Lord David Puttnam, the Open University’s new Chancellor, outlines the challenge ahead for the University in the 21st century

Tilting the balance away from catastrophe

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feel an enormous sense of pride in my new role as the fifth Chancellor of this unique institution. This is not only the University that most closely equates to my own, rather bumpy, academic journey – it is also the repository of the dreams of hundreds of thousands like me, who thought that the chance of higher education had, for whatever reason, passed them by.

In all the careers I’ve had, in every job I’ve ever done, all the roads lead back to education. I think the OU has a massive contribution to make to the whole area of what we have come to call ‘widening participation’, which is why I was so delighted to take up this position.

Although I have no experience of the day-to-day management of an educational institution, I do know a thing or two about turning dreams, or aspirations, into tangible reality. That’s what drives me, in the same way as it has always driven students who have committed themselves to the OU and its courses.

I also know that if the UK is to be a sustainable, fulfilled and prosperous society in the 21st century with all that that implies, there is not the slightest room for any let up in our efforts to deliver a world-class educational opportunity for every man, woman and child in this country, an educational goal that has inspired the vision of the OU since its inception.

More than ever, we need people who understand how to deal with the complexity of the challenges that arise in a world in which we are all increasingly interdependent. That’s why lifelong learning, and the opportunity to engage with it, must be at the heart of any worthwhile vision of education.

I also passionately believe that this institution needs to draw on the potential that is currently being served by digital technologies to transform the delivery of learning.

Designed primarily for business or for entertainment, these technologies have been successfully adapted to help people overcome isolation and create communities of common interest, in ways that simply weren’t possible in the old analogue world.

Such technologies have allowed us to store, share and search knowledge in ways that librarians of the past would have only dreamed of. And they have enabled us to create worlds of delight, pleasure and excitement that hundreds of millions of people around the world immerse themselves in daily.

Imagine what we could achieve if we turn the collective talents that developed these imaginative, immersive and engaging resources to solving real human problems, to creating new social interactions and practices that meet the complex needs of learners.

I believe the OU, largely because of its origins, and the way in which it has used mass communication to deliver learning in the past, is in a unique position to position as a leader and advocate of change in the relationship between digital technologies and learning. Let’s take just one example.

The OU’s Digital Education Enhancement Project (DEEP) shows exactly how much can be achieved by technologists and educators working with local communities. Based in Sub-Saharan Africa, the project has challenged the idea that the first thing rural communities require is books, and that only when they have some sort of ‘library’ should they be allowed to access other resources!

Instead, the OU team has demonstrated the huge impact on teaching, learning and educational attainment, when teachers and families in these communities get to design and commission the resources they want to meet their needs.

Small, simple technologies and new teaching methods placed at the service of the teacher and meeting the needs of the child have been developed – not just kit, but new ways of working, teaching and learning. In fact, in many cases the schools have leapfrogged the traditional development phases, and have found they were able to compete more effectively in the world around them.

Such initiatives also underline the fact that education is fundamental to any serious concept of development, be it poverty reduction, improving the lives of women, infant mortality, or child exploitation.

I’m hugely looking forward to helping the OU tackle some of these big challenges in the next few years. One of them I find most exciting is that, unlike conventional universities where people enter at the age of 18 or 19 from, for the most part, middle-class families, at the OU the track record of successful graduates carries with them their own unique story.

Each has a tale to tell of what they went through, how they had to organize, or even compromise, their work, their family life, their children. The challenge for me is to become a credible and successful advocate for the role and purpose of the OU. Everything I’ve learned through my work for the United Nations International Children’s Education Fund (UNICEF), and in various spheres of domestic government has only reinforced my view that, in the words of H.G. Wells, the future really is becoming ‘more and more a race between education and catastrophe’. Personally, not finding the idea of catastrophe all that attractive, I’ve thrown in my lot with education!

Knowledge and understanding are the twin pillars upon which any sustainable future for this planet will be built. This great institution has an important role to play in tilting the balance away from the catastrophe we sometimes seem intent on inflicting upon ourselves. As Chancellor, I am looking forward to playing my own part in tackling that enormous task.

Gleneagles aid promises broken by G8 nations

The pledge by G8 nations at Gleneagles in 2005 to double aid to the poorest countries of the world and thus make poverty history by 2010 is already significantly off track. Aid to Africa is already half of what is needed and Oxfam, in a hard-hitting report published in June 2007, claims that if present trends continue, the G8 nations’ target will fall short by a staggering 530 billion. Last year the G8 nations spent ten times more on military expenditure than they did on aid, and last year the government slashed its aid budget by 30 per cent.

Oxfam produced some striking comparisons. Britons spend twice as much on champagne and wine than their government does on aid. German women alone spend more on shoes than their government spends on aid, the French spend more on perfume. In the USA the aid budget in 2006 was less than half the annual profit of the ExxonMobil oil company.

Oxfam calculate that it would cost the British consumer less than what UK consumers spend on celebrity magazines each year to transform the lives of people in the poorest countries. The USA could make a massive difference by spending as much on aid each year as its population spends on nail varnish, while for Germans an effective aid budget would cost only one half of what Germans spend each year on pet food.

In total, the richest countries need to spend only $1 dollar per year per person in order to achieve the pledge made at Gleneagles of raising aid from $25 billion to $50 billion each year by 2010.

Web links at: www.oxfam.org.uk and www.makepovertyhistory.org
Creating the future

Dot Millet, Dean of Social Sciences, sees challenging times ahead for the Faculty

My title comes from the planned theme for our Faculty conference to be held in Nottingham at the beginning of October, 2007. The conference will allow all members of staff in the Faculty (including associate lecturer and student representatives) to be asking questions about the future of society. We will be taking some time out together to consider what this holds not only for our research and teaching, but also for the Social Sciences more generally.

What are the key concerns of society as we move further into the twenty-first century, and how can we as an academic community both respond to and indeed influence the key debates that are to be had? How should we be preparing ourselves to set the agenda for relevant teaching and research in our existing areas of expertise? What new areas should we be exploring and developing? These and other questions will be occupying us in October and I look forward to reflecting on our discussions in the next issue of Society Matters.

Last year I talked about a major challenge that the Faculty faced in replacing the hugely successful foundation course DD100. An Introduction to the Social Sciences. A new course team was formed from all departments across the Faculty. Following many discussions and debates over the intervening months, the team has made excellent progress towards mapping out what the replacement course will look like, what topics it will cover and what pedagogical model it will adopt. We now have an outline for a course that promises to attract and excite students interested in current issues in the Social Sciences and also, importantly, to equip them for future study in one or more of the discipline/interdisciplinary areas offered at Levels 2 and 3. The new foundation course will be presented for the first time in October 2009, and as the production develops, more news about it will be available to members of the Faculty, notably in the next edition of Society Matters.

Our new course developments have also been progressing over the last year and I’d like to take this opportunity to write about one of them here. We have been thinking of ways of providing some topical, shorter courses to complement the existing Social Sciences programme (for continuing students) as well as to encourage new students to ‘try out’ study at Higher Education level in the Social Sciences. Given the success of short course suites in the Science and Arts Faculties we decided to explore the possibility of a similar approach and are now developing five such courses for first presentation during 2008.

These exciting new offerings will be 15 – point courses at Levels 1 and 2. The first to come on stream will be a Level 2 course Applying Psychology. Other proposals are currently being firmed up. New areas of study could include Sport, Culture and Society (at Level 1), and Politics, Media and the War (Level 2). Several of these courses are not only based on some very creative research synergies in the Faculty; but also link to other teaching offerings both within the Faculty and beyond and so we are expecting them to be a very successful experiment! More details on these new short courses will be available soon, and will feature in your next issue of Society Matters.

Altogether, this promises to be an exciting and challenging time for Social Sciences and one where we are very focused on the future. I look forward to reporting on some of the outcomes of our current thinking and the decisions from our autumn conference next year.

Richard Skellington, June 2007

Editorial

The first edition of Society Matters was published as Tony Blair’s opening year in office came to a close. Now, nine years on, it survives and Tony Blair has gone amid bitter recriminations concerning legacy, cash for honours and the war in Iraq.

Welcome to our tenth issue. We have come a long way from our humble two-colour, 12-page issue in 1998. We have tried to create a space where students and staff can debate freely the key issues of the day and how the social sciences can get to grips with them. We have tried to inform and stimulate imaginations and to demonstrate the relevance of social science to all we do in our lives, especially in those areas over which we have little or no control.

We have not ignored the vital international agendas – 9/11, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Middle East, Chechnya, the arms trade, migration, rapid urban population growth, HIV/AIDS, child poverty, water scarcity, climate change and global warming – each has been investigated in our pages.

We have explored UK issues: the July 7th bombings, the rise of Islamophobia, the Stephen Lawrence legacy, gender and disability inequalities, the role of the media in everyday life, the future of welfare, and the way in which New Labour has turned increasingly to spin and deception. These are contentious and hotly contested areas of everyday life, but they are examples of the way in which Society Matters has risen to the challenges connecting us to our contemporary world.

Neither have we shirked from key issues that affect the future of our Faculty. Ten editions of Society Matters illustrate how we have changed as a Faculty. They chart important shifts in curriculum and pedagogy, and testify to the way in which research too has tried to hit the ground running.

We have campaigned for greater equality across the University and, through our cartoonists, we have tried to see what this holds not only for our research and teaching, but also for the Social Sciences more generally.

