased information about the safety and efficacy of a whole range of alternative therapies work.

Second, I submitted my first ever formal complaint about a television programme. I had suddenly transformed myself into “Disgusted of Tunbridge Wells”. Little did I realise that submitting a complaint to the BBC would almost as much work as writing a book.

After researching the subject, reviewing the footage and discussing it with experts, I informally approached the programme-makers, who were unwilling to accept any errors. This then led to the submission of a formal complaint, which was then rejected.

I then appealed, but the complaint was rejected again.

I clearly need to get out more, because I appealed yet again, this time to this highest authority, the BBC Trust. At last, the main complaint over the acupuncture sequence was upheld. This entire process had taken over a year.

Was it worth it? Having worked at the BBC, I know that such complaints leave a black mark on the reputation of film-makers, making it less likely that they will be given such responsibility again. Also, it sends a message to other producers that they cannot play fast and loose with the scientific facts. As well as keeping

rogue producers in check, such complaints also help those producers who care about the truth, and there lots of them, to resist any pressure to manipulate viewers.

The problem, however, is that submitting such complaints is time-consuming, and scientists seem to prefer to grumble among themselves and get on with their work, rather than combating misinformation. This is perfectly understandable, but it means that the most powerful means for engaging with and influencing the public – the media – is allowed to get away with nonsense. And, of course, this problem is not limited to alternative medicine. Channel 4's *Great Global Warming Swindle* and Panorama's recent episode on the dangers of Wi-Fi are both excellent examples of how programmes can mislead the public.

So what is the solution? Perhaps it is time for one of the major scientific bodies to take on board the responsibility of keeping an eye on the media. Academics, or indeed anyone who cares about the representation of science, could then submit complaints to a central office, perhaps housed at the Royal Society, which would then consider each one and decide whether or not it was worth pursuing. Because the central office would have a detailed understanding of the complaints procedure and

the way the media operates, it would complain effectively and efficiently.

A similar body already exists for supporting the media representation of science – the Science Media Centre was established five years ago to help journalists and scientists work together. It has been hugely successful in encouraging scientists to talk to journalists, thus enabling journalists to convey the science more accurately. While the Science Media Centre acts as the good cop, the sort of body I am proposing would act more like the bad cop.

The scientific bodies currently spend several million pounds on public engagement and educational outreach, but if some of this were to be diverted into what might be called Science Media Watch then it might pay huge dividends in the accurate and fair portrayal of science, medicine and technology.

It might takes years before anybody adopts and implements this idea, so in the meantime it is up to individuals to monitor the media. Next time you come across irresponsible journalism concerning science, I would urge you to do your duty, submit a complaint and join me in Tunbridge Wells.

Simon Singh is the co-author of Trick or Treatment? Alternative Medicine on Trial.



soldiering on



Despite its shortcomings, DR LIAM FOX argues that we must not abandon NATO

AS YOU READ this article from the comfort of your office, café or home, NATO forces across Afghanistan are fighting and dying. They are committed to a struggle that ensures the security we enjoy back home, the improvement of the average Afghan's life and, as many have claimed, the future of the NATO alliance as we know it today.

Since the close of the cold war there has been a lot of talk and debate as to what NATO's new role is. Advancements in European Union defence integration in the form of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) have added to this debate. With the advancements the Lisbon Treaty makes in deepening EU defence integration, this question has never been more pertinent.

So where does this leave NATO today? NATO's involvement in the Balkans gave it new life in the late 1990s but its current role in Afghanistan has been an awakening for many in the alliance. Today, NATO is challenged by a new type of warfare in a theatre of operations more than 3,200 miles from its headquarters in Brussels.

The mission NATO is conducting in Afghanistan would have been unthinkable 50 years ago. In fact, 10 years ago no one would have guessed this would have happened. Consequently, NATO's mission in Afghanistan has created further debate on NATO's role in European security, and lately, on NATO's survival as a security alliance. The mission to Afghanistan has also brought to light some

of the problems the alliance faces in a post-cold war world. To address some of the recent shortcomings in NATO we must get back to the basics.

What is NATO for? During the cold war NATO's two primary roles – political and military – were easily defined and separable. The military role of NATO was to provide continental defence against the Warsaw Pact and the spread of communism. There was a clear military objective: to defeat the Soviet Union on the battlefields of central Europe when called to do so. Conversely, NATO's political role provided western democratic countries a platform on which they could stand and confront the USSR and communism in Europe. Here the objective was also clear: prevent the spread of communism into western Europe.

The luxury of the bipolar world during the cold war allowed us to make clear and distinct differences between these two roles. But times have changed. In today's world, economic and security interests are interlinked in a global interdependent network, leading to an unavoidable set of shared interests with a multitude of actors.

Consequently, we now have the unavoidable importation of strategic risk. It is under these terms that NATO's *raison d'être* is just as

relevant now as it was during the cold war. Leaders in NATO must demonstrate a degree of political clarity in resolving political issues that underline military operations in the face of determined threats.

However, this will not be enough. The agreement of political aims by the various members in NATO must be equally matched with military capability to follow through. Leaders in NATO must work together to identify future threats that are in all our security interests. Strong arguments can be made that Article V, the mutual defence clause, needs to be expanded to cover new 21st century threats such as energy security or cyber terrorism. I welcome the fact that these issues were discussed at the recent NATO summit in Bucharest.

For NATO to work properly as a security alliance, NATO members must have the willingness to take equal risks with regard to supplying troops and equipment.

Currently there are certain members who are doing a disproportionate amount of the funding and fighting. This is simply not sustainable in the longer term. NATO members need to understand that membership brings implicit and explicit responsibilities to ensure that their militaries have the capability to fight and win on the modern-day

NATO must maintain its primacy in European security

battlefield.

One of the areas that I believe needs to be addressed is the "fighting/funding gap" we have in NATO. Currently, there is a system in place whereby NATO members have to pay the full costs of deploying their soldiers on NATO-led military operations. This discourages smaller members from sending their troops to the frontlines. Many member states, especially the newer eastern European members, are willing to fight but cannot fund the cost of deploying and supporting combat troops in long distance theatres of operation like Afghanistan.

Put simply, the current mechanism of "costs lie where they fall" is not working and the alliance needs to look at ways to create a common fund for all NATO-led military operations. I know that I am not the first person to recommend this, and I certainly won't be the last, but it is time that we start turning rhetoric into results. This problem will not go away, and the more NATO undertakes robust military operations in out-of-area theatres like Afghanistan, the more the question of funding will create cleavages in the alliance. The formula by which the common funding will occur should be based on a fair and frank assessment of the ability for each member state to pay and the ability of each member state to fight.

Another area of contention that has to be addressed is the conflicting view between NATO members as to what role the alliance should have in European security. What policymakers on both sides of the Atlantic have to understand is that the NATO alliance

the NATO alliance is based on a give-take relationship

is based on a give-take relationship.

Europeans and North Americans may have competing security needs and visions of NATO's role in the 21st century but this shouldn't be the beginning of the end for the alliance. As a result of recent Russian nationalism, many in Europe view NATO's main role as still providing continental security. To them, what NATO's mission should be has changed little since the cold war.

However, on the other side of the Atlantic, especially in the United States, NATO is now viewed as an alliance for expeditionary warfare; just one of several multilateral tools the US has at its disposal in the fight against terrorism.

Far from diverging, both views can be, and have to be, reconciled. Otherwise, America's view of NATO will make it irrelevant to many in Europe, while Europe's view of NATO will leave the Americans looking elsewhere for security alliances.

Even faced with all the current challenges, I wouldn't go as far as saying that NATO has simply stopped working as a functioning security alliance. The members of NATO still have the same shared values as during the cold war. But there are now diverging views on the assessment of what is an external threat to NATO and in what way the alliance should respond to these threats.

NATO's future depends on the support of its members. It must be very clear on both sides of the Atlantic that NATO must maintain its primacy in European security and must have the right of first refusal over the ESDP for all military operations involving Europe. I believe that any EU military capability must supplement and not supplant NATO. The ESDP must be one of many delivery tools of NATO policy and objectives. If the requirement for the mission at hand calls for a civilian capability then the ESDP will deliver for NATO, not the other way round.

With the current struggle in Afghanistan, the tinderbox which is the Balkans, the threat of global terrorism, problems with energy security, and a resurgent Russia, the stakes are too high. The EU must realise that NATO must maintain its primacy in European security, and that any advancement of EU military capabilities must be wholly integrated into the current framework of NATO – in support of NATO's aims and objectives. In order to successfully face the threats of the 21st century, this is the only way forward.

Now is not the time for NATO members to turn their backs on an organisation that has been so good to them for the last 60 years.

Dr Liam Fox MP is the Shadow Secretary of State for Defence.



armed and ready



BOB AINSWORTH discusses the importance of the Armed Forces

WELCOME THE FOCUS in this edition of the Oxford Forum on the nature of modern warfare; I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute. The importance and quality of the debate and discussion on these pages highlights the myriad of challenges that we all face in this complex and uncertain world.

Providing security for the nation and for its citizens is the most important responsibility of government. Crucial to this are the regular and reserve Armed Forces. Together they serve to protect and safeguard the United Kingdom and its overseas territories and to support the government's foreign policy. The Armed Forces are a force for good and it is a privilege to work with them. In recent decades they have: liberated the Falkland Islands; contributed to a peaceful resolution of the troubles in Northern Ireland; helped to liberate Kuwait; contributed to the restoration of legitimate government in Sierra Leone; relieved suffering in the Balkans and Africa; countered narcotics and supported security on the high seas; provided our strategic nuclear deterrent; and, at home, played a pivotal role in response to flooding, the foot and mouth crisis and in sustaining essential public services. At present they stand ready for every eventuality whilst nation-building and fighting global terrorism on two fronts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The Armed Forces are also vital national institutions. Reservists live and work in our communities, spreading experience, skills and values acquired from the military. The Cadet Forces play a key role in developing the young. On average, over 20,000 people leave the

Services every year. They leave better educated, fit, skilled and with compassion, confidence, a strong work ethic and team spirit. These qualities provide employers with valuable employees and society with responsible citizens.