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Women’s inequality worldwide is increasing

The plight of women worldwide has been highlighted during the last year by a series of reports from British Government development agencies and human rights groups. Among the disturbing findings are:

- Seventy per cent of the world’s 1 billion poorest inhabitants are women
- Women produce half the world’s food but own less than 2 per cent of the world’s land
- Over two-thirds of the world’s 800 million illiterate adults are women, since girls, in many parts of the world, are not seen as worth the investment
- Domestic violence, where women are predominantly the victims, kills and injures more people in the developing world than war,
- Each year, two million girls aged from 5 to 16 years join the commercial sex market
- A third of the world’s women are homeless or live in inadequate housing
- Women work two-thirds of the world’s working hours, but earn only a tenth of the world’s income

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Bureaucracy, the rule of no-one, has become the modern form of despotism. Mary McCarthy, US author

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Bureaucracy, the rule of no-one, has become the modern form of despotism. Mary McCarthy, US author
Do you want to think through issues raised by the media about Islam? Are you curious to get behind media images of Islam to find out what the religion really means to Muslims in the West? Want to examine some of the more controversial aspects of the Muslim presence in the hijab (headscarf)? Are you interested in arguments about whether Islam is compatible with democracy? Or do you work with Muslims in Europe and America and the impact that the focus on Islam has had on them is not like to think of it as a toolkit containing the elements needed Europe and America have responded to the Muslim presence. I raised by current controversies surrounding the Muslim presence in the West, to get a sense of the range of opinion and whether Islam is compatible with democracy? Or do you work whether there are elements in your own background that are really important for understanding how Islam is perceived and the way public debate tends to get framed: critical work on media presentations of Islam and how audiences read those images and stories, material on the study of Islam as a religious tradition, or how Western societies steer public, religion, and insider (Muslim) and outsider (philosopher and social science) perspectives on the whole range of issues raised. education in separate schools)? Where does Muslim radicalism come from? Sufis and Muslim spirituality, who represents British Islam? What impact has 9/11 had on Muslims in America? ‘We’ve used two course texts (provided in the course pack) — one by Joellez Eseri, an anthropologist who has studied Muslims in Europe and America, and the other by Tariq Ramadan, a leading Muslim intellectual and reformer. One of the pleasures of making the course was the opportunity to talk to Muslim leaders and commentators in the UK, continental Europe and America about how they see the issues, and these interviews have been distilled into two audio CDs which are an integral part of the course. The tuition will be mostly on-line — the monthly tutor conferences should produce some lively debate – but there are also a couple of one-to-one phone chats with your tutor built into the course, to help prepare for the first assignment and end of course assessment – an essay which takes the place of an exam. We think AD252 will be relevant to lots of people who

- money is like manure; it’s not worth a thing unless it’s spread around encouraging young things to grow.
- Faculty course, DB123
- Gordon Brown’s close adviser – launched the innovative new
- ‘very thought provoking’ . On the other hand, two other students but I really enjoyed this perspective in the course. ‘ Another
- Institute of Educational Technology’s 2006 End of Course
- Science in Context
- As a new course, S250 Science in Context was included in the Institute of Educational Technology’s 2006 End of Course Survey. One student wrote, ‘often science is taught and discussed from a perspective from fiction with real life. This course bridged the gap…’ Some students seemed to prefer parrot-style learning without the social reality aspect, but I enjoyed the course. ‘ Another student wrote, ‘I felt I had
- ‘I prefer science rather than science in a social context.’
- S250 replaced the Faculty of Science’s first ‘science issues’ course – S280 Science Matters – after the latter had run for 13 years (with minimal updating except via offprints associated with assessment). I recall being present at a staff development meeting in the early 1990s when an associate dean was speaking. Lecturer carefully explained to members of the Course Team that there was a subtle play on words in the title of the new course, which might have escaped their attention! Of course, since then other publications have adopted titles that are not that dissimilar.
- S280 was a very wide-ranging course that covered topics as varied as BSE (just a poorly understood cattle disease in those days before vCJD had been identified), nuclear power (before this topic went ‘off the boil’ somewhat), climate change (at a time when it didn’t appear in quite so many OU courses) and genetic engineering (long before the human genome had been sequenced). While S250 covers several of the same topics as its predecessor, it also deals with a few entirely new ones. Although the BSE/vCJD story is now quite mature, it does reveal quite a lot about the relationship between science and wider society – and, incidentally, continues to spring some biological surprises. We know that the Earth has been struck by asteroids and comets in the past with devastating effects. How should society respond to the discovery of such a body on course for a collision with Earth in (say) a couple of decades?
- The drilling of deep tube wells in West Bengal and Bangladesh has inadvertently exposed tens of millions of people to entirely natural arsenic contamination of their drinking water, leading to serious diseases and the decision whether or not to inform the public.
- Although plants are undoubtedly a source of many valuable medicines, the Internet has allowed the promulgation of the unpardonable public of much ‘pseudoscience’ in relation to plant-based treatments.
- Climate change and the genetic manipulation of organisms are two fields that have continued to develop since S280 was written and couldn’t possibly be ignored in S250. Finally, we hope that the fact that convinced many students to study the course is that it culminates in a book on nanotechnology.
- So, S250 includes a diverse range of interesting scientific topics, all of which have a societal dimension. However, the Course Team knew that many students taking the course would have previously concentrated on pure science. How could we help them analyse science’s broader societal context reasonably systematically?
- After considerable discussion, we opted to complement the seven ‘topics’ with four ‘themes’ (or CRED for short): (science communication, risk, ethical issues (not ethics per se) and decision making). Across the course as a whole, we aimed for a balance of 80 per cent ‘science’ and 20 per cent ‘themes’. In order to help students ‘get their eye in’ for the themes, the letters C, R, E and D — in apparently handwritten form — appear in the margins of the first four books adjacent to passages considered to be particularly relevant to the themes. Furthermore, a different one of these marginal symbols is omitted from each of each of the first four books, with students being invited to annotate the books for themselves as an activity. Thus, in studying the BSE/vCJD book, a student might decide that feeding animal remains to cattle, experimenting on animal ‘models’ even to investigate serious diseases and the decision whether or not to inform someone that they may have become infected with a disease, the symptoms of which may not appear for decades and for which there is currently no cure, are ethical issues that merit E being written in the margin alongside. As the IET Survey shows, students varied in their enthusiasm for the ‘in context’ aspects of S250. We know that comparatively few S250 students came from primarily social science backgrounds. If you happen to be one, we would really like to hear what you think of the course and how you got on with the ‘science’ aspects.

Launch of You and Your Money: Personal Finance

Ed Balls, Economic Secretary to the Treasury – and famously Gordon Brown’s close advisor – launched the innovative new Faculty course of the same name, You and Your Money: Personal Finance in Context at the Open University in London. He warmly endorsed the University’s decision to go ahead with the course and argued that it made an important contribution to the work of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and the Financial Service Authority have put improving the financial capability of UK citizens very high on their list of objectives.

The launch was also attended by many journalists, senior staff from the financial services industry, as well as colleagues from educational organizations, such as the Basic Skills Agency, and voluntary organizations, such as the National Consumer Education Trust.

The launch was featured in over 50 newspapers, magazines and websites including The Independent, The Guardian, The Sun.

The results were incredibly successful and DB123 recruited over 1,400 students – over three times its original target. The coverage also provoked many enquiries from external organizations who wanted to become involved with the course in some way, or help to showcase it for the wider public.

The Faculty’s Economics Department is looking into the possible expansion and further development of personal finance as a curriculum area in our course offerings.
Desmond Tutu: defusing the arms trade

The world could eradicate poverty in a few generations were only a fraction of the expenditure on the war business to be spent on peace. No longer should the peace business be undermined by the arms business

For many years, I've been involved in the peace business, doing what I can to help people overcome their differences. In doing so, I've also learnt a lot about the business of war – the arms trade. In my opinion it is the modern slave trade. It is an industry out of control; every day more than 1,000 people are killed by conventional weapons. The vast majority of those people are innocent men, women and children.

There have been international treaties to control the spread of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons for decades. Yet, despite the mounting death toll, there is still no treaty governing sales of all conventional weapons, from handguns to attack helicopters. As a result, weapons fall into the wrong hands all too easily, fuelling human rights abuses, prolonging wars and digging countries deeper into poverty.

This is allowed to continue because of the complicity of governments, especially rich countries' governments, which turn a blind eye to the appalling human suffering associated with the proliferation of weapons.

Every year, small arms alone kill more people than the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki put together. Many more people are injured, terrorized or driven from their homes by armed violence. Even as you read this, one of these human tragedies is unfolding somewhere on the planet.

Take the Democratic Republic of Congo, for example, where armed violence recently flared up again; millions have died here during almost a decade of conflict. Despite an UN arms embargo against armed groups in the country, weapons have continued to flood in from all over the world.

Arms found during weapons’ collections include those made in Germany, France, Israel, the USA and Russia. The only common denominator is that nearly all these weapons were made in Germany, France, Israel, the USA and Russia. The only

Five rich countries manufacture the vast majority of the world’s weapons. In 2005, Russia, the USA, France, Germany and the UK accounted for an estimated 82 per cent of the global arms market. In contrast, the amount of US rich countries spend on fighting HIV/AIDS every year represents just 18 days’ global spending on arms. But while the profits flow back to the developed world, the effects of the arms trade are predominantly felt in developing countries. More than two-thirds of the value of all arms is sold to Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Latin America.

In addition to the deaths, injuries and rapes perpetrated with these weapons, the cost of conflict goes deeper still, destroying health and education systems.

For example, in northern Uganda, which has been devastated by 20 years of armed conflict, it has been estimated that 250,000 children do not attend school. The war in northern Uganda, which may be finally coming to an end, has been fuelled by supplies of foreign-made weapons. And, as with so many wars, the heaviest toll has been on the region’s children. Children under five are always the most vulnerable to disease, and in a war zone adequate medical care is often not available.

The world could eradicate poverty in a few generations were only a fraction of the expenditure on the war business to be spent on peace. An average of $22 billion is spent on arms by countries in Asia, the Middle East, Latin America and Africa every year, according to estimates for the US Congress. This sum would have enabled those countries to put every child in school and to reduce child mortality by two-thirds by 2015, fulfilling two of the Millennium Development Goals.

In October 2006, governments voted in favour of a resolution to start work towards an international Arms Trade Treaty (ATT). The vote was confirmed in the UN’s General Assembly. By the summer of 2007, the number of states supporting the ATT will have increased to 153.

In other words, a ban on selling weapons if there is a clear risk they will be used to abuse human rights or fuel conflict. The UN resolution has been put forward by the governments of Australia, Argentina, Costa Rica, Finland, Japan, Kenya, and the UK. These governments believe the idea of an Arms Trade Treaty is one whose time has come.

I agree. We must end impunity for governments who authorize the supply of weapons when they know there’s a great danger those weapons will be used for gross human rights abuses. Great strides are being made towards ending impunity for war criminals. It cannot be acceptable that their arms suppliers continue to escape punishment. No longer should the peace business be undermined by the arms business. I call on all governments to put the control of the international arms trade at the top of their agenda.

A child soldier from the JEM rebel movement, near Durum, Darfur region, Sudan

www.controlarms.org

The civilian toll from cluster bombs

According to Handicap International, 98 per cent of cluster bomb victims during the last thirty years have been civilians, a third of them children. Their report, published in November, 2006 and based on investigations into 24 countries and regions affected by war and armed conflict since 1976, revealed that 11,044 people have been killed or maimed by cluster bombs, a weapon still being used in 2005, every year, according to estimates for the US Congress. This sum would have enabled those countries to put every child in school and to reduce child mortality by two-thirds by 2015, fulfilling two of the Millennium Development Goals.

In October 2006, governments will vote on a resolution at the UN General Assembly to start working towards an Arms Trade Treaty. That Treaty would be based on a simple principle: no weapons for violations of international law. In

The cost of war puts international aid in the shade

The United Nations’ millennium goals and the aid commitments agreed at Gleneagles in 2005 are severely impaired every time there is a war in the developing world, according to a House of Commons international development committee report published in October 2006. The report concluded that preventing and ending conflicts will do more to create a climate for poverty reduction than any amount of costly aid programmes.

It was revealed that the cost of a single war was equal to two-thirds of the total global aid budget. The report estimated the average cost of a civil war for a low-income country at £29 billion, against a total global aid budget in 2004 of £42 billion. It urged British companies not to participate in trading in diamonds and oil from war zones, and desist from fuelling conflicts through arms sales.

War: the facts 2007

• The world spends over $2 billion every day on arms
• Every day over 500 people, mostly civilians, are killed in armed conflicts across the globe
• Since 1945 there have been 250 major wars
• In 2006, at least 35 nations were involved in armed conflicts
• The last year when there was no war of significance anywhere on the planet was 1816
• In 2006, over 530,000 military service personnel were deployed around the world; 70 per cent of them were American
• The USA spent over $450 billion on defence in 2006

For your benefit, learn from our tragedy. It is not a written law that the next victims must be Jews. Simon Wiesenthal

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9/11 and the ‘War On Terror’ creating official reality

Andrew Johnson, a tutor on T224 Computers and Processors and a DSA Assessor for the University’s Access Centre, explores the official story about 9/11, and shows just how important it is to question what it is we are being told.

In progressing through academic studies and disciplines, one of the key activities is the development of critical thinking. In order to develop our understanding of a subject, we should question what we are being told and, sometimes, how the information is being presented. Only when we can answer questions we have about a subject to our satisfaction can we say that we understand that subject. However, perhaps we should pause and consider, can we usefully apply similar critical thinking skills outside our area of study?

For example, when considering daily news reports, how often do we stop and think, ‘How accurate is this information? What is the source? or ‘How has this or that conclusion been drawn?’ ‘Is the information complete?’ There are two expressions that are pertinent to the thrust of what I am saying, ‘Don’t believe what you read in the papers!’ and ‘Never believe anything until it’s been officially denied’. The latter aphorism is attributed variously to Jonathan Lynn and Antony Jay, the writers of Yes Minister, Benjamin Disraeli, Otto Bismarck, or Claude Cockburn.

In recent years I have found I have to apply critical thinking ‘in reverse’, so to speak. In 2004, I had some time in 2004, that the official story of the attacks on 9/11 could not be true. A video I watched clearly showed how the World Trade Centre Towers in New York could not have been destroyed solely as a result of jet impact and burning jet fuel. It seems strange to some people that anyone should question any of the essential elements of the official story of 9/11, which is now widely recognized as the trigger for the ‘War on Terror’ – a basis for many significant elements of foreign policy, and even domestic laws.

Once it was highlighted to me in the video (called 9/11 – The Great Illusion, made by George Humphrey), I realized that there is absolutely no way that either of those towers could have been destroyed by about 60,000 gallons of kerosene. Why? Kerosene burns at about 800°C, under optimum conditions. The WTC towers collapsed in 8.1 and 10 seconds, respectively. At 5:20 pm, the building collapsed at virtual free-fall rate, in 6.6 seconds, into its own footprint – no plane had hit this building, only a small amount of debris. It has now come to light that BBC World reported that WTC 7 had collapsed about 20 minutes before it actually had. This revelation has made 9/11 researchers question how the BBC was able to see into the future.

Other documentaries have analysed the events of 9/11, but all of them have either made questionable statements or omitted or ‘glossed over’ the facts. A BBC Horizon documentary, The Power of Nightmares, first televised in 2004. This BAFTA award winner, made by Adam Curtis, exposes the real history of Al-Qaeda and concludes that stories of this group’s ability to commit acts of terrorism on a large scale have been grossly exaggerated, if not completely fabricated.

Some time in 2004 I had some time in 2004, that the official story of the attacks on 9/11 could not be true. A video I watched clearly showed how the World Trade Centre Towers in New York could not have been destroyed solely as a result of jet impact and burning jet fuel. It seems strange to some people that anyone should question any of the essential elements of the official story of 9/11, which is now widely recognized as the trigger for the ‘War on Terror’ – a basis for many significant elements of foreign policy, and even domestic laws.

Once it was highlighted to me in the video (called 9/11 – The Great Illusion, made by George Humphrey), I realized that there is absolutely no way that either of those towers could have been destroyed by about 60,000 gallons of kerosene. Why? Kerosene burns at about 800°C, under optimum conditions. The WTC towers collapsed in 8.1 and 10 seconds, respectively – this is (essentially) at a rate of free fall, i.e. they fell with no resistance. The programme did not attempt to explain how the fuselage of the plane – essentially a weak hollow tube made of light materials – could crash through several steel girders, penetrating quite deeply into the building.

In October 2006, Robert F. Kennedy, 1966

Guantánamo Bay: five years on

January 2007 marked the fifth anniversary of the first arrival of detainees from Afghanistan at the US naval base at Guantánamo Bay, the major US detention centre, but not the only one, established after the attacks of 9/11. Since 11 January 2002, over 770 ‘enemy combatants’ from 45 nationalities, including children and the elderly, have arrived at the base. Many have been ill-treated.

At 11 January 2007, demonstrations were held in London, Belfast, Cardiff and Birmingham to mark the fifth anniversary. In December 2006, 14 detainees were charged for trial by military tribunals, but in June 2007 the US Supreme Court declared that these tribunals violated US international law.

• 520 detainees were defined by military panels as ‘enemy combatants’ without access to lawyers
• 0 of the detainees have been convicted of any offence
• 385 have been subsequently transferred to other countries, including the UK
• 17 out of 18 under 18 year olds have been held; 4 still remain
• 10 detainees were ‘waterboarded’
• 238 detainees died as a result of ill-treatment
• 200 hunger strikes have occurred
• 5 per cent of the detainees were captured by US forces
• 86 per cent were initially detained by Pakistani or Afghanistan Northern Alliance Forces;
• many allegedly were turned over to US custody for cash payments

In the early summer of 2007, over 400 detainees were still held at Guantánamo, effectively in six camps. In December 2006, 14 detainees were moved into the newly built high detention centre, Camp 6. On 11 January 2007, demonstrations were held in London, Belfast, Cardiff and Birmingham to mark the fifth anniversary. In October 2006, President Bush introduced the Military Commissions Act, which effectively stripped US courts of jurisdiction to hear appeals from any foreign national held as an ‘enemy combatant’ in US custody.

For a compelling account of Guantánamo Bay read the secret prisons by Clive Stafford-Smith, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2007

What has violence ever accomplished? What has it ever created? Whenever we tear at the fabric of a life which another man has painfully and clumsily woven for himself and his children, the whole nation is degraded.

Robert F. Kennedy, 1966

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The struggle continues

Rob Berkeley of the Runnymede Trust sets out the ongoing challenges for a race-equality agenda and says our segregated university system must be less resistant to change.

Inspired by travels around the southern states of the USA during the civil rights movement, a young lawyer and an academic established The Runnymede Trust as a 5-year project to counter racist propaganda in the UK. Nearly 40 years later, Runnymede is still here. Yet the fight against racism is not the one that our founders Antony Lester and Jim Rose began in order to understand and generate understanding across generations. Racisms mutate, societies are dynamic, and hydra-like, injustices persist.

As our government extended rights and opportunities to earlier generations, underpinned by the 1978 Race Relations Act and the 1976 Race Relations Act, the immediate pressure of immigration and the struggle of people to gain recognition for their identity were in the minority, seven are post-1992 urban universities. Each. Meanwhile, of the 11 institutions where white students are in the minority, seven are post-1992 urban universities. Each. Meanwhile, of the 11 institutions where white students are in the minority, seven are post-1992 urban universities. Each.

While people’s ethnic backgrounds are often important to them, they are not the sum of anyone’s experience or identity. The identifications which with which we operate are shifting, mutations which happen. They are based on a wide range of experiences and in the ways in which groups are treated within our society. In terms of policy this becomes particularly salient when the communities with which we identify are not treated with the respect they deserve. People from minority ethnic groups, people with disabilities, people with minority sexualities, or by age. These influences are not felt separately but combine to create a new experience, for example, black women have a different experience based on their gender and race that is different to that of black men or of white women. The challenge for policy remains to provide meaningful recognitions of the racism, and to appreciate the diversity of experiences. The current policy confusion about people of mixed heritage serves to highlight the urgency of this challenge. The new Commission for Racial Equality, in their report on this aspiration, thought the challenges presented in understanding discrimination based on multiple identities should not be underestimated.

Segregation and integration

There are numerous reasons why communities may choose to live together – for mutual support, to enable cultural or faith groups to flourish, to preserve language, to gain access to familiar foods and traditional activities. Such ethnic communities include Chinatown in London and New York, the Banglows of London, Harlem and Brixton. Such clustering becomes a problem when it leads to segregation.

The debate about how segregated minorities are in the UK continues to rage among statisticians and demographers. If people are unable to leave an area or feel constrained to remain in a place then we have due cause for worry. If people’s ethnic backgrounds are not being recognized then the benefits of diversity are in danger of being lost as communities live parallel lives rather than working together to create a successful multi-ethnic society.

This is a problem for the higher education sector, where a clustering of choices and the educational disadvantage for policy providers to multi-ethnic perceptions is a factor to be appreciated.

Racism: A Very Short Introduction

If you buy one social sciences book this year make sure it is this one. This very short introduction to racism is part of a new series of books from Oxford University Press, which explores in microcosm many of the key issues and debates in contemporary social sciences. But do not let the ‘very short’ fool you. This book provides a concise introduction to the history of race and racism – in all its brutal and painful realism – it also brings compelling insight to both our understanding of the history of racism and how it continues to shape our 21st-century world. Books four times its length have delivered much, much less.

The book unpacks some of the clichéd simplistic definitions of racism and goes beneath those often dangerous generalizations. Rattansi challenges these water-tight definitions of racism and suggests that the idea of institutional racism has outlived its usefulness. He remedies this as racism, like Islamophobia, is not an irrational aberration. The future of our society depends upon our ability to further challenge racially discriminatory practices.

Two decades have passed since the publication of Rattansi’s 1997 book, Racism: A Very Short Introduction, which today, 8 years after its last presentation, remains the only OU course to deal with the importance of racism in our everyday lives. For those students interested in how race and racism inform our knowledge of the everyday this is a must.


Hyper-diversity

Previous patterns of migration have occurred over time and space, and the responses of entrepreneurial individuals in the light of on-going global inequalities have made the speed at which patterns of migration can change much swifter. For Britain, the immediacy of crises in certain parts of the world and the responses and appropriate public services to be made to those crises have focused on white, black and Asian people, the realities of the UK Census operates with 16 categories, which become the pattern, in the past, to draw up categorizations that included a broad number of countries. Classification, it has been the pattern, in the past, to draw up categorizations that included a broad number of countries. The UK Census operates with 16 categories, which become more stretched as they are forced to include a greater diversity of peoples and experiences. Such great diversity of experience within a category makes it difficult to generalize to a country level, or to the category.