We must not however allow these plaudits to conceal the unique demands we impose on our Armed Forces in the course of their duty because it is essential that what I have described above endures. Our Armed Forces must remain second to none and prepared to meet every eventuality. This requires the relationship between Service people, government and the nation to be mutually supporting. Each must play its part in cementing that complementary relationship. The recently published Command Paper, "The Nation's Commitment: Cross-Government Support to our Armed Forces, their Families and Veterans", addresses a variety of aspects of that relationship.

Two principles underpin the paper. First, it is designed to end any disadvantage that armed service imposes on our people, their families, or our veterans. It specifically seeks to counter the difficulties that follow from being required to move around the country or the world, and identifies those areas where special treatment is needed to achieve this. Second, the paper sets out how we can better support and recognise

those who have been wounded in the service of their country. I believe that this paper represents real change and is to be welcomed. Equally, its proper judge will be the Armed Forces, their families, and veterans. It is they who are doing the really hard yards on behalf of us all. And we should all be clear quite what a worthwhile contribution those yards are making.

In Afghanistan our forces are part of the International Security Assistance Force which is a NATO-led mission of around forty countries operating under United Nations Security Council approval. The mission is working in partnership with the democratically elected government of Afghanistan to help it to build a peaceful, confident and self-sufficient nation. The efforts of our forces as part of this international coalition are profoundly impressive, even humbling on occasions. It is invaluable work preventing any relapse of Afghanistan back to being a failed state which offers a safe haven for international terrorism and the narcotics trade. We are realistic about the magnitude of the task ahead but it is also important to take stock of the progress being made. The facts speak for themselves.

In 2003, 9% of the Afghan population had access to basic healthcare – by 2007 that figure had increased almost tenfold to 85%. Today six million children are enrolled in schools,

the Armed Forces are vital national institutions

over a third of whom are girls. This is in stark contrast to the situation in 2001 when only one million Afghan children – and very few girls – were being educated. Moreover, in order to enable the stability that is the vital prerequisite to reconstruction and institutional reform, 60,000 Afghan soldiers and 80,000 Afghan police have been trained, equipped and deployed.

Similarly, our commitment to Iraq remains. Here, the training and mentoring of the Iraqi security forces continues to be an integral component of our support to the Iraqi people. Embedded at key levels in its structure, UK forces are mentoring and training the 14th Division of the Iraqi Army in Basra. In the round, 495,000 Iraqi forces have been trained and equipped by the international coalition. Increases in the capability of those forces are

definite sense that the people are reclaiming their streets. Progress is also being made on vital infrastructure. Preparations are being made for Basra airport to transfer to Iraqi civilian control and the port of Umm Qasr is being developed into a thriving commercial hub.

These sterling efforts by our Armed Forces in Iraq and Afghanistan – in addition to those all around the world on land, at sea and in the air – are the reason why

our commitment to Iraq remains

demonstrable both in Basra and more widely across Iraq. This summer's report from the House of Commons Defence Committee described the security situation in Basra as "transformed" – a testimony, I believe, to our forces, but also most importantly to the determination of the Iraqi people to find a brighter future. This is illustrated by the reduction in incidents of indirect fire against British troops in Basra from two hundred a month at their peak last summer to an average of less than five a month since April this year.

I visited Basra earlier in the summer and was extremely heartened by what I found – the markets were buzzing and there was a

government must not rest on its laurels when it comes to the Armed Forces. We must continue to support and invest in our Forces, their families and veterans. The demands of operating on two fronts continue to be exacting and, in spite of those demands, the Armed Forces must have the opportunity to ensure that they can confront tomorrow's challenges. In order to do so, they will need to train for all eventualities, thereby remaining agile, flexible, resilient and world class. We are mindful of this and, as the tempo of operations reduces, will grasp every

opportunity to enable such recuperation. In this way we will retain the crucial insurance policy of the best Armed Forces in the world. As such, we will be able to face this world of uncertainty and threat with a confidence that will enable us to make a full contribution.

Bob Ainsworth MP is Minister of State for the Armed Forces.





KIM SENGUPTA argues that war has never been a more dangerous place for journalists

AROUND 215 JOURNALISTS have been killed to date in Iraq. To put this in perspective, two died in the First World War, 68 in the Second, 77 in Vietnam and 36 in the Balkans. Iraq has been and remains the most dangerous war to cover in the history of journalism.

The reason this has not made the headlines is because almost all the victims have been Iraqis, and the deaths of Iraqis, like that of Afghans or Somalis, are deemed to be less worthy of note in our media than those of people from Western news organisations in the conflict zones. The lethal figures are, however, worth mentioning to illustrate how the local reporters are vastly more in danger than those of us who have the luxury of flying out after doing our stunts and prop up bars telling war stories.

It is stating the obvious to say that war reporting is a risky business. Famous journalists who have lost their lives include Robert Capa in the first Indochina war, Ernie

Pyle on the island of Okinawa in the Second World War, Larry Burrows in Vietnam. Covering conflicts continues to take its toll of casualties, but what has changed is that deaths and injuries are increasingly not accidental collateral damage from stray shells or being caught in the crossfire. Instead, many have been specifically targeted because of what they had reported or because they are from the wrong side of the sectarian divide. They are killed in drive-by shootings or abducted and executed, often after being tortured. There are little or no investigations into the attacks, giving impunity to the murderers.

Local reporters are overwhelmingly the ones most vulnerable, but foreigners, too, can be in the firing line. I met Martin Adler, a renowned cameraman in Nairobi as I was coming out of Somalia and he was about to go in. We discussed the security situation and the risks involved. A week later he was killed while filming a demonstration in Mogadishu. A gunman had approached him through the

crowd and shot him through the chest. A year earlier Kate Peyton, a BBC producer, was shot and killed in front of her hotel in the same city.

Mahad Elmi, a reporter on the HornAfrik radio station and Ali Iman Sharmarke, co-owner of the network, were killed within two weeks of each other in the Somali capital. HornAfrik has prided itself on its fierce independence and impartiality in the face of intimidation by warlords and terrorists. The station, and Elmi in particular, had been one of the first ports of call of foreign journalists, myself included, who valued the insight they could provide in trying to make sense of the mayhem. Their killings came not while the country was being controlled by the Islamist militias – charged by the Americans as allies of al-Qa’ida – but rather since “democratic rule” had been allegedly restored with the installation of the Transitional Federal Government backed by the West and neighbouring Ethiopia, an ally of the US and UK in the War on Terror.

Nour al-Khal, a very brave female journalist I worked with in Iraq, was abducted by armed men in police uniform. She was with an American reporter, Stephen Vincent. Both were shot and dumped by the roadside and left for dead. Nour survived and has since left Iraq. Vincent had been writing about how the

police in Basra were heavily infiltrated by Shia militias and terrorising the populace. What happened showed that the gunmen feared no repercussions from kidnapping and killing an American, let alone an Iraqi, in the middle of Iraq’s second city, then supposedly under British control.

In Baghdad we stay outside the Green Zone at a hotel called the Hamra. It got blown up early one morning in Autumn 2005. I was lying in bed watching what was left of my room fly around overhead. None of the journalists were killed or even seriously injured, but a row of houses at the back were blown down and around 20 people, all Iraqis, were killed. There were strong suggestions that that the attack had been ordered by a senior member of the government who had got fed up with foreign journalists writing about death squads he ran. It may seem extraordinary that someone would be prepared to organise a bombing just because he did not like some stories in the media – surely even Alastair Campbell wouldn’t have done that. But this was Baghdad, a place where rules of normal society does not apply and nothing much would have happened to the minister, who continues to be in the government in a different post, if he had succeeded.

Journalists are not forced by their employers to go to dangerous places, although an American television company was sued for wrongful dismissal by a member of staff who claimed that he had been fired after refusing an assignment to Iraq. Attempting to explain why many journalists do in fact volunteer to cover conflicts, Harold Evans says in his book “War Stories: Reporting in the Time of Conflict from the Crimea to Iraq”, that the attraction is that “war is the biggest story of all”. In the same book Nora Ephron argues that covering war is a classically macho endeavour (Hemingway an example) in which the journalist can indulge in physical danger without the disapproval some of the public may have about wars. “The awful truth is that for correspondents war is not hell” she holds. “It is fun”.

Is war really the biggest “biggest story of all” to cover? Conflicts are, of course, covered in the British media with the level of interest dependant on whether the UK is involved. But that initial interest tends to dissipate remarkably quickly – the coverage of Iraq and Afghanistan now is, at best, intermittent, and conflicts where there is no direct British or American involvement tends to get relatively sparse coverage. Indeed, a question often asked of the few remaining foreign journalists who go to Baghdad on a regular basis is whether it is really worth taking such risks for a story on page 38? Journalists would get more consistent projection if they specialised in politics, or arts, or sports.

The vast majority of journalists one comes across do not regard covering wars as “fun” but there are a few who do seem to have a hankering for following the trail of strife. One oft repeated “rule” is that one knows that the time has come to leave a war zone when the only other remaining hacks are the mad French photographers. Seeing war reporting as a macho endeavour, on the other hand, is a



journalists are not forced by their employers to go to dangerous places

convenient shorthand but also an inaccurate one. Some of the finest writing from conflict zones at the moment comes from women correspondents like Christina Lamb, Hala Jaber and Marie Colvin. Imbuing them with posturing male characteristics, as Nora Ephron does, is silly and simplistic.

Another book, Philip Knightley’s “The First Casualty: The War Correspondent as Hero and Mythmaker from Crimea to Iraq” is an update of his classic tome on journalism published in 1975. Knightley sees the coverage of conflicts in terms of a tussle between the military, and thus the state, and the media over the control of news. His thesis is that with the increasing prevalence of reporters “embedding” with the troops and the unwillingness of news organisations to undertake the risks and costs of sending reporters autonomously to cover conflicts

has meant that the military has effectively won and independent reporting is finished. Vietnam, he argues, was really the last time really independent reporting took place. Knightley is a distinguished journalist and commentator but on this occasion he is wrong. Journalists who covered Vietnam will tell you tremendous pressure being exerted by the US forces at the time on journalists to reflect the Pentagon view of the world, and the necessary reliance on the military to facilitate coverage. If anything, dangers facing journalists have grown considerably in the intervening time. The number of those being killed and injured every year attests to that grim reality on the ground.

Kim Sengupta is the Defence and Diplomatic Correspondent for The Independent.

turning the corner

TENELLE PORTER follows Liberia's journey from civil war to a slow, yet promising, recovery

STEPS OFF a cool plane into the Liberian night that was as hot and thick as soup. Waiting for entry clearance under a pavilion ablaze with fluorescent lights, a UN peacekeeping troop from Ukraine brushed mosquitoes off of my back. "The bugs like you" he said. They liked everyone it seemed. I saw them landing, fat as flies, on the necks and backs of the travelers ahead of me.

I loaded two suitcases, one heavy with surveys and supplies for my research project, into the driver's old sedan. The driver laid on the horn and a half chorus of La Cucaracha peeled through the night, parting the crowd of vendors clumped around the car and allowing us to pass.

From the airport to Monrovia, we snaked

over the dark, two-lane road through candle lit shanty towns where adults and children, nearly invisible in the night, walked along the road's grassy shoulder. Thick air streaming in the windows smelled like cooking meat. On the way, the driver related some of his experiences of the recent Liberian civil wars.

At one point he told me we were passing God Bless You Corner, explaining that the rebels, who had routinely ransacked travelers on this road, named it so because if you passed it and survived, it meant that God had blessed you. "How did you go to the airport?" I asked. "You didn't go," he said, "not during the war."

We drove past The White Flower, a crumbling compound that was once the palace of former president Charles Taylor. The driver

sucked his teeth and told me that Taylor is currently on trial for war crimes in The Hague. We passed two military bases and clusters of faded billboards with crude illustrations and imperatives: "Stop Crime!"; "Mine and Trade our Diamonds Legally"; "Stop Rape!"

Other billboards pictured a smiling George Bush shaking hands with Liberian president Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf above the slogan "America Supports Liberia." Bush had visited Liberia the day before I arrived. The driver told me Liberians lined the streets to welcome the president's caravan. Bush stayed in the country for a few hours, meeting with Johnson-Sirleaf and delivering a ten minute speech to new military recruits.

The Liberian civil wars, the first from



1989 until 1996 and the second from 1999 until 2003, claimed the lives of an estimated 300,000 people. In the first war, President Samuel Doe, notorious for abusing civilians with his military, was rooted out of office and subsequently tortured to death by rebels. In the second, President Charles Taylor, Doe's former minister who was ejected from office for reportedly smuggling government money, was overthrown and fled the country to Nigeria. Both wars were fueled by a complex amalgam of tribal conflicts, political vendettas and struggles for control of diamond mines, rubber factories and the capital city.

In 2003 UN forces intervened. They ambitiously set out to disarm the entire country. By 2005, approximately 103,000 fighters had been disarmed. Of those, roughly 12,000 were children.

Former adult combatants were invited to participate in year-long rehabilitation programs offering education, social reintegration services and vocational training. Child combatants were disarmed, reunited with family members and some, having been out of school for several years, were enrolled in an Accelerated Learning Program (ALP) which condensed six years of primary school into three.

Five years since the end of the wars, the effectiveness of the Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation and Reintegration program (DDRR) is debatable. The UNDP claims "solid empirical evidence that the DDRR program in Liberia has indeed enabled a much better life for ex-combatants." However, research methods and quantitative outcomes are not well specified in their report.

National unemployment and illiteracy rates are currently estimated at eighty percent. A UN report released on 19 March, 2008 raises concerns about "high numbers of unemployed youth, including former combatants, who continue to pose a potential threat to stability

in the country."

I spoke with James Davis, a Liberian social worker who assisted with the rehabilitation and reintegration of child combatants after the war. James currently leads a team of volunteers working to build lasting relationships with former child soldiers because he believes rehabilitation camps provided ex-combatants with insufficient support.

"Kids were brought to the camp for counseling and documentation for only three to four days or sometime a week," he said. As soon as their parents or relatives were located, they were sent home. As a result, Davis told me many never returned to school and some became petty thieves and instigators of violence in their communities.

In some ways the post-war situation in Liberia is not unique. Nevertheless, facets of the wars make the task of reconstruction in Liberia particularly complex. The fledgling government is trying to educate a multitude of ex-combatants, resurrect a military and convince an abused public that the new armed forces are capable of deploying justice.

The obstacles to these goals are formidable considering that both government and rebel troops committed innumerable human rights violations during the civil wars. Both raped, murdered, tortured and stole from civilians. Both kidnapped children and trained them to be soldiers. Both, as one Liberian editorialist put it, contained "predators...who gunned down their own people."

I met with Colonel Craig Bailey, Senior US Defense Advisor in Liberia, to learn about the Liberian government's plans to rebuild the military. Colonel Bailey explained that all new recruits were strictly vetted. They had to pass an aptitude test, HIV test, literacy test, health and fitness test and a drug and alcohol test. They also underwent a background check and were rejected if they had a criminal record or a

history of committing human rights violations.

Photographs of eligible recruits were put in newspapers and posters throughout Monrovia. Civilians were invited to turn in any recruit that they knew had committed human rights violations. According to Colonel Bailey, only about twenty percent of potential recruits advanced to military training.

The US and UN have invested in the training of 2,000 military personnel with the hope that Liberia will be able to fund another 2,000 troops. About 1,000 troops have already been trained and five hundred began training March 2008.

Presently there are only twelve US military officials stationed in Liberia to assist with training. "The Liberian army is doing really well," Colonel Bailey reported, "we've seen strong leadership emerge...they aren't dependant on our help." The hope is that stringent vetting policies will not only lay the foundation for the development of a just military but also for the fostering of public trust in the government and its armed forces.

The attitudes of some civilians reflect that the strategy might be working. Several young people I spoke with aspire to join the new Armed Forces of Liberia. Other civilians are optimistic about the military's future. James Davis believes the armed forces are "being reorganized to reflect a professional code of ethics." "I am confident," he said, "that the new army will regain the trust and confidence of the Liberian people."

To this day physical reminders of the war in Liberia are as obvious as gaping wounds. Buildings damaged during the war sit like tombstones, baking in the sun. Tangled coils of barbed wire stick out of the tops of fences guarding schools, restaurants and houses. There is no centralized electricity. UN peacekeepers patrol the streets and keep watch in outposts along Monrovia's major roads.

Recovery is slow, and yet the sense I gleaned from the Liberian people is that they yearn for restoration in their country. "We are a peaceful people," said Mary Sargbeh of Monrovia, "we just want to keep peace."

Tenelle Porter is a student at St. Hilda's College, and works in Oxford's Department of Social Policy and Social Work.



physical reminders of
the war in Liberia are as
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does democracy make us happy?

Drawing on studies from across the world, PROFESSOR BRUNO S. FREY argues that the right to vote makes a people happier - in more ways than one

Democracy has normally been seen as a value in itself: it is desirable to let citizens participate in political decisions. It is also commended from an instrumental point of view - it produces political decisions closest to the preferences of the citizens. I here want to argue that democracy systematically raises the population's subjective happiness and life satisfaction to a considerable extent. Happiness research allows us to identify two different reasons for this increase in happiness: democracy creates more desirable political decisions; and the right to participate in the process of political decision-making is, moreover, valued in itself by citizens. This can be seen by looking first at representative democracies, and secondly by analysing countries with high levels of direct democracy, notably Switzerland.

Joy across the world

An international comparison surveying over 25,000 people in 28 countries during the period 1988-1998 looked at whether individuals living in more democratic nations feel happier than individuals in countries with less extensive democratic institutions. Happiness was measured by the responses to the question: "If you were to consider your life in general these days, how happy or unhappy would you say you are, on the whole?" to which participants could answer "very happy", "fairly happy", "not very happy", or "not at all happy". The happiest people, on average, live in Ireland, closely followed by Denmark, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, the United States and New Zealand. High mean happiness scores are also recorded for Sweden, Spain, Austria and Canada. In contrast, the least happy people are from the ex-communist countries of Hungary, Russia, Latvia, Slovakia and Slovenia.

Democracy leads to happiness

Two different indicators were used to measure the extent of democracy, and a "happiness function" is then estimated including a large set of socio-demographic, economic and cultural determinants, in

order to exclude other reasons for different national levels of happiness. The study revealed a positive (and statistically significant) relationship between more extensive democratic institutions and subsequent self-reported happiness. Individuals living in countries with more extensive democratic institutions are more satisfied with their lives, even if many other determinants of happiness (socio-democratic, economic and cultural) are taken into account.

The effect is sizable, i.e. democratic institutions considerably raise people's well-being. An increase in the extent of democracy by one mark on a 10-scale raises self-reported happiness to an extent similar to an increase of \$4,500 per year in an individual's income.

the happiest people live in Ireland, followed by Denmark, Switzerland and the UK

The results strongly suggest that individuals living in countries with more extensive democratic institutions feel happier with their lives according to their own evaluation than individuals in more authoritarian countries. These results are not prompted by directly asking whether individuals would be happier living in a democracy. Rather, the subjective, self-reported evaluation of well-being has been gathered, independent of the objective political conditions. Moreover, many other influences on happiness are controlled for, and a certain amount of trust can therefore be placed in the results.