Over time, ethnic diversity has a more complex relationship to immigration. Those from black and minority ethnic communities are becoming more likely to have been born here, born and brought up in Britain. The reality of the past, to draw up categorizations that included a broad number of countries. The UK Census operates with 16 categories, which become more stretched as they are forced to include a greater diversity of peoples and experiences. Such great diversity of experience within a category makes it difficult to generalize to a country level, or to the category.

The speed at which change can occur is dramatic and has repercussions for the political stability and social solidarity in an area. For example, in the 2001 local government elections, Barking saw a major increase in representation of the BNP, the largest far-right party in the UK, making it the second-largest far-right party on the local council. Policy was slow to understand this change and opportunist racists were able to capitalize on distrust of newcomers and of difference by claiming that many were asylum seekers or receiving welfare support or taking public housing.

Increasingly, migration is not only to major urban conurbations in the UK but to smaller cities and rural locations (especially in the case of agricultural workers). This has spread debate about immigration and ethnic diversity away from London, Manchester and Birmingham, to Lincolnshire, Sunderland and Plymouth, areas that had previously been perceived as having relatively ethnically homogeneous communities.

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Ageism and the Open University

Is there ageism at the Open University? Heather Simpkins, who at 67 is taking a year off from her BA Open Degree, explores some of the tensions around teaching and ageism with the OU's Director of Learning Strategies and Freshers' Week coordinator, David Puttnam.

The OU has devised a system of learning that suits all ages. My interest here is in the ageing student. As a 67-year-old student, ageism is not something I have had to deal with while studying with the OU.

I find myself in the adage that ‘you’re never too old to learn’ and those who prefer to argue that ‘you can’t teach an old dog new tricks’ are missing the whole point of the opportunities offered by OU education. The range of courses available is quite staggering. If you don’t want to go for the full-blown degree, you can take a single course.

The Cambridge Guide to English Usage defines ageism as a word that denotes a particular form of social prejudice, alongside examples such as sexism and racism. I speak as I find, as a word that denotes a particular form of social prejudice.

Ageism is more visible in the classroom. I am not alone in my notion of wine-tasting with the OU – our tutors – who do their utmost to make sure we stay the course.

Before embarking on any research for this article, I was further enlightened by reading the January 2007 edition of The Oldie magazine that the OU has announced that in future it will not consider applications to teach from anyone over 64. A quoted former lecturer (unamed) tells us, ‘the OU will welcome you cordially if you want to spend your money gaining a degree with them; just don’t expect any grey heads amongst your tutors.’ Ouch!

Melanie Newman reports similar findings to those quoted in The Oldie at various universities in her article, ‘Scrapheap still looms for those who hit 65’ in The Times Higher Education Supplement later that month.

Are there double standards at play here? In the Sesame centre-fold, Peter Taylor-Whiffen argues, ‘with no upper age limits for courses at the Open University, older people play an important part in enriching older peoples’ lives, as these case studies prove. Could this quote also be applied to the question of the non-renewal of older associate lecturers’ contracts?’

There are some exceptions to this. Some recent research on the experience of higher education students, for example, has crossed two strands of identity – ethnicity and gender, religion and gender, ethnicity and age, religion and social class. Little of this research, however, is focused on age, ethnicity and religion. Even though age is not at the same time, and very little equality policy and practice recognizes that poverty and capabilities are intricately linked to opportunity and disadvantage.

Looking at the experience or outcomes of individuals across several strands of identity is challenging, not least because when we want to move on beyond 65; a case should be made to prove they are no longer fit for the job, something that should apply to an OU employee of any age.

Interestingly, a recent press release from Cranfield University School of Management says that older workers have better time keeping, are more likely to think before they act, are more loyal, conscientious, reliable and dependable.

What a pity if older lecturers are to be given the push sooner than they would wish – all those years of accumulated experience and wisdom. How very wonderful if the OU could be as innovative in dismissing ageism within its ranks as it has been in revolutionizing higher education from its inception.

Young, gifted and black: why the OU must embrace multiple identities

Tong O'Shea, Policy Officer for Equality and Diversity, urges the OU and other public bodies to develop more sophisticated equality monitoring tools and to take decisive action in responding to difference. Without a greater willingness to use positive action, we will not close the gap between some entrenched inequalities in the next fifty years.

A new equalities commission and a single equality act together create an extraordinary opportunity for us to understand difference in a way that moves away from classifying people using narrow definitions of identity. Universities, health services, local authorities and other public bodies around the country have recently completed new gender equality schemes, in response to the latest in a string of piecemeal equality legislation. In December 2006, public bodies published disability schemes, and many institutions will either have recently completed or be in the process of commencing a review of race policies. These public-sector duties are complemented by a series of additional protections in employment and vocational training, on the grounds of sexual orientation, religion and belief, and more recently age.

While UK equalities legislation may be described as advanced by many measures, the approach to gender, race and age equality is piecemeal. In the lifetime of this parliament, the UK has passed three separate equality acts, each with a slightly different remit. Since then, maturity has given us a completely new perspective to an OU employee of any age.

In recognition of the need for a more coherent joined-up approach, UK Government passed an Act in 2006 that will create a new single equalities commission – the Commission for Equality and Human Rights (EHRR) – in place of the current structure in October 2007. Government is also conducting a major review of legislation and has committed itself to a single equality act in the lifetime of this parliament. For example, a single equality act creates the opportunity to recognize what might seem obvious to many but which is relatively invisible in research, policy and the measures used to monitor progress towards greater equality – that people have multiple identities.

Each aspect of an individual's identity interacts with the other aspects of identity in a complex way. There are many needs, which are unique to each individual. While institutions have been responding to race, disability, gender, and to other aspects of identity to a lesser extent, there has little focus on a whole person approach – meeting the entire individual needs of customers [or students in the case of the OU].

There are some exceptions to this. Some recent research on the experience of higher education students, for example, has crossed two strands of identity – ethnicity and gender, religion and gender, ethnicity and age, religion and social class. Little of this research, however, is focused on age, ethnicity and religion. Even though age is not at the same time, and very little equality policy and practice recognizes that poverty and capabilities are intricately linked to opportunity.

Looking at the experience or outcomes of individuals across several strands of identity is challenging, not least because when we want to move on beyond 65; a case should be made to prove they are no longer fit for the job, something that should apply to an OU employee of any age.

Several factors may conspire to prevent a whole person approach to meeting needs and responding to inequalities. For example, the Disability Rights Commission is a relatively new body and understandably seeks to safeguard the rights of disabled people under the new CERH. A separate disability committee has therefore been agreed. The Commission for Racial Equality is also concerned about a loss of focus on race issues and has fought to keep a network of Race Equality Councils. Other social movement groups are concerned for their voices to be heard. This separatist approach doesn’t bode well for individuals. People are, after all, many different things.

In addition to the two key actions for institutions outlined above, the OU and other public bodies therefore need to monitor closely the emerging new legislation and the manner in which the Commission conducts its business, ensuring that the recommendations for a coherent multiple identity approach are not missed.

The new OU strategy ‘Equality and Diversity: making it happen!’ is available at: www.open.ac.uk/equality-diversity/p4_1.shtml

One of the good things about getting older is you find you’re more interesting than most of the people you meet. Lee Marvin, American actor

widening the UK wealth gap between young and old

Between 1996 and 2005 the personal wealth of British people between their late thirties and early sixties doubled, while the wealth of those between 18 and 24 years of age stood still. But, according to Bank of England research on the March 2007, households between the ages of 25 and 34 are worse affected. This age group saw its median personal wealth fall from £3,000 in 1996 to a mere £950 ten years later.

The reasons for the rise in personal wealth of those from the late thirties can be found in the property market, where the average house price tripled in a decade. However, even in the most prosperous group – those over 55 years of age – many people have found that they have taken on much more debt than in 1996. The average household, for example, has had to borrow less because they are entering the property market at a later stage, or simply because they have been priced out of the property market altogether. Since 1994 the average age of the first-time buyer has risen from 28 to 34.
Should Britain replace Trident or end its nuclear arms capability?

Just before Christmas, Tony Blair told the House of Commons it would be ‘unwise and dangerous’ for Britain to give up its nuclear capability. But what are the arguments for and against? Paul O’Brien, who is completing his OU degree in Politics, Philosophy and Economics, explores the options.

The end of the operational life of the Trident weapons in 2024 has rekindled decades of debate in Britain about nuclear arms. Some experts argue a decision needs to be made now in order for a replacement to be ready in time. Britain has 16 Trident missiles based on four Vanguard-class submarines, providing 200 nuclear warheads in total. The British Government estimates it will cost between £15 and £20 billion over 30 years to replace Trident. It has been suggested this could be made by cutting the number of submarines to 3 and the warheads to 160.

Government arguments for replacing Trident are based upon the idea of an uncertain future in an increasingly hostile world where more nations in the developing world and any number of terrorist groups could develop a nuclear option. The government, like all governments since Hiroshima, feels it would be failing in its duty to protect its citizens if Britain did not have an independent nuclear capability.

The key question is what kind of security threats would Britain be facing in 20 years time? The Cold War has been over for some time but new nuclear ‘players’ have emerged. Iran and North Korea have either developed or are developing a nuclear capability. With other countries increasingly eager to join the nuclear club the government feels it prudent to retain its nuclear arsenal as an insurance policy. There is also the growing nuclear capability of Israel to take into consideration in an increasingly unstable Middle East.

Nuclear weapons are not effective against current terrorist threats. But despite this the British Government is renewing its nuclear arm capability after 2024 could act as a deterrent to rogue states wishing to pass on or sell nuclear technology and components to terrorists. Those opposing the replacement of Trident believe the billions of pounds could be better spent elsewhere – on the infrastructure of our economy, on caring for the elderly, on improving the environment, or on the education of our children.

Even if a nuclear threat did emerge in the future, nuclear weapons are something that could never be contemplated in a civilized world. The moment a nuclear weapon is fired the world as we know it would be finished. Retaliation could destroy the world several times over.

And how independent is the capability? Trident and its replacement will almost certainly rely upon US technology. It is also hard to envisage Britain would use its weapons independently from another country, especially the USA. If a nuclear war was to erupt, the USA by itself has so many warheads that Britain’s contribution would not only be insignificant but pointless.

There may also be legal complications given Britain has signed the nuclear non-proliferation treaty. Lawyers, academics, the military establishment and most of all, politicians will continue to debate interpretations of the treaty, but its overall aim is quite clear. There is a commitment to disarm, by nuclear weapon, states and a commitment by countries without nuclear weapons not to pursue them.