Direct democracy and happiness

The previous section argued that the more developed the democratic institutions, the happier people are. This analysis can be taken a step further by considering the effect on happiness of citizens' direct participation rights - including either optional or mandatory

popular initiatives and popular referenda.

Switzerland is the only country in the world systematically using referenda at the national level and the sub-federal level. Remarkably, its 26 cantons differ in the amount of direct political participation rights citizens have. Popular initiatives and referenda can vary to some extent by requiring more or fewer signatures to propel them, or by covering more or fewer areas of decision making (e.g. including or excluding fiscal affairs).

The right to participate

The relationship between self-reported life satisfaction and the extent of direct political participation rights has been estimated

in a study of over 6,000 persons in 2002. Life satisfaction is dependent on a number of demographic factors, such as age, gender, nationality, education and family status; on the two economic variables of employment and income; and on the institutional variable of direct democratic rights.

The study allowed us to draw the following major conclusion: the more extensive the direct participation possibilities of the citizens, the higher their self-reported life satisfaction. This effect is of considerable magnitude (and again statistically highly significant). Consider the following thought-experiment. When a particular person moves from Canton Geneva, where direct participation possibilities are quite restricted (1.75 out of 6), to Canton Basel-Landschaft, where citizens enjoy extensive participation rights (5.69 out of 6), this person has an 11 percent higher probability of belonging to the group of citizens indicating that they are "completely satisfied". It was also found that it is in fact the right to participate,

rather than the actual participation, which affects people's happiness.

The twin benefits of democracy

The study mentioned was able to go one step further by differentiating between two types of utility that constitute the measured increase in life satisfaction accompanying more extensive direct democracy. The first type of utility refers to outcome - people in a democracy are happier because their political system is more likely to make decisions than make the majority happier. The second type of utility is of quite a different nature. "Procedural utility" refers to the well-being experienced by citizens as a direct result of having the right to directly participate in political decision-making. This includes the value assigned to being able to express ideological positions, irrespective of whether the act of voting has any effect on political outcomes.

Benefits but no rights

Citizens enjoy both "outcome utility" and "procedural utility" because they have the right to vote. In contrast, non-citizens can only enjoy outcome utility (assuming they are treated in the same way as citizens), but, because they have no right to vote, are prevented from enjoying the procedural utility produced by political participation rights.

The study, which again controls for a large number of other determinants of happiness, indicates that foreigners - who are prevented

it is the right to participate, rather than actual participation, which affects people's happiness

from voting - experience lower gains in well-being from living in a more direct-democratic canton than citizens do. While the positive effect of voting participation rights is 3.3 percentage points for citizens, it is reduced by 2.3 percentage points to a smaller positive effect of 1.0 percentage points for foreigners. This effect is estimated by taking into account that foreigners are on average less happy than the Swiss.

Conclusions - and problems

Democratic institutions contribute to happiness. Direct participation rights - via popular initiatives and referenda - further increase individuals' satisfaction levels. This is true for both outcome and procedural utility.

The research reported suggests that more extensive democratic institutions raise self-reported subjective well-being, both with respect to democracy as such and direct democracy. While these results are based on careful econometric estimates, and take into account many other determinants of happiness,

problems exist as always and need serious consideration. Of course, happiness depends on a great many factors, and the econometric estimates reported accordingly take into account a large number of variables assumed to influence happiness. The crucial question is whether some important influences are overlooked or inadequately captured, because, in that case, the estimates would be biased. A suitable way of dealing with this problem is to undertake robustness exercises to eliminate them, as indeed were undertaken for the estimates reported above.

Throughout these studies we have assumed that democracy affects happiness. However, there is one final complicating point. The reverse relationship may also be in effect: happy people may choose to have democratic institutions.

Bruno S. Frey is Professor of Economics at the University of Zurich. His research seeks to incorporate political science, psychology and sociology into neo-classical economic models. His book, Happiness: A Revolution in Economics, was published last year.



[Photograph: Denis Nordmann]

a happier planet?

NIC MARKS of the new economics foundation argues that a sustainable society will grow from hope, not guilt

The environmental movement has, in my opinion, overplayed the fear and terror tactic – it does get people's attention but it leaves everyone terrified about the future. It is for this reason that when I talk about a happier, fairer and lower carbon future I quite deliberately put the word "happier" first. Some people don't seem to like this; in fact they don't seem to like the concept of happiness itself, saying that it is trivial, transient and intangible. However I genuinely think that happiness is not only a vital element of a more socially just and sustainable future but also that it is the key feature of the path towards it.

What is happiness for?

To persuade you of this I want to share with you my favourite insight from positive psychology. Consider for a moment the evolutionary purpose of emotions – why is it that human beings have feelings at all? Clearly they must serve some purpose that aids our very survival as a species. The so-called negative emotions of anger and fear have been well understood for some time, and form the basis of the fight or flight syndrome. If there is a dangerous predator close then it serves us to be frightened and run away or freeze (so as to look small and avoid detection). However why do we feel happy? Until recently feeling happy has been seen solely as a signal of good functioning, in other words a message that "life is good" and we should carry on with what we are doing.

More than just a sign that "all is well"?

However, Barbara Fredrickson, a professor of psychology at the University of North Carolina, has developed the "broaden-and-build" theory of happiness that could revolutionise our understanding of the phenomenon. The first part of her theory is that positive emotions "broaden" our repertoire of thoughts and actions; when experiencing positive emotions we pay more attention, are more flexible, playful, and open to relationships and ultimately more creative in our responses to the immediate environment.

experience of happiness itself helps us build the skills that we will need to overcome future challenges

these changes from our current way of living are quite likely to be profound

Happier and greener

The second part highlights the other benefits that flow from these thoughts and actions as they facilitate the "building" of psychological and physical resources; these include resilience, social skills, physical abilities, emotional intelligence and self mastery. In other words the experience of happiness itself helps us build the skills that we will need to overcome future challenges. Further research shows that people seem to flourish in situations where they have a certain stability of relationships to give them solid ground as well as delightfully dynamic opportunities to challenge them. Whilst many people have high levels of financial wealth in Western countries it seems that the stability of our relationships is under severe strain and many people would not call working long hours to pay the mortgage a delightfully dynamic challenge! There is plenty of potential for the enhancement of these "qualities of life". If we want to create a future world which offers sustainable livelihoods for all people then we will need flexible, resourceful and open people and these are precisely the sort of skills that flow from happiness.

Communities of the future

When I try to imagine these sustainable societies and communities I think they are likely to share some features between them as well as having distinctive local characteristics – there will be no homogenous one size fits all. I think the commonalities will include both resource efficiency and well-being, whereas the diversity between them will reflect local cultures, traditions, creativity as well as different local environmental

conditions. These changes from our current way of living are quite likely to be profound, but they also have the possibility of being profoundly enriching.



A new way to measure progress

We clearly have a long journey to make if we are to create a sustainable future, and to start out on this journey we need to be sure that we are at least pointing in the right direction. This need for a sense of direction demands new indicators that point towards a happier, fairer and lower carbon world. At a global level we have devised nef's Happy Planet Index to be a new signpost for nations to assess their progress at living better but using less. We can mirror this process at a personal level by reflecting on the possibility that less might be more, that a shedding of the excess baggage of the materialistic lifestyle might be psychologically and spiritually freeing by enabling us to feel lighter and live more lightly.

So this is our vision for the future – happier people and a happier planet – and if we can start to communicate this vision more articulately and more broadly then perhaps it will be easier to be hopeful about the future of the planet.

Nic Marks is founder of the Centre for Well-being at nef (new economics foundation) and creator of the Happy Planet Index.

www.neweconomics.org
www.happyplanetindex.org



can we teach well-being?

Having pioneered "happiness lessons", DR ANTHONY SELDON says education should be about the good life, not exams

Wellington College, the school I run in Berkshire, started introducing lessons in happiness in 2006. It struck me as a fairly prosaic move, but suddenly the world's media was camped on our doorstep and everyone wanted to know what on earth

was going on. Why was Wellington College, set up by Queen Victoria and the Prime Minister of the day in 1859 as the national memorial to the Iron Duke, doing something so unmilitary and weird as teaching happiness? Why was it not teaching people

how to grow up to become good soldiers and learn how to kill people, or at least just teach them facts facts facts so they could maximise their exam scores which is the obsession of British education? The media just didn't get it.

What is education actually for?

In fact, it is quite simple. It all depends what you think education is for. If it is there to teach people to maximise exam performance, such an approach has little or no role, but if, as I think, education should be about teaching people how to live life, and live life to the full, then such thinking becomes mainstream. Why?

why was Wellington College doing something so unmilitary and weird as teaching happiness?

Money really has not got much to do with it. Nor has getting nine A grades at A Level.

Have we really "never had it so good"?

Year on year, the West becomes more affluent. As Prime Minister Macmillan said fifty years ago, people had "never had it so good", and they have carried on having more and more of the booty since he said it. Odd though that depression, dependency, anxiety and alienation amongst adults and more particularly children, has grown steadily. What is going on? Surely more dosh should be making people more happy. That is what we were brought up to believe. Wrong. Happiness in fact comes from a sense of self-worth, relationships and harmony. Money really has not got much to do with it. Nor has getting nine A grades at A Level. Or even four.

A happiness revolution in universities

At Harvard, over 50% of undergraduates last year reported depressive and anxiety symptoms. The figure will not be very different across British universities. At

Harvard, the most popular course amongst undergraduates in the last two years, taking over from "the principles of economics", has been "happiness". The classes are based on the work that emanated from University of Pennsylvania and Professor Martin Seligman since 1998, when the "positive psychology" school of thinking began to take off. What it did was to change the obsession of the academic subject away from mental illness and its causes towards investigating the ingredients and causes of happy and productive lives. It was a quiet revolution whose impact is still to be fully felt.