Does replacing Trident contribute to the ‘good faith’ disarmament negotiations that the treaty calls for? The government believes it does, as it is reducing the overall number of warheads in compliance with the treaty. But what measures does this send to non-nuclear states? It seems fine for some countries to possess nuclear weapons but not others. Do as I say, not as I do seems to be the message.

Both arguments put forward for and against replacing the Trident system, one seems to be largely ignored, which could explain why Britain will not abandon its nuclear arsenal for the foreseeable future. What would happen to Britain’s international status and prestige if it were to become non-nuclear? With other countries such as India increasing in economic importance and more countries acquiring nuclear weapons, would a non-nuclear Britain continue to hold influence? Would there still be a permanent seat on a UN Security Council that is under mounting pressure as well as pressure from states that cannot be guaranteed.

Britain’s leading role in NATO and its special relationship with the USA has rested on its nuclear capability. It is also hard to imagine British politicians willing to cede to France the status of being the only nuclear power in the European Union. For all the rhetoric about security and future threats, Britain cannot afford to not have an independent nuclear capability if Britain is ever flagging internally.

Paul O’Brien works in music royalties and has just finished D203 Power, Equality, Dissent.

Don’t suffer in silence – there are people ready to listen

What do you do if you need peer support? Catriona Nedin, who is studying D315 Crime, Order and Social Control, finds out how the OU can help.

Anyone who has been reading Society Matters over the past few years will have seen my progress through the OU, and the many problems I have encountered on the way. While I am not ashamed to say that I have only made it with the help of people from within the OU. Friends and family have been a lifeline, but the OU has also been there as a shoulder to cry on – sometimes literally. Fellow students have given me tremendous support, and tutors have shown understanding and leniency wherever possible within the guidelines. However, many students do not realise that there is a group of people – Peer Supporters – who are available to help, be it short term for a one-off problem and immediate need or longer term for those who are just floundering with a course and merely need someone to talk to and encourage them towards their goal.

I came across the Peer Support system accidentally and now feel that I am ready to face the world again. I now know that there are a group of volunteers ready to listen, give constructive help and to advise on a suitable path to follow in order to help try and overcome any situation. For those out there who are as unaware of Peer Support as I was, here is a little introduction.

Peer Supporters are volunteers who are available online to provide support to any student who feels they require it. They can give assistance on many topics: First Class help, exams, awards, financial help, assignments and assessments. They also give understanding and support for people with problems in their personal life, students with disabilities, and those who are just floundering with a course and merely need someone to talk to and encourage them towards their goal.

All the Peer Supporters are, apparently, past or current students who, between them, are from most or all of the OU Faculties and therefore have extensive knowledge of courses, as well as many years attending the University of Life! If they can discuss your problems online and offer constructive help, or suggest what you might consider doing next and provide help for the best possible outcome.

Where are they found? On First Class, go to your desktop and click the OU shield, then click the OUSA shield and a big red circle will appear with a white question mark on it – that’s the Peer Support On-line icon. Either fill in the ‘help request’ or ‘ongoing support’ form and wait. Very soon you will have halved your worry as a reply pops into your First Class mailbox.

Still have doubts? Well, there are many options available to you. You can ask for a male or female supporter, someone who has a disability and knows what you are going through, and/or someone who is from the same course background or programme of study as you. I understand that the Peer Support team try to match up the supporter and supported, and have chosen the best person to help you.

I’m now in my penultimate year with the OU before I graduate – hopefully! In 2009. Without the support system I have been blessed with, I would have put away my books long ago. D315 is a difficult course, with masses of reading to do and not enough time available. There is no time to wallow in self-pity, so it is vital to have someone there to listen. So, if you happen to be my rock, listener and mentor, a heartfelt thank you. As I was told – ‘Don’t suffer in silence, let Peer Support On-line help’.

Laugh and the world laughs with you

Children laugh about 400 times a day, about 30 more times than adults, according to research. Laughter reduces blood pressure, allergic tensions, and boosts the immune system. But what is laughter? And why is it so important? Scientists investigating how the brain responds to emotive sounds now believe that positive sounds such as a giggle trigger an involuntary response in the brain that prepares facial muscles to react. Human laughter is often an involuntary response in group situations in particular where we mirror the behaviour of others, and this, according to University College London researchers, facilitates social bonding and helps us interact socially. As a result there is a greater emphasis today on using laughter as a form of therapy. In Mumbai in India the first ‘laughter yoga’ club was formed in 1996. Now there are over 5,000. For genuine students of comedy the University of Haifa has just started a degree in musical clowning, which is designed to provide vocational skills for use in hospitals and other welfare institutions.

WAG lifestyles

A survey of 2,000 young women aged between 21 and 25 found that the average twenty-something female spends around £1,000 a month on clothes, beauty products and going out. The average young woman went out 4 nights a week. Her wardrobe contained 151 items, including 25 pairs of shoes, 8 handbags and 4 hats. She is more concerned about femininity than feminism. She believes she has a better sex life than her handbags and 4 hats. She is more concerned about femininity and not enough time available. There is no time to wallow in self-pity, so it is vital to have someone there to listen. So, if you happen to be my rock, listener and mentor, a heartfelt thank you. As I was told – ‘Don’t suffer in silence, let Peer Support On-line help’.

Inside Acacia Avenue

Acacia Avenue has always been a byword for contented suburban life in situation comedies. But what is life like in reality? Research in 2006 by the Automobile Association into the lives of residents in 15 Acacia Avenues in England and Wales – A Portrait of Middle England – found Acacia Avenues to be inhabited by families and older couples. One third of residents are aged 60 and over. They tend to stay put and go away on holiday for only one week of the year – to Spain. Acacia Avenue has house people on average incomes but, mysteriously, in one seven residents work for charities. Four out of five residents spend their time watching TV, and four out of ten report fish and chips to be their favourite meal.
Where does the idea come from that pop celebrities can claim to represent Africa? How do religious ideas play out, and how are they set out? How do religious ideas shape how politics is conducted? Where would you stand in relation to the positions we set out? How do religious ideas play out, and how are they accounted for, in riots, abortion debates and the Iranian revolution?

4 What do bodies and sexuality have to do with politics? Have ideas about bodies and biological aspects of human life, ranging from Darwinian evolution to the manipulation of the genetic make-up of people, had a significant impact on modern politics?

5 Isn’t politics, at root, about violence? If so, does this help us to understand why violence is such a recurrent phenomenon in modern world politics? Can key theoretical writings on violence help us make our mind up?

Each of the five topics is presented on a DVD-rom in the form of a virtual ‘room’ which takes students on a structured and guided journey of ideas in which printed, audio-file and visual media are used to examine the living relevance of political ideas. The integrated multi-media presentation builds on the experience of learning through various media that OU students already have. It gradually improves students’ skills to critically and pro-actively develop knowledge in a multi-media age.

The course offers a high degree of flexibility in how and where to learn. Audio-visual parts can be studied on the computer or through a DVD player. Shorter clips can be downloaded on a portable music/video player. Text extracts can be read on screen, as no printed Reader. Audios can be listened to on the computer, a CD player and as a downloaded mp3 file.

DD306 also presents a more active way to learn, through guided activities that help students to develop their own interpretations of the materials with sound arguments to back them up. The activities give students the support and opportunity to practice and take ideas to the next stage of development. They also make it possible for students to ‘own’ what they are studying, rather than being ‘told’ by an authority what to make of the materials. The multi-media approach to learning provides the best way to study the materials and to gain the confidence and skills of an independent learner. There is plenty of back-up to help and support students, both from tutors and within the site’s materials.

So, not just a standard ideas course at all! But one that seeks to make political ideas easily accessible, exciting, and highly relevant to our understanding of some of the most pertinent questions in contemporary world politics.

Living Political Ideas

Jef Huysmans and Raia Prokhovnik, co-chairs of DD306 Living Political Ideas, explain how their new multi-media course will make political ideas exciting, easily accessible and highly relevant to our understanding of some of the most pertinent questions in contemporary world politics.

Aristotle and Plato, in arch centre: Raphael

1 How has the relation between leaders and masses been conceived of in modern politics? And how is this relation being re-envisioned in a world of global networks, a crisis of parliamentary representation and a revolution in communication technology? How can extracts from Machiavelli and others help us answer these questions?

2 In a world of environmental crisis, would we give nature a political voice and if so how? Can the great divide between political beings and natural beings be broken down in the interest of animal rights and environmental conservation? Aristotle’s and others’ views throw any light on these questions?

3 Should religious ideas shape how politics is conducted? Where would you stand in relation to the positions we set out? How do religious ideas play out, and how are they accounted for, in riots, abortion debates and the Iranian revolution?

5 Half-a-million people in 160 different countries are now using the OU’s open content website

The truth is generally seen, rarely heard. – Spanish philosopher
Taste matters

Patrons of a Swansea pub, landowners in the borders of Scotland, and members of a Midlands’ Pakistani community centre are some of the people helping research into how our tastes not only reveal much about who we are but about our class and privileged status. Elizabeth B. Silva, Senior Lecturer in Sociology, and David Wright, Research Fellow in the Centre for Research on Socio-cultural Change (CRESC), explain how tastes can help us understand inequality better.

It has become something of a truism in contemporary society that we are shaped by who we choose. A new study, conducted by a team of sociologists from the Open University and the University of Manchester, offers strong evidence that what we choose – our likes and dislikes – are shaped by who we are in relation to a number of social and economic factors.

The Cultural Capital and Social Exclusion Project (CCSE) seeks, through an innovative combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, to interrogate patterns of taste in a variety of fields of culture and to ‘map’ these tastes in relation to a range of socio-economic variables.

The research draws on the work of Pierre Bourdieu, whose study of cultural taste in 1960s France – Distinction – has become a defining work in the sociology of class and consumption. For Bourdieu, taste, rather than being a matter of personal preference, is the product of social reproduction. Individuals with the ‘right’ kinds of taste, i.e. tastes held by the dominant class, have been consecrated by the state through the education system, more likely to be able to gain advantages in life. They are able to cash in what they term their ‘cultural capital’ and pass it on to their children both at home and through the informal use of the education system. In this way the middle classes, for example, are able to use culture to reproduce their positions of privilege.

To investigate these relationships in the UK, the CCSE project sets out to focus groups with students and individuals from a variety of socio-economic, ethnic and national profiles from across the UK (from the patrons of a Swansea pub to landowners in the borders of Scotland and the attendants of a Midlands’ Pakistan community centre). Talk about cultural likes and dislikes from these groups fed into the design of a major new survey which combined questions about cultural tastes with questions about cultural participation (what people actually do) and linked these to the tastes (what people like to do) with questions about cultural capital and social exclusion (what people actually do) and linked these to a series of questions about socio-economic data and social attitudes.

The survey was administered to 1,781 post-code sampled individuals representative of the UK population. Thirty households were then re-contacted and survey respondents and their partners were interviewed at length about their engagements with various cultural practices and tastes, giving a more rounded picture of the place of culture in their lives that the survey alone provided. Eleven people in prominent business, political, or other professional were also interviewed.

Given that the start of the 21st century is different in important ways from Bourdieu’s 1960s France. The emerging findings of this study, however, suggest a persistence of some elements of the relationship, identified by Bourdieu, between tastes and social class.

But we should not forget our own dark history, when racism treatment and widening inequality – for example at the birth of the Welsh and Irish cultures – were the norm. We may well judge the developing world we look at how we used to be. Let’s not stigmatize developing countries. Let us not write in ways to make it appear they have social ills that we do not.

Of course, it is not the point of our project to suggest which activities are ‘better’ or ‘worse’ than others. What the MCA reveals strikingly about tastes in contemporary Britain is not that they are stratified in terms of ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture, as Bourdieu might have attested. We discover that there is a stark division between those who like and do anything, positioned predominantly amongst the higher occupational groups (individuals located on the right of our ‘cloud’ illustrated) who take intense interest in publicly organized arts that take place outside the home, and those who broadly do not engage with ‘culture’ thus defined at all (individuals located on the left in the illustration). This division raises questions about the current priorities of cultural policy. Bourdieu’s assertions about the relationships between culture and class might appear anachronistic in an era when Arts Councils fund hip-hop and ‘high’ art. Despite this, the CCSE project reveals the persistent relationship between tastes, cultural capital and inequality in the contemporary UK.

The CCSE project was funded by the ESRC between March 2003 and March 2006. Preliminary Findings have been published in a series of studies published in a special issue of the Journal Cultural Trends and Social Divisions, Vol. 15 (no. 2 & 3), 2006, edited by Tony Bennett and Elizabeth B Silva. The project’s website contains more information and links to further publications: www.open.ac.uk/sociology/culturalcapitalandsocialexclusion

Taste matters: Are we not only driven by our cultural tastes, or are we also shaped by them?

Society Matters

Does society matter? Maybe not as much as we think

After reading a UNICEF report which placed the UK bottom of a league table on child welfare, Harjit Sandhu, who is studying DD202 Economics and Economic Change, argues we shouldn’t wait for reports to highlight the obvious.

Are we too quick to highlight the gross inequalities of other nations and neglect the differences within our own society?

Back issues of Society Matters have tried to remind us of the inequalities in both the developed and the developing world. They have explored the relationship between the two, especially how the legacy of Empire and foreign policy continue to prevent the developing world from realizing some of those rights and obligations that we have long taken for granted.

But we should not forget our own dark history, when racism treatment and widening inequality – for example at the birth of the Welsh and Irish cultures – were the norm. We may well judge the developing world we look at how we used to be. Let’s not stigmatize developing countries. Let us not write in ways to make it appear they have social ills that we do not.

Do we really need to think about why we are becoming more obese, why our families are struggling, why the NHS does not fix itself, why we are failing the nation’s children in education?

In the case of the NHS, it does not have infinite resources and we can help if we all eat better, exercise more, reduce binge drinking, stop burdening doctors with common colds, and stop missing appointments. Increased health awareness will reduce the burden on our amazing health system.

Parents fail their children more often than schools. Would a politician survive if they said, ‘take some responsibility, feed your child well, take time to read to them, show them hard work is important, teach them to respect others, don’t just blame long days at work as an excuse to neglect them, and give them ready meals before you sit them in front of a TV’? Big Brother and Jade Goody created more news coverage than the UNICEF report. This tells us about priorities in the UK today. Do we read reports showing that we treat the elderly worse than many other developed nations or that we have poorer basic education systems?

Society has to matter! There is no choice, and we should not have the choice to ignore our responsibilities and we should be more to bring back some sense of community and family values because these are the very things that shaped this country.

Maybe if we all accepted that we lack social responsibility we might be in a position to do more about it.


See article on page 10.
Every little helps, or does it?

Earlier this year the Open University announced a partnership with the supermarket giant Tesco, whose annual turnover in 2006 of more than £47.6bn made it the UK’s 2nd largest private employer. The OU agreed to pay its membership fees to the OU to get access to Tesco’s Clubcard database. This database is a goldmine of information, as the OU already has something like 12 million Clubcard customers and the OU database is a ‘very good’ one. Hence the OU’s partnership will add something like 12 million Clubcard customers to its database, adding something like £25bn of spend to its database. Hence this partnership is a major coup for the OU and will add something like £25bn of spend to its database. Hence the OU’s partnership will add something like 12 million Clubcard customers to its database, adding something like £25bn of spend to its database.

It is estimated that the OU will get something like £4million in return, but this is nothing compared to the cost of the partnership to Tesco. Hence the OU will get something like £4million in return, but this is nothing compared to the cost of the partnership to Tesco.

The OU is also using the opportunity to launch a new campaign, ‘The OU in the Community’, which aims to increase its membership by 50% over the next five years. This will be achieved through a series of initiatives, including a new website, a new brochure, and a new advertising campaign.

The OU has also announced that it will be launching a new course, ‘The OU in the Community’, which will be available for £100. This will be a new course for the OU, and will be available online and via distance learning. The course will be aimed at people who are interested in the OU’s mission of social justice, and will cover topics such as the OU’s history, its values, and its role in education.

The OU has also announced that it will be launching a new partnership with the supermarket giant Tesco, which will allow the OU to access Tesco’s Clubcard database. This will enable the OU to gain insights into the spending habits of Tesco’s Clubcard customers, and will allow the OU to better target its marketing efforts.

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And Israel would be encouraging the development of more than 600 of these barriers divide every Palestinian city from scattered throughout the West Bank. In the West Bank more barriers and roadblocks would be on Israel's borders and not of security, it would have been built on Israel's green line academics, including Palestinians not from the West Bank, with students often spending hours every day at checkpoints, wall, and effectively annexing most of the fertile farm land of their lands, trapping around 30,000 Palestinians in towns and numbers of Palestinians, isolating tens of thousands from security barrier on Israel's recognized international borders, post-1967 violates another provision of the Convention. So Jerusalem and over 100 settlements on the wider West Bank September 2000, 68 pregnant Palestinian women gave birth into three main enclaves (excluding East Jerusalem) and many subdivisions within each of these has led to the isolation of one Palestinian community from its neighbours. The sweeping nature of the Wall and the development of checkpoints in the form of armed siege and curfew constitutes a form of collective punishment, as does house demolition the families of militants. Israel's racist Family Unification Law (which forbids Israeli citizens currently or prospectively married to residents of the Occupied Territories living in Israel with their spouses), and the deportation of relatives of suspects.

The movement of over 400,000 Jewish settlers into East Jerusalem and over 100 settlements on the wider West Bank post-1967 violates another provision of the Convention. So does the construction of the wall. Each wall erected for security barrier on Israel's recognized international borders, the wall goes deep into Palestinian territory, displacing large number of Palestinians, threatening their livelihoods, their lands, trapping around 30,000 Palestinians in towns and villages and 220,000 in East Jerusalem on Israel's side of the wall, and effectively annexing most of the fertile farm land of the West Bank and its inhabitants. Furthermore, the Wall is an example of theConvention's refusal to live up to its obligations.

Student and academic life has been particularly hard hit, with students often spending hours every day at checkpoints, unable to go about their daily lives. Convicted of a variety of academic, including Palestinians not from the West Bank, are forced to apply for visas from the Israeli authorities and receive them only sparingly denied. If the 'separation' wall had been built in the interests of security, it would have been built on Israel's green line border, not deep within Palestinian territory. Checkpoints, barbed wire and the wall itself are 'human Rights in the Occupied Territories, StoptheWall, the United Nations, and Occupation Magazine.

It would appear that some people are never prepared to accept the reality that the last thing Israel can be accused of is being an 'apartheid' state. It is probably one of the most inclusive countries in the entire world, with all religions and a myriad of nationalities among its citizens. Non-Jews make up 20 per cent of Israeli citizens, and they enjoy full citizen's rights. Israeli law does not differentiate between Israeli citizens based on ethnicity. In Israel, Arabs possess the same rights as all other Israelis, whether they are Jews or not. These rights include special political representation. The Israeli Supreme Court has often ruled in favour of Arab complainants against governments.

Abbas has been known to give up to 60 per cent of the occupied territory, which could help produce a peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Palestinians do not consider this to be an acceptable solution, as they believe that it will undermine their national identity and their right to self-determination. The international community has been largely unsuccessful in persuading Israel to make any concessions in this regard. The situation remains tense, with both sides continuing to engage in violence and rhetoric.

Poverty rises in West Bank

A UN report published jointly in February 2007 by the World Food Programme and the Food and Agricultural Organization, revealed that 46 per cent of Gaza and West Bank households are ‘food insecure’ and malnourished, while another UN report estimated that 40 per cent of occupied territories as ‘being like apartheid South Africa’. The food report painted a bleak picture of human welfare in the Palestinian territories, especially in Gaza where the UN found 40 per cent of households live below the poverty line.

In 2007, Palestinian farmers received 85 per cent less for their produce, and 60 per cent less for their exports of goods. This has led to a significant decrease in income and purchasing power in the region. Additionally, the closure of checkpoints and the restrictions on movement have made it difficult for people to access markets and services, further exacerbating poverty.

The Palestinian Authority has implemented various policies to address poverty, such as providing subsidies for basic needs like food and fuel, and implementing social welfare programs. However, these efforts have been challenged by the wide range of socio-economic conditions in the region, including political instability, security threats, and limited access to resources.

In conclusion, the Palestinian territories continue to face significant challenges related to poverty and inequality. Addressing these issues will require a sustained commitment from the international community and the Palestinian authorities to prioritize the needs of the most vulnerable populations. The fight against poverty in the Palestinian territories is a key component of the struggle for a just and lasting peace in the region.
Will we ever learn the truth about Rwanda?

Rwanda is a story from another lifetime, unable to compete with Iraq and Afghanistan. On 6 April 1994, President Juvenal Habyarimana was assassinated. During the next 100 days tens of thousands of civilians were massacred. Fergal Keane, who received an honorary degree from the Open University in 2005, argues Rwanda is now a largely forgotten sideshow.