Well-being can be taught

What we can learn from it forms the basis not only of the Harvard and Wellington College course, but also thinking that is beginning to permeate education at primary, secondary and tertiary level across the world. Essentially it is saying that we should look after our bodies, and to live in harmony with them:

three bouts of exercise for twenty minutes a week has more anti-depressive effect than taking Prozac. We should live in harmony with our emotions, understanding and accepting them more fully. And we should learn to embrace our subconscious minds, and develop habits of positivity, to replace habitual gloomy thought patterns. Acceptance of self is key, but grounded in reality rather than wish-fulfilment. A final core ingredient is the sovereign importance of looking after others: if you want to feel good, do good. Hedonism, including drug taking and over-drinking, still a growing problem among the young everywhere, will never lead to happiness. Loving others will. Yes, things really are that simple. And yes, you can teach young people about things I have only sketched out here.

Anthony Seldon is Master of the independent boarding school, Wellington College. He is best known as a biographer of Tony Blair, and has so far written three books about the former Prime Minister.



faith in the future

GRACE DAVIE examines the state of religious belief in Britain

CAPTURING THE STATE of religion or religious belief in Britain today isn't easy. Several, seemingly contradictory, things are all happening at once. Is Britain post-Christian, or post-secular? Or does it manage both at the same time? Are all parts of Britain the same? And in which direction are we moving?

The starting point concerns the role of historic churches in shaping European culture, bearing in mind that other factors, notably Greek rationalism and Roman organisation, must also be kept in mind. The Christian tradition has had an irreversible effect on the shaping of both time (the calendar, holidays, festivals) and space (the ubiquity of Christian buildings) in this part of the world. Britain is evolving, but the legacies of the past remain deeply embedded in our physical and cultural environment.

A presence guaranteed by history is one thing: a hands-on role in the everyday lives of Europeans quite another. Commentators of all kinds agree that, with very few exceptions, the latter is no longer a realistic aspiration for the historic churches of Europe. But that does not mean these institutions have entirely lost their significance as makers of religious identity.

One way of understanding these ambiguities is through the notion of vicariousness: religion performed by an active minority but on behalf of a much larger number, who understand and approve of what the minority is doing.

The idea that the majority comprehends and agrees with churchgoers' actions is controversial. But religion can be seen to operate vicariously

the growing presence of other faith communities is challenging some deeply held assumptions

religion will increase in salience in public debate – driven by the significance of religion worldwide



in a wide variety of ways. Church leaders and churchgoers believe on behalf of others, and incur criticism if they do not fulfil expectations. And church people embody moral codes on behalf of others, even when such codes have been abandoned by large sections of the population.

An excellent illustration of vicarious religion in action lies in the furore that followed Rowan Williams' comments on the place of Islamic moral codes in the British legal system. A senior figure within the Church of England had – rightly or wrongly – violated expectations. The archbishop of Canterbury's contribution was not dismissed as irrelevant, but became the focus of public debate for several days.

Equally important are Europe's diminishing, but still significant, band of churchgoers. Here the change is best summarised as a shift from a culture of obligation or duty to a culture of consumption or choice. What was once simply imposed or inherited becomes instead a matter of personal discretion.

This pattern is entirely compatible with vicariousness. The chemistry, however, gradually alters – a shift that is discernible both in practice and belief, not to mention the connections between these two manifestations of religion. For example, the number of baptisms has dropped dramatically in the post-war period – evidence once again of institutional decline. In England, baptism is no longer an obligation, but an increasingly rare event undertaken as a matter of personal choice by people of all ages. As a result, there is a very marked rise in the

religious vitality

PROF PETER CLARKE explores the growth of new religious movements

WE ARE EXPERIENCING a worldwide phenomenon of renewed religious vitality. In its western form it is sometimes misleadingly seen as resulting from the arrival of unprecedented numbers of believing and practising economic migrants from Asia, Africa and parts of eastern Europe.

But this phenomenon cannot be attributed solely to these developments, any more than the growth of new forms of evangelical Protestantism and the resurgence of Islam can be attributed to modernisation.

The migration westwards of Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists from the Middle East and Asia has undoubtedly contributed to the vitality of religion in the west. In some cases it has acted as a catalyst in giving rise to a Christianity that is more self-aware and self-assertive. It also needs to be kept in mind that there has been much lapsing and backsliding among Muslim migrants, especially among Muslim youth. This has had repercussions on both the mission and quality of education provided by the madrasahs (Muslim schools), which in many places have become stricter about matters such as the teaching of Islamic knowledge.

Religious dynamism, newfound vitality,

and the ever increasing interest in spirituality – wherever they are found – are the outcome of both local and wider factors. The Ikhwan or Muslim Brothers movement founded in Egypt in 1929 by Hassan al Banna cannot be fully understood if seen purely as a response to western influence. The brotherhood was as concerned with rescuing Islam from local forms of corruption.

Religious vitality should not simply be understood in terms of numerical growth, but considered within the framework of religion in the contemporary world.

It is important to make a distinction between the force and the scope of religion. The idea of force refers to the degree of determination with which believers hold and are held by their faith. "Scope" refers to the range of social contexts within which religious views are considered as being relevant. Both these aspects of religion have become more pronounced in recent times.

The increase in the force and scope of religious belief has aroused considerable concern among humanists and politicians, even among devout religious believers. Former US president Jimmy Carter, for instance, is persuaded that religion is striving

to acquire too great an influence over the public realm – to the disadvantage of both the public and the religious sphere.

The new religious vitality has come as a shock to secularisation theorists. Many had previously believed that religion's influence had decreased, was decreasing, and would continue to decrease in a world dominated by instrumental reasoning. Such theorists mistakenly consigned religious forms of power and innovation – and in particular charismatic power – to the pre-modern world.

Secularisation theory lost sight of religion's organic qualities, its potential dynamism, and its capacity for reinvention while retaining its own distinctive identity. Theorists also underestimated religion's intellectual role, believing it had been surpassed by science.

Yet for many in the west religion retains the capacity to explain the world and to engender hope in its transformation through

messianic beliefs. These beliefs continue to be strongly held almost everywhere in the modern world – even in places where one would least expect to find them, such as Japanese Buddhism, neo-Hindu movements like the Brahma Kumaris (daughters of Brahma) movement, and in the Korean Won Buddhist movement. There is hardly a single example of religious innovation in the contemporary world where these beliefs have not figured prominently. Yet little attention has been given to their potential to generate powerful religious commitment and ideological fervour.

There can be little doubt that in the past century religions such as Buddhism, Islam and Christianity have undergone changes as profound as any in their history, and are continuing to experience change on an unprecedented scale. Even the misleadingly labelled "traditional" religions such as those of Africa, Oceania, and Asia are radically changing: some are moving from an ethnic, non-proselytising base to universality.

While the force of religion has increased – or is perceived to have increased – no one religious orientation predominates. Nor does religion communicate an uncontested ideological message. There has been an explosive rise in socially conservative religion in the west over the past 50 years, but liberal religion has also been on the increase.

Most religion is global: regionalism has declined rapidly. This has engendered new forms of religious pluralism which make specific demands on social cohesion. During the 1970s, Islam in the west was an exotic appendage to the rest of western European religious culture. Now it makes sociological sense to speak of European Islam.

Where religious innovation is concerned, the present age, rather than being seen as the pinnacle of secularism, might well be described as an age of growth and diversity. It has introduced new styles of being religious and new ways of believing and belonging.

Some might argue that new religious vitality is no more than a passing phenomenon, and that it lacks adequate institutional foundations. But religion can thrive even when it lacks strong institutions: there is no church of Buddhism.

Given the profound transformation in communication technology now underway, it could well prove to be the case that solid structures impede growth, while movements with loose structures may be better prepared as styles of spirituality change. And change they do.

Peter Clarke is professor of the history and sociology of religion at Wolfson College, Oxford.



number of adult baptisms – by no means enough, however, to offset the fall among infants.

Also relevant for the future of faith in Britain is the growing number of immigrants, largely accounted for by the influx of labour in the 1950s and '60s. The implications for religion are considerable.

One way of understanding this better is to compare the British situation with the French. In Britain immigration has been much more varied than in France, in terms of both provenance and faith. Here, ethnicity and religion criss-cross in a bewildering variety of ways: only Sikhs and Jews claim ethno-religious identities. In contrast, immigration to France has been largely from the Maghreb. As a result, France has by far the largest Islamic population in Europe: about nine per cent of French people are Muslim. Arab and Muslim have become interchangeable terms in popular parlance in France.

Beneath these differences lies a common factor. The growing presence of non-Christian faith communities, and of Islam in particular, is challenging some deeply held assumptions. The notion that faith is a private matter and should, therefore, be proscribed from public life – notably from the state and from the education system – has been conventional wisdom for the past 50 years.

But many first- and second-generation immigrants to western Europe hold strikingly different convictions. By their sheer presence, these immigrants propose a challenge to the traditional way of doing things. Hence a whole series of heated controversies regarding the place of religion in public life: the wearing of the veil,

the rights and wrongs of publishing material that one faith community finds offensive, and the location of "non-European" religious buildings. There have been moments when a lack of mutual comprehension, exacerbated by a reluctance to compromise, has quickly led to alarming and dangerous confrontations.

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another

Such episodes raise a further point: the extent to which the secular intelligentsia exploit these events in order to articulate alternatives – be they ideological, constitutional or institutional – to religion. Resurgent religion brings with it resurgent atheism: a fact that is becoming ever more obvious. Despite this, the re-emergence of faith as a source of public debate was not anticipated. Resurgent religion has taken Britain by surprise. So too have its best-selling alter-egos.

What then will happen next? I venture to make some cautious predictions.

Vicarious religion is likely to diminish – indeed it may well disappear before the middle of this century. Churchgoing will nonetheless

persist, but operating increasingly on a market-based model. Only those religious organizations that make it worth the while of the faithful to attend will prosper. Religious minorities will continue to make their presence felt, sometimes very positively. We ignore their contributions at our peril. Finally, the salience of religion in

public debate will see a further increase. Such a shift will be driven not only by the presence of new forms of religions in our midst, but by the significance of religion worldwide.

For all these reasons, it is crucial that we escape from the situation in which we currently find ourselves. The majority of Britons are largely ignorant of their own faith, never mind anyone else's. And yet we will increasingly need to resolve sensitive religious issues. Improvement is imperative.

Grace Davie is a professor of sociology at the University of Exeter, and author of The Sociology of Religion.

[Photography: Martin Erichsen]



[Photography: Ilker]



losing our religion

A shift from religion to spirituality is taking place, and churches may struggle to survive, says CALLUM BROWN

LESS THAN 6.3% of the people of England attend a Christian church on a Sunday. And that number continues to fall, as it has done for the last 50 years. It raises the question of whether there is a future in Britain for a religion like Christianity.

Not every country in the world is in the same state. Across much of the USA, South America, Africa, and south-east Asia, religions are thriving. The world's two most religious countries, many commentators aver, are India and the USA, closely followed by places like Nigeria. In most continents, popular attachment to religions, participation in religious rites, and levels of prayer and religious observance remain strong and in some places growing.

Yet Britain, most of Europe (including European Russia), Australia, New Zealand and Canada, seem to be very different. Here, levels of religious activity are low and have been declining for up to half a century. Levels of recruitment to the clergy are falling, and the traditional churches are having to merge congregations, close buildings and sell land in order to keep going. Some have called this "the end of Christendom" in Europe, whilst others merely refer to the secularisation of European

culture and the de-Christianisation of society.

What is happening in Europe, though, is more complicated than mere decline in religion. The very nature of organised religion is being transformed. This is because of two factors acting both internally and externally

people have been led to a **view of spirituality founded on a sense of a "god within" rather than a "god above"**

upon the churches.

The first of these is the splintering of religions mostly between liberal and conservative wings. Internal division is not new in Christian churches, but it has taken a turn in severity over the past 20 years. There is the prospect of some churches suffering schism over issues such as homosexuality, abortion, contraception, and the ordination of female

clergy. There are other issues of more arcane theology involved too, but it is instructive that at the heart of religious division in the modern world is the imposition of religious control over the human body.

Attempts by European churches to control

women's bodies was important in instigating widespread female alienation from the churches from the 1960s and 1970s, with considerable antipathy between the women's liberation movement and representatives of conservative Christianity. The same issues about control are to be found in each of the world's main religions, so it is by no means a circumstance peculiar to Christianity.

But what is critical for the position of Christianity in Europe has been the widespread rejection in the last half century of traditional law over the body. Christian-based laws on matters as diverse as censorship of books, theatre censorship, suicide, homosexuality, abortion and contraception have been

the charismatic renewal movement, and widespread advance of women in ordained roles. Some have referred to the search for "authenticity" in religious experience both within and outside the churches as a characteristic of our age.

But at the same time, some perceive a

in this faith free-market, **no belief is central, and no key article of faith is required**

overturned or sidestepped in most European nations. The pressure for reform has come mostly from outside the churches, though liberal Christians have been involved in the process too.

The result has been the ending of effective central Christian control over the lives of most Europeans. Neither in law nor in public culture is there now acceptance of a "Christian norm" of behaviour and morality as there was at the beginning of the 1960s. The absence of widely agreed common religious culture marks out European secularisation from almost every other continent.

The second factor that has been influential in changing the nature of British religion has been the rise of what is often referred to as the new age. Some people talk of "the spiritual revolution" that has led people of faith and no-faith away from the notion of a centred religion with controlled entry and central tenets of doctrine. Instead, people have been led in the past few decades increasingly to a view of spirituality founded on an innate sense of a "god within" rather than "god above", of a shared sense of another life not founded on doctrinal belief and education in scriptural authority.

The nature of the new age leads some sociologists of religion to discount its importance. The absence of central coda and counting of members makes its significance impossible to calculate, they say, and makes it liable to exaggeration by practitioners and sympathetic observers.

But other scholars remark on the way the ideas of the spiritual revolution have infused all forms of public life from bookstall to corporate capitalism, television soap operas and hippy fashion. Spiritual-based therapies are now extremely popular, and centres such as Glastonbury, Iona and Findhorn enjoy enormous popularity. The spiritual revolution has undermined authority in religion, challenged hierarchies and hegemonies in the religious world, making it increasingly difficult for those who claim leadership (such as the archbishop of Canterbury) and made them more liable to criticism, ridicule and disbelief than was formerly the case.

Now, in the midst of these major forces, there has been great change taking place within religions in Britain. The major Christian churches have not merely declined in their numerical size in the past half century; they have also seen the arrival of new forms of worship, development of house churches,

fundamental shift taking place. The shift from religion to spirituality signals the shift from church to faith. This is a shift from public ritualised performance, organised and legitimated by the state or its agencies, to a free-market in spiritual ideas and forms of ritual, into which individuals may enter to the extent that they wish, selecting items of faith in a form

of "pick 'n' mix" selection.

In this faith free-market, no belief is central, and no key article of faith is required. Even belief in a God is not necessary, and indeed there is an argument put forward by some that the key characteristic of this new world of spirituality is religious doubt. Certainty, which is the hallmark of religion, is being displaced by doubt, the hallmark of agnosticism, making the very lack of certainty about either a god or an afterlife a motif that marks out our new European generation.

If this is indeed what has happened, then this has major implications for religions in Europe. Our conceptual bandwidth on what constitutes faith is changing in ways that may undermine many of the institutions of organised religion. This is a move from the notion of religion itself to something very different and something in which the traditional churches may struggle to survive.

Callum Brown is professor of religious and cultural history at University of Dundee, and author of The Death of Christian Britain.





debating bishops

Bishop JAMES JONES argues that religious representation in the House of Lords benefits society

THE PRESENCE OF the bishops in parliament as "the lords spiritual" raises questions about both the established church and the character of the second chamber.

Most observers recognise that the quality of debate and the quality of the amendments to legislation in the House of Lords are of a high order. This is not surprising: the appointed members are drawn from a wide range of society and bring to the debate a depth of experience and an application of expertise often absent in the Commons. Out of this body of knowledge there is wisdom that makes for better laws. The Lords have power to revise the legislation but the Commons have the last word. The task for those reforming the House of Lords is not how to make it more democratic. It is how to draw into this chamber people with the experience and

expertise to revise the laws that cover the whole spectrum of our life.

I am not convinced that a so-called "democratic system" manipulated as it is by both the media and the machinery of party politics will yield up people with the breadth of experience that is necessary for the refining of good laws. There needs to be a method of appointment that is beyond reproach and accountable to parliament in order to secure from every walk of life people of integrity and wisdom – many of whom are alienated from the machinations of partisan politics. This should include, alongside the professions and the trades, those who are pastors in the community. Spiritual leaders from the different faith communities have an understanding of human need and nature that equips them to comment on and shape the legislation. That is why the lords spiritual have a role to play in

parliament in the contemporary world.

At present that role is secured by virtue of the established church. Questions are rightly asked as to whether in a society where many faiths are practised Christianity (as expressed in the Church of England) should have such a prominent position and one that is enshrined in law.

One of the welcome features of the present House of Lords is that other faiths such as Islam, Hinduism and Judaism are present on the benches of all parties. They are, of course, represented individually but they add indisputably to the breadth of the House and to the authority to legislate on so many issues from assisted dying to incitement to religious hatred. If the other faiths were not already present in the House I think there would be huge pressure to ensure their presence through statutory reform.

But why should the senior bishops continue to sit in the House of Lords by right? I think it has to do with history, symbolism, demography, authority and representation.

Within the multi-faith settlement that is emerging in our society there is a uniqueness about the place of Christianity in British culture that is central to our character as a nation, and gives the Church of England a distinctive role within the diverse practice of faith today.

Historically, Christianity has shaped the culture and institutions of our national life. Our laws, liberty, language, literature, landscape, learning and leisure are infused

out of its unique corporate and pastoral experience. It does so with an authority from below – from its practical engagement with the people. Some within the church challenge this very point about being able to speak prophetically: they argue the presence of bishops in the House of Lords reeks of privilege. It's a serious point.

I think temptations to compromise are very real but I do not think that the temptation itself constitutes an objection in principle. Nor do I think that the prophetic voice of the church is muffled or muted by establishment. Indeed, it is because the Church of England is established that comments are leapt upon by

there is a uniqueness about the place of Christianity in British culture that is central to our character as a nation

with the ethos of Christianity. Each has been and continues to be open to other influences but their development has also been the product of Christian faith. Our laws stretch back to the ten commandments; our liberty owes a debt to the Christian champions of parliamentary democracy; our language and literature resonate with themes and images from the Bible.

This history finds contemporary expression in the fact that the Church of England is a presence in every community across the country. The corner shop may have closed, the surgery and school may have disappeared, even the pub may have shut, but the church is still there, and in some of our most deprived urban and rural settings is surprisingly vibrant. Of all the faith communities it is a fact that the Church of England is unique in maintaining a presence in each neighbourhood. Indeed, it is the commitment of this diocese where over 45 per cent of the parishes are in areas of multiple deprivation that we maintain a "sustainable, led and transforming Christian presence in every community". By virtue of its inheritance and historic resources the Church of England is there with the people.