In the months leading up to the explosion of genocide in Rwanda in April 1994, human rights groups, diplomats and UN peacekeepers were warning of the danger. As John Echizenari, an expert on Rwanda, warned, "The perpetrators, high within government circles, had made meticulous plans. A radio station under their control, Radio Mille Collines, had been whipping up anti-Tutsi hysteria for months. Secret arms caches were kept ready for use by government soldiers and the party militia, the core of which had been trained in the tactics of slaughter. Lists of Tutsis and their Hutu sympathizers had been compiled for targeting. Only a trigger was needed."

None of this would have escaped the attention of the leader of the Rwandan Patriotic Front, Major General Paul Kagame. Like everybody else watching Rwanda closely, he would have been well aware that Rwanda was a tinderbox. Any violent action by a group linked to the Tutsi minority could provoke a terrible response from the Hutu extremists.

A trigger for this that makes recent allegations from the French judge Jean-Louis Bruguière so potentially devastating if proved to be true. It is an important if. As yet, nobody has seen the evidence that Judge Bruguière has gathered, let alone tested it in open court. What we have had are leaks, including one that came shortly before the tenth anniversary of the genocide, a development many observers believed was more than coincidental, and which infuriated Rwanda as survivors prepared to mark the day.

"The current conflict in the Sudanese region of Darfur began in 1993. Darfur is the size of France and home to six million, mainly nomadic, Muslim rural people. Darfur means homeland (Dar) of the Fur – one of the region’s largest ethnic groups. Darfur is now home to 14,000 (Dar) of the Fur – one of the region’s largest Muslim rural people. Darfur means homeland (Dar) of the Fur – one of the region’s largest ethnic groups. Darfur is now home to 14,000 of the region’s largest Muslim rural people.

Darfur and a new genocide

The current conflict in the Sudanese region of Darfur began in 1993. Darfur is the size of France and home to six million, mainly nomadic, Muslim rural people. Darfur means homeland (Dar) of the Fur – one of the region’s largest ethnic groups. Darfur is now home to 14,000 aid workers, the largest humanitarian operation anywhere on Earth.

Since 1993, more than 150,000 Darfuri civilians have died through violence, and a further 250,000 have perished from disease and starvation. In May 2007, the UN estimated that nearly 3 million people had been displaced, and a quarter of a million Darfurians had left the region mainly for the neighbouring country of Chad, where they faced further suppression. Nine out of ten villages in Darfur have been destroyed.

The UN are currently providing humanitarian assistance to over 3.6 million people, with tens of thousands more beyond the reach of humanitarian workers. There are over 14,000 aid workers helping survivors in Darfur but, since the Darfur Peace Agreement was signed in May 2006, beatings, rapes, robbery and murders against aid workers and peacekeepers have risen by 90 per cent.

After 27 years of Robert Mugabe’s rule, Zimbabwe’s economy is in tatters. Between 1999 and 2006 it shrunk by 50 per cent. Since independence in 1980 the inflation rate has risen from 7 per cent to 2,600 per cent in 2007 – the highest in the world. In 2007 many people survive on grain handouts. In 2006 the price of a standard loaf of bread was 25-30Z, it is now over 24Z1,000.

The country is gripped with widespread poverty. There is massive unemployment and an HIV/Aids pandemic. In June 2007, unemployment reached a record 80 per cent. Political strife, censorship, surveillance, the abuse of power, denial of justice and repression increasingly characterize the Mugabe regime (BBC, Reporters Without Borders, 2007). In 1997 the average life expectancy of a Zimbabwean woman was 65; in 2007 it is 34.
Drug exploitation is both a social and an individual problem. But, particularly in Latin America, a lot of other issues such as poverty, capitalism, organized crime, violence, the rights of indigenous peoples, human justice and a huge amount of money, and imperialism, are also tied up with drug distribution and addiction.

Most of the world has drugs flowing from other countries. Four countries produce the bulk of the drugs: opium in Afghanistan, and cocaine from Peru, Bolivia and Colombia. In 2003, the world spent as much on food as on drugs and legal drugs put together. For narcotic drugs in 2003, at the point of production, $91 billion exchanged hands at a retail value of $54 billion. The ‘street price’ paid by the consumer was an astonishing $320 billion. The problem was that 4 per cent of the income generated – the rest went to the middle-men. This explains the entry of organized crime in the business.

Nixon declared ‘war on drugs’ and drugs as Public Enemy Number One in 1971. Since then American interference in Latin America has increased indirectly and directly. The war to destroy cocoa plantations so that the drug problem could have its ‘final solution’. Observers of American policy will not be surprised by the historically rooted approach. The American preference to seek military solutions abroad to domestic problems and impose its version of capitalist and democratic models on the rest of the world, unilaterally, to serve its economic interests, shapes all policy agendas.

The war on drugs was thus to be fought first on foreign soil, at the expense of the economic, social and cultural changes that are needed. When the US government needed a farm for its own crop, tobacco, it has had no qualms about stripping other countries to provide a market for its own creation. When the US government needed money, it has passed the problem of debt collection from this list. ‘Coca, yes, coca no’ is the slogan of Bolivia’s newly elected president, Evo Morales.

In 1997, the RAND corporation, appointed by the US government, concluded that neither eradication by the US Government, nor interdiction (interception of the drugs in transit) had any effect on the quantity of drugs entering America or its street price. Further, it proved that such military interventions increased drug prices by 14 times costing the American people $134 billion. Thus, the US government媪s policy is to perpetuate the drug trade.

In 2005 the International Labor Rights Fund filed a US lawsuit against chocolate companies Nestlé, ADM and Cargill, claiming they shared responsibility in the trafficking, torture and forced labour of Côte d’Ivoire child cocoa workers. The case continued into 2006.

In the 1980s, coca plantation production in Bolivia and Peru declined due to American pressure, but the result was to transfer production to the two countries’ borders – to Colombia. Colombia is now the major producer of coca for cocaine production.

In 2000, America reacted to Colombian coca expansion by declaring a new dronacoin policy. Plan Colombia was designed to eradicate Colombia and its coca supply. This is the use of force. America financed the operation by training military and police in Colombia to fight the drug cartels, and by deploying planes and helicopters to spray the area under coca cultivation with herbicides. This forced changes in land use without providing any viable alternative, changes that resulted in social misery on a massive scale.

In their new book, 50 Reasons to Buy Fair Trade, Miles Litvinnoff and John Madeley show how all consumers can benefit from fair trade, and how their actions can improve and save lives. Millions of children worldwide are exploited and enslaved by others. Some are injured or die as a result.

In their new book, 50 Reasons to Buy Fair Trade, was published by Pluto Press in 2006. Society Matters is pleased to publish, with permission, two edited extracts that deal with the exploitation of children and the production of sports goods. Each account explored here can help you explore page 22 for the second extract. There is a third extract in Society Matters Extra. The book, 50 Reasons to Buy Fair Trade, was published by Pluto Press in 2006. Society Matters is pleased to publish, with permission, two edited extracts that deal with the exploitation of children and the production of sports goods. Each account explored here can help you explore page 22 for the second extract. There is a third extract in Society Matters Extra.

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Why do we punish the victims of slavery?

Britain has created a legal framework that makes it virtually impossible to take action against trafficking argues Aidan McQuade, the Director of Anti-Slavery International

There are slaves in Britain today. Impossible, most people would say. No. It is just that they are hidden away. It is a problem that both the police and the Home Office acknowledge, but which is kept out of the political spotlight because of contradictions between the Government’s attitude to immigration – on which it seeks to placate populist opinion – and its avowed determination to crackdown on the UK’s ‘modern day slavery’ business.

What do we mean by slaves? A slave is anyone who is forced to work through coercion or deception, for little or no pay, and who is controlled by an ‘employer’, usually through mental or physical abuse or threats. The International Labour Organisation estimates that there are at least 360,000 people living in slavery in industrialised countries. Two-thirds have been coerced into forced labour by people traffickers in a worldwide industry worth at least $32 billion a year. This is plainly big business.

No one knows how many of these people are in the UK. There are thought to be thousands of people in Britain who are slaves today. Most of them are caught in debt bondage, which is sprung debt traps. They have been tricked into taking a loan for as little as the cost of medicine for a sick child – or more often only to pass payment into the UK to repay the debt. Many are forced to work long hours, seven days a week, for little or no pay. They are kept in the thrall of a gangmaster. They may never pay off the loan. Such unfortunate people are to be found in agriculture, construction, cleaning and domestic work, food processing and catering, care and nursing, and the restaurant trade.

British politicians are happy to fulminate about the iniquities of people trafficking. But they have created a legal and political framework that makes it virtually impossible to take sustained and meaningful action against the criminal gangs who undertake the trade.

After the incident in which 23 Chinese cockle-pickers in the throes of a gangster’s vengeance lives in Morecambe Bay, the Government made trafficking for forced labour a criminal offence. A licensing system came into force in 2006 and the Government is setting up a UK Human Trafficking Centre with a mandate to pursue trafficking for both labour as well as sexual exploitation.

Yet despite these positive initiatives, there has not been a single successful prosecution for the offence since it was introduced in 2004. Nor is there any special assistance available to people who are trafficked for forced labour. Most mysteriously, the Government still has not signed the Council of Europe Convention on Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings, which would ensure that people trafficked into forced labour are provided with minimum standards of protection and support. More than 30 other European countries have signed.

Why this lamentable failure? A central reason is that the investigation of trafficking is fatally hampered by the UK immigration policy and the ‘prison’ of organized immigration crime, through which trafficking is seen at the policy level.

For the police to have any prospect of catching those who run international networks, they must have the co-operation of the victims. However, when the victims have irregular status in the country, there is limited incentive for them to co-operate with the police. The police cannot guarantee them protection, access to services or an opportunity to regularize their status. They can only try to negotiate protection for them with the Immigration Service, which often attempts to deport victims whom the police would regard as witnesses and expect to be treated as victims of crime.

This is because the Immigration Service works on a quota system of deportations. So, for immigration officials, there is limited incentive to stop the deportation of victims of trafficking, even if it assists police enquiries. This situation is likely to get worse, not better.

Under the Government’s latest proposals, the number of deportations will increase. This will further hamper the pursuit of criminals, for the victims of trafficking are even less likely to co-operate with the police if they are immediately to be deported back to the very countries where those criminal gangs still hold sway.

The result is a system whose priorities are upside down. Instead of protecting the rights of victims, the system punishes them. Trafficked people can be detained, charged or prosecuted for immigration offences such as illegal entry or destroying their documents, although this is most likely to have happened as a result of coercion from the traffickers.

What all this means is that trafficking people to the UK remains a high-profit, low-risk business for those criminal gangs who organize it. In countries such as Germany and Italy, which have signed the European Convention Against Trafficking – and where minimum standards of protection to the victims of human trafficking now exist – prosecutions have increased. In the UK there has still not been a single prosecution.

This situation has always been unacceptable from a human-rights perspective. What is clear now is that it is unjustifiable from a law-enforcement perspective as well.