This history and demography give to the Church of England a remarkable authority. Unlike other professionals, our clergy and our people are there 24/7. This gives the Church of England unusual authority to speak especially to those in power about both comfortable and uncomfortable Britain. If you read the speeches of bishops in the House of Lords you will find they do not shrink from this calling. They speak as they find. They are critical friends to those in government. From asylum seekers to prisons, from urban regeneration to the rural economy, bishops challenge policy and amend legislation in the light of the church's pastoral knowledge. Of course, members of the House of other faiths and of none also speak passionately about these issues.

But the Church of England, as one of the few omnipresent institutions in the country, has a special responsibility to speak prophetically

that they are acting in a representative role on behalf of faith communities generally in their own areas.

I am conscious of that dimension and am encouraged by people such as Akbar Ali and Shiv Pande that the Muslim and Hindu communities of Merseyside see me as their champion. Thus, I hosted the Diwali reception at the town hall and welcomed Hindus from all over England for their ceremonies on the River Mersey.

I am the patron of the Abdullah Quilliam Centre, which helps to raise funds for the Muslim Heritage and Education Centre to promote as true example British Islam. Welcoming and affirming the other faith communities does not compromise my conviction that Christianity has shaped our culture and that the Church of England has a unique and continuing place in our constitution. It has a representative function in speaking up for the importance of faith in public life. This generous hospitality does not diminish the uniqueness and distinctiveness of the Church of England and its role in our national life. I believe it flows from and further enhances the Church of England's role as pastor to the nation.

"Pastor to the nation" is a role that the Church of England occupies especially through the media as it ministers to the community locally and nationally. We saw it with the tragic killing of Rhys Jones. The media coverage, however, only scratched the surface of what the church was doing at a local level. Recently at our clergy study day looking at the changing face of the Church of England I recounted these episodes of the clergy at work in the community when Rhys was killed.

David Williams, chaplain at Alder Hey, visited the family in their immediate grief. David Leslie, the parish priest working with Father Andrew ecumenically, ministered to the community and to the family through their pastoral visits and vigils. Mark Coleman, chair of the governing body of Rhys's school, worked alongside parents and children and, as area dean, supported his colleagues. Here was the



spiritual leaders have an understanding of human nature which equips them to comment on legislation

the media – more so than those of other faith leaders with the exception of the Chief Rabbi. The critical prophetic voice is amplified by virtue of the Church of England's established position. Its opportunity to speak certainly comes from its establishment, but its authority comes from its connection with people at the grassroots.

Although critics of the church's established position use pejorative terms such as "privilege", the reality is that bishops see themselves exercising "responsibility" in bringing to bear spiritual values on public policy and legislation. They do so mindful

Church of England doing what it does day in and day out. When bishops sit and speak in the House of Lords or speak through the media they do so connected to this pastoral reality. We do not trumpet these things because the strength of our work lies in its very discretion. However, when people want to challenge the right of the Church of England to occupy a place in parliament, it is important for us to tell others that the Church of England remains at the heart of our communities.

The Rt. Rev. James Jones is Bishop of Liverpool.

shields, trophies and other gongs

NICHOLAS DANIEL looks beyond competitions in search of a musical revolution

IN A WORLD where commercialism and competitiveness are increasingly seeping into the world of performance and arts education, it is perhaps a good time to examine whether competitiveness has any place in music. Can it help the consumer, overburdened with commercialism and bombarded with “eyeball” input, to come to any conclusion about what music they want to listen to, and if so, why?

I was lucky enough to win the BBC Young Musician competition in 1980. Because there were only three television channels, and because it was broadcast during a prime time BBC 1 Sunday evening slot, more people watched it than ever watch any single programme now (except the Queen on Christmas day, but then Her Majesty is now spread across the channels!). The effect of this win on my life and career was huge and it still has an impact now, nearly 30 years on. This is not to underestimate the subsequent work I have done: gritty practice, great experience on the road in other competitions, on the radio, television and on disc, and the maturing of myself as an artist now weigh a lot more heavily than one single competition win. That is good, as at the time I had an eerie feeling that the BBC competition was too much of an easy shortcut to success that I hadn't quite earned. Protestant work ethic perhaps!

However, with an instrument such as mine – the oboe – starting a completely solo career would most likely have been impossible, or certainly much harder, without the huge boost provided by prime time television. Now, even without a major recording contract with one company (I have made over thirty recordings on many different labels) or a big shot international agent (my agent is wonderful and a fantastically supportive friend and partner in my development) I still have a deeply satisfying career that takes me all across the world and gives me and my family a great life, with concerts such as the First Night of the Proms last year, playing real repertoire – Mozart's Oboe Concerto – and not crossover muzak-sludge!

I have judged the BBC competition and many others nationally and internationally and sit on panels where I cast an opinion on frequent occasions all over the world, including in my position as Professor of Oboe at the Musikhochschule in Trossingen, Germany. I take the responsibility of it very seriously, as has almost every colleague I have worked with, whether they have the same judging criteria as me or not.

So it looks like I am in favour of competitions, right? On the face of it, surely a competition helps the public cut through the

bewildering variety of artistes on offer to one that is the best of the bunch? Well not exactly. It's not as simple as that.

Competition is a matter of taste. When there is a judging panel of “experts” there is a personal opinion being expressed that cuts through the rich world of different tastes and opinions for a general all purpose result that pleases an average of all the judges.

Let me explain the mathematical equation that leads to an average and bland result. This judging system is very commonly used in the world of music competitions. Eight judges all give marks, say, out of ten, the lowest and highest marks sometimes being cut off in case of bias. An average is then taken of the remaining marks. The performer that offends least people because of not offending too much of the individual taste of the jury will get an average mark of about seven out of ten. They don't thrill, but they don't offend. The startling performer with life, energy and individuality will come along, make a big statement from their performance, offend at least five of the judges, who are presumably there because they are well known performers or teachers with a strong opinion, thrill about five of the judges with an open mind and heart, and end up with an average mark of about five. Therefore we end up with a sort of “British New Labour”

effect of a winner who tries too hard to please everyone and ends up somehow clinging on to first place despite only average performance and seeming to play the game right.

This also holds true even if the judging is done by conversation, as a panel that disagree will get an aggregate agreement and will award a prize with a majority decision. The result once again: bland winner.

I guess that with the X Factor system of judging, leaving the vote to the people through phone lines, online voting and SMS messages, you will get a result that pleases the majority of the viewing public. Look a little deeper though and you may see that it is possible, with three acts left in the penultimate round, for the ultimate winner to have more people voting against them than for them. Sound familiar? Democracy in action?

Of course, incredibly rarely, a winner comes along, such as Leona Lewis or 'cellist Natalie Clein, who totally transcends the competitive medium. That competition then seems a somehow grubby and inappropriate medium, and overlooking the artiste before that time seems an error of judgement on the part of some record company or other.

I would be uncomfortable with a competition for the sort of music I play to be judged in this way, with the public vote deciding the ultimate victor. This is not because I don't believe in the public's instinct and taste (actually I do, and I feel this is greatly abused right now, but more on that later), but because the artists themselves all have qualities and potential that don't deserve to be belittled and wobbled by “coming second”. There are many of the most successful performers in the world who only ever got a second prize, and then twenty years later dwarf their previous conquerors as artistes. Also, there is often an age limit for music competitions: for the BBC competition it is a ridiculous eighteen years. Much of an artist's musical maturity comes after that age in the more lasting arts, and often after the age of thirty. Because of our obsession with youthfulness and shallow surface impressions, despite the fact that music is more about the ears than any other sense, the marketing of music has become more about the visual than the aural. As a result, the music-buying public, myself included, are often disappointed with the music we buy, and every time a promising performer disappoints they erode a little more of the goodwill given by the music consumer.

I believe that with modern media and the speed of disposability of recordings and artists (whatever happened to Daniel Bedingfield by the way?), there are dangers for the artist who needs time to mature and grow into something more than a one-hit-wonder, whether it be the latest stunningly airbrushed and digitally edited violinist or a quality singer-songwriter such as Leona.

I believe that an artist has a responsibility to him or herself to make sure that their development flows in a way that allows them to continue improving and growing all their working life, and that it's highly possible, indeed likely, that the public could get a deeper, richer performer with a more satisfying output with years of experience of their craft. There are a lot of “shooting stars” up to a certain age who can be marketed more easily when they are young, recent competition winners and wrinkle-free, and it appears that there is an obsession with youth in the world of the professional marketer of music. Particularly amongst women, performers with experience such as Kylie, Madonna and pianist Imogen Cooper are exceptions to the rule in being visible to that level at their age.

I have a great hope and dream that, with the benefit of the internet and mediums such as YouTube, with or without visuals, the general public can take a wider tour of discovery of the available performers than the controlling and narrowly opinionated record companies and music managers will allow them. I have a profound belief that the human soul can understand quality and honesty in the most complex music given by the most intense and personal performer, and that it doesn't matter whether that is Stockhausen or Kanye West, John Woolrich or Leona Lewis, they can discover, sample and then purchase for themselves what their instinct says will bring them refreshment and stimulus.

I believe that there is a cultural environment where we have risked a huge amount of goodwill for short term commercial gain, and that there is a finite amount of time to put it right.

I have a hope that patient audiences can find and discover things for themselves, maybe with a specially created egalitarian platform like YouTube or maybe something like it that is non-judgemental and non-competitive.

It's possible that audiences need a guide to what they like, and maybe personal



recommendation is a good way forward with this, either through comments or a ratings system that currently exist, or through a trusted person with great taste that is prepared to be open and share with the public their discoveries. Examples include the presenters of BBC Radio 3's Late Junction, who do this without prejudice and commercial interest. I myself have been discussing setting up such an enterprise with a colleague of mine, sampling and recommending young artistes that come my way with a sort of stamp of quality unaffected by a promotion budget! It's still musical judgement and taste, and therefore a kind of competition, but in a different way and only because people are so time poor. I don't blame the public for deserting their previous record buying habits in droves – I honestly think that the big players in that commercial field have lost the plot, and I gather that even they themselves may think so too.

So let's hope, music-loving brother and sisters, for a global cultural revolution enhanced by the internet and unaffected by ugly commercial values, where the greatest performers and performances are available whether they have won a competition or not, whether they are photogenic or not, where they are enjoyed for the benefit of their musical talent, and where the record companies are servants of their consumers, reflecting the public's interests and tastes rather than trying to manipulate them. Is that too much to ask?

Nicholas Daniel is an oboist and former BBC Young Musician of the Year. His website can be found at www.nicholasdaniel.com

we end up with a "British
New Labour" effect of a
winner who tries too hard
to please everyone





poetic licence

MICAH SMITH explores the multiple voices of poet Daljit Nagra

DALJIT NAGRA is one of the success stories of recent British poetry. Since he won the Forward prize for Poetry for best individual poem, in 2004, and then for best first collection, in 2007, he has enjoyed a slew of glittering reviews, has been invited to judge several writing competitions, and has just completed a tour of India, giving readings to promote his Faber & Faber published collection, *Look We Have Coming to Dover!*. His name has even made it into the Oxford Forum once before, with poet Todd Swift describing him as “the most talked-about, and talented, younger poet to emerge in England this decade”.

Nagra’s poetry is certainly original. Leaf to the end of *Look We Have Coming to Dover!*, and you will discover something you won’t find in any other poetry collection: a “Punjabi to Ungreji Guide”. ‘Ungreji’, the guide explains, is Punjabi for ‘English’.

This is just one of the many subtle (and sometimes less subtle) ways in which Nagra, himself the son of Indian immigrants, plays with his readers’ ideas about “otherness”. He could have written a “Punjabi to English Guide”, but instead chooses to define English in Punjabi terms – as ‘Ungreji’. In our increasingly multi-cultural Britain, Nagra seems to be asking, what is “foreign” and who is the “other”?

A similar idea is developed in his poem *Yobbos!*. The poem’s narrator is “sozzled / to

the nose with sprightly / Muldoon... When some scruffy looking git pipes to his crew - / Some Paki shit, like, / Eee’s lookin into!” The irony here is that the Indian, reading poetry and displaying an impressive command of the English Language, seems more proper and “English” than the offensive, inarticulate yobs the poem depicts.

When I speak with Nagra, he tells me that he wanted to explore the effects of colonialism, examining the way how some Asians in Britain try to be “whiter than white, putting on really Queens English... when they go back to India they feel superior”. They find themselves in a difficult position, not accepted by all in England, and yet in some sense “foreign” upon returning to India, where, as he describes in one poem, “the locals steal looks from us for ages”. His poetry challenges Asian readers, as he put it, “to question the effects of whiteness”.

But Nagra also challenges non-Asian readers, asking them to question what their interest is in the poetry of other cultures. In his swing-like poem *Booking Khan Singh Kumar*, an Indian poet – presumably Nagra himself, since he used to use Khan Singh Kumar as a pseudonym – asks his readers: “Do you medal yourselves when you meddle with my type”.

“I often found it easy to get things published”, he tells me. As one of the only poets in Britain exploring the Indian experience, he “had an interest value”. But this can also be limiting; as the narrator exclaims in the final

lines of *Booking Khan Singh Kumar*: “What bothers is whether you’ll boo me if I balls // Out of Indian!”

The poem’s title is also telling; *Khan Singh Kumar* combines a Muslim, Sikh and Hindu name to create a quite implausible name for a character. So what strikes the English reader as being a normal Indian name is in fact a clever illustration of how people, in their ignorance, subsume the variety of Asian identities, with all their intricate complexities, into the one generic construct of “The Asian”.

Sadly, while Nagra opposes this construct in his work, he has sometimes been the victim of it in reviews. The critic Ben Wilkinson has suggested that “the media’s interest in Nagra is perhaps most obviously (and indeed, unfortunately) attributable to them finding in him their latest Asian”. One reviewer, for example, hailed Nagra as the “Voice of British Asian Poetry”. For Nagra, however, the description is “melodramatic” and actually “quite offensive” – “what even is British Asian?” he asks when I speak with him.

The danger of lumping together complex and differentiated identities is one Nagra’s main themes. *Look We Have Coming to Dover!* opens with a quote from George Orwell, asking if people with “brown faces... even have names? Or are they merely a kind of undifferentiated Brown Stuff...”. This sets the agenda for the rest of the book, in which Nagra, through the variety of characters in his poems, refutes Orwell’s suggestion that Asians are “undifferentiated”.

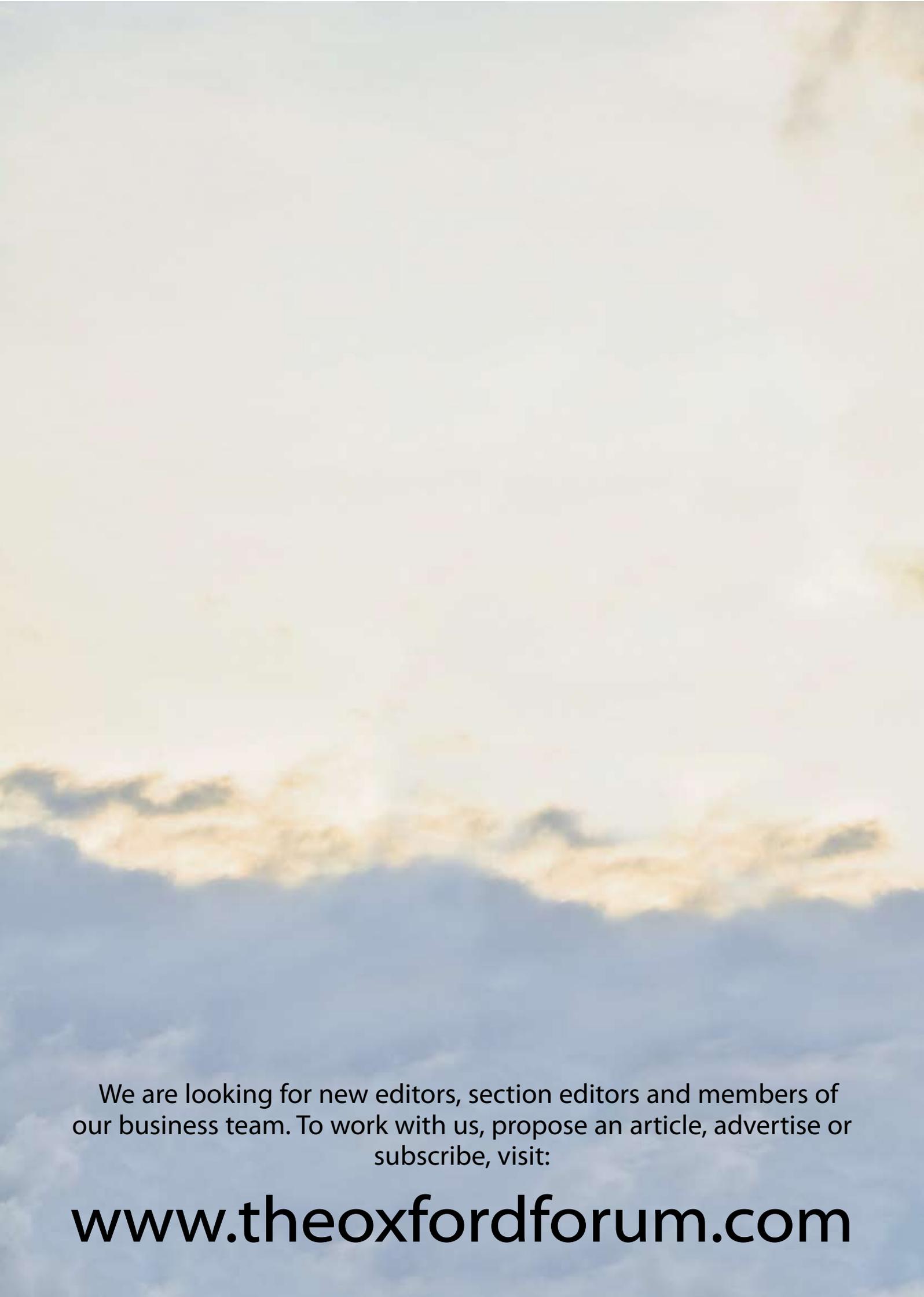
Nagra pointed out that no interviewer had ever asked him about the Orwell quote before, which surprised me, given how central it seemed to be to his aims. But perhaps that oversight itself reflects the media’s desire to find in Nagra “the voice of British Asian Poetry”, even if that means overlooking the more complex aspects of his work. When critics look to Nagra as “the voice” of British Asians, they seem to ignore his multiple voices.

Nagra creates that variety of voices by playfully blending Punjabi into many of his poems, creating an original sound some critics have called “Punglish”. Nagra, however, is no fan of the word, considering it to be quite ugly, and used mostly for its “soundbite quality”.

To my mind, to describe Nagra’s poetry as Punglish implies that it is somehow not quite English. But Nagra’s project is an attempt to marry various Asian voices with the English language. While that requires him to pull the English language in unusual directions, to describe his work as anything other than English suggests that the English language is not inclusive enough to accommodate Asian accents and sounds – something which Nagra, through his poetry, shows to be false. What critics have called Punglish is certainly remarkable in its originality, but English it remains. Or should that be Ungreji?

Daljit Nagra’s pamphlet Oh My Rub! was listed as one of the Guardian’s poetry books of the year; he has also been the recipient of the Forward Prize for Best Individual Poem, amongst other awards.

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