Society Matters is grateful to Aidan McQuade and the Independent. A version of this article was first published in the Independent on 27 December 2006.

Slavery: the facts

The abolition of slavery in 1807 did not result in immediate slave emancipation. It was another 26 years before Parliament passed the necessary legislation, and it was not until 1838 that the slaves of the West Indies were freed. Abolition had its roots not just in white opposition, but crucially in African protest and organized revolt. For decades prior to 1807, slaves had been agitating for their freedom. In 1772, for example, Lord Mansfield’s edict brought the ‘sons of Africa’ to Britain to fight for the abolition of the trade, among them Olaudah Equiano and Ottobah Cugoano, leading activists in the abolitionist campaign.

In 1792, 400,000 Britons boycotted slave-grown sugar. The Slave Trade Act of 1807 was limited in its scope. The Act prohibited British subjects and residents of the UK or any of its colonies, dominions, or territories, from engaging in the transatlantic slave trade from the shores of Africa. The Act did not, however, prohibit the inter-colonial slave trade in the British Caribbean islands and the Americas.

The 1833 Emancipation Act allocated Caribbean plantation owners a £20 million in compensation, equivalent to 40 per cent of the then national budget. Emancipation was ‘squeezed out’ of the system, with slaves given ‘apprentice’ status, which effectively meant they continued to work and toil without pay for many years. Freed slaves received nothing in assistance, and continued to work in slavery-like conditions long after emancipation. It is possible that Britain made more money out of slavery after the Slave Trade Act of 1807 and the 1833 Emancipation Act, which made owning slaves illegal. The enslaved were freed only in the West Indies and Cape Town; the last Acts abolishing slavery were in Sierra Leone in 1927 and the Gold Coast in 1928.

The slave trade lasted 300 years. 20 million Africans were enslaved. A slave sold in 1760 could fetch £50 (over £4,000 in today’s money), an amount that would provide a comfortable life for one person for over a year. Over 1.25 million West Africans died on their way from Africa to the Caribbean.

Today, each year, over two million people in the world join the growing millions, mostly women and children, who are recruited into the sex trade and other forms of forced labour. According to UNICEF, the United Nation’s children’s agency, 27 million children worldwide are trapped in forced labour in barely subsistence conditions, illegal smuggling of people has reached ‘epidemic proportions’, especially in southeast Asia, and is fuelled mostly by the sex trade. Girls from poor rural areas of Burma, Cambodia and the Philippines are especially vulnerable, according to UNICEF, the United Nation’s children’s agency. Many end up working as prostitutes in the USA, Australia and Japan.
Scottish elections and the question of poverty

Gerry Mooney, Social Sciences Staff Tutor, argues that the new Scottish administration will be judged on how successful it is in reducing inequality and poverty in the new Scottish political landscape.

From the radio on my desk a heated debate on BBC Radio Scotland is booming out. Two leading members of the Scottish Labour Party and the Scottish National Party (SNP) are debating the aftermath of the May Scottish Parliament elections.

The Scottish National Party (SNP) released Abolish Labour as the major political party in Scotland; it had secured the largest number of MSPs (Members of the Scottish Parliament). A second outcome was the SNP’s election victory, and a third and run by public bodies rather than ‘private companies’—received an emphatic score of 8.10.

A range of social policies received ‘top billing’ in this survey, but for some observers all of these issues can be traced to an increasing concern about poverty and inequality. Ensuring that the question of poverty featured prominently in the Scottish elections is a victory in itself, as well as being a reminder that poverty remained a major issue in contemporary Scotland. In 2007, 910,000 people in Scotland live in poverty (18 per cent of the population). Over 240,000 are children (23 per cent of all children).

While there has been some progress in reducing the numbers of children and pensioners in poverty since 1997, no reduction in the number of working-age adults without children who live in poverty has been made. Alongside children, certain groups of people are at particular risk of poverty. These include young adults, lone parents, people affected by disability, ethnic minorities and asylum seekers.

The scale and intensity of poverty varies from place to place. One fifth of Scotland’s poverty is in Glasgow city, which has a disproportionately share of Scotland’s poorest areas. However, large numbers of people in poverty live in areas with lower concentrations of poverty. Amidst claims that it is a ‘boomtown’ city, evidence that more people are income deprived in Edinburgh than in any other local authority area except Glasgow and North Lanarkshire may come as some surprise.

This serves to illustrate a deepening polarization and growing income inequality. While poverty is most prevalent in urban areas, one in ten of the rural population (100,000 people) are income deprived.

Detailing the extent of poverty is one thing. Explaining the reasons for it is a different task and it is in relation to this that there is growing controversy in Scotland today. The contributors to the book were unanimous in firmly rejecting any argument that individual behaviour is the primary factor explaining poverty. Yet, such arguments rarely disappear. They are, unfortunately, a recurring theme in debates today, as they have been in the past.

In Scotland, some journalists and academics have been arguing of late that ‘poverty will always be with us’, that there is a need for a ‘non-material’ approach to poverty, that it reflects a ‘cultural and spiritual malaise’! These ideas chime well with other arguments, increasingly influential in both UK and Scottish governments, that focus on socio-psychological factors. There is an emerging ‘happiness industry’, which would have us accept that ‘unhappy attitudes’ are holding people back, while ‘weirder’ brand of pseudo-psychological thinking has emerged from the Scottish Centre for Confidence and Well-Being. It has bemoaned the ‘Scotts’ crisis of confidence’, which it believes attempts to transform Scotland as a modern competitive nation. It is a sad (dare I say unhappy?) state of affairs to note that these ideas have found a ready home in the Scottish Executive, not least with ex-First Minister Jack McConnell.

It would be a mistake to dismiss such thinking as media sound bites, merely political rhetoric. As far as questions of poverty and inequality are concerned, however, such ideas matter immensely. They bring with them enormous consequences for poor people and other disadvantaged groups across society. Against such thinking, campaigners and academics struggle to shift the emphasis toward the structural and material causes of poverty.

Under a new Scottish Prime Minister it remains to be seen whether Gordon Brown’s British Government will renew its commitment to reducing poverty in Scotland. The prospects may not be encouraging given that Gordon Brown’s final budget income tax cut in March 2007 was at the expense of the poorest in society.

Poverty is not a residual phenomenon but the daily lived experience of millions of people across the UK. Understanding and addressing poverty means not only challenging dangerous and backward thinking but also moving the analytical and explanatory lens ‘upstream’ to focus more on the activities of the rich and powerful and on the underlying processes that generate so much wealth—but yet at the same time produce so much poverty.

The truth about rural Britain

The British countryside is polarized between rich and poor and is characterized by rising levels of bigotry and racism, according to research by the Young Foundation. One in five households in 2006 live below the poverty line, 23 per cent of rural children live in poverty.

The highest proportion of low-wage workers in England live in rural areas, but house prices mean that many rural dwellers cannot afford the cheapest properties in their own neighborhood. Since 2005, in England, the proportion of homeless families rose by 38 per cent. In North Cornwall the average house price in 2006 was 14 times the equivalent local average income. More than 20 per cent of Britain’s inhabitants live in the countryside and, according to the Rural Communities Commission, by 2011, 46 per cent of households will be unable to afford to buy or rent.

Racism and mental ill health are increasing while the take-up of access to higher education and public services remains low. Northumberland, Devon and Cornwall experienced big rises in racially motivated incidents. Between 2002 and 2006, North Wales witnessed a 400 per cent increase in racially motivated incidents. Areas covered by the top ten police forces witnessed a 400 per cent increase in racially motivated incidents. Between 2001 and 2006, North Wales saw a big rise in racially motivated incidents. Areas covered by the top ten police forces witnessed a 400 per cent increase in racially motivated incidents. Between 2001 and 2006, North Wales saw a big rise in racially motivated incidents.

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The government’s millennium goal of halving child poverty by 2010 has suffered a huge setback. In 2005–6, 3.8 million UK children lived in relative poverty—defined as households on less than 60 per cent of average income net of housing costs—a rise of 200,000 on the previous year, and almost a third of UK children. The figures also showed that over 12.7 million people now live in relative poverty, an increase of 600,000 on the year before.

Since 1998–99, 600,000 children in the UK have been lifted out of relative poverty. But to reach the government’s target a further 1.1 million children must be lifted above the poverty line in the next 4 years. The government blamed an increase in the number of self-employed people falling below the poverty line. In his March 2007 budget, Gordon Brown announced increases in tax credits and benefits designed to lift 200,000 children out of poverty, but the millennium goal is rapidly slipping out of reach.

The official figures came a month after a seminar UNICEF report* on child welfare across 21 industrialized countries. UNICEF ranked Britain bottom of the league table on child well-being and noted this was especially related to the number of children living in relative poverty. Britain was ranked in the bottom third on five of the six UNICEF dimensions of child welfare, especially in relation to child poverty. In addition to material well-being, the dimensions compared data on health and safety, education, and peer and family relationships, behaviours and risks. UNICEF’s report is a wake-up call to the fact that, despite being a rich country, the UK is failing children and young people in a number of crucial ways. Interestingly, UNICEF asked children for their own perceptions of their well-being. Britain came bottom on the 21 countries in the league table.

Cops to kissagrams, barmaids to bouncers: the role of women in the UK security industry

We observed people having parts of their ears bitten off, being chased down the street with scuffles and poles, and being threatened with kettles of boiling water. And that was just the women. Louise Westmarland, Lecturer in Social Policy, reports on the first UK study into women bouncers

Has your bank been turned into a trendy wine bar? Over the past ten years, pubs and clubs have increasingly become an important feature of UK city centre development. Has the increasing number of female door security staff in the UK night-time economy meant the emergence of a new gender order? Could women train and redesign their bodies in order to break into what is often seen as one of the last masculine outposts, where women train and redesign their bodies in order to break into what it was like to work in an occupation where intimidation, control troublesome women customers. A lot of people are under the impression that a guy is not going to turn around and hit a woman... but that's not the case. If you get in the way of half the guys here then they'll just smack you back out of the way unless you're prepared to defend yourself in some way. The guys don't care whether they're hitting a guy or a girl at the end of the day. In many cases, women claimed to be working in ways that echoed the actions of male colleagues in threatening situations. We found ample evidence of female door staff willing to take part, where necessary, in violent action, despite the fact that their occupational identity would not seem to be so heavily dependent on a large, well-muscled physique. Many of the women interviewed regarded their role as equal to that of the male bouncers. One of the women explained how she would deal with a group of customers who were required to leave her club. You just say, ‘right, come on, you’ve had enough… come on, put your bottles down, you’ve got to go’ and, I mean, you use minimal force, minimal force, so you’ll ask them to leave...

Britain’s happiest place

If you live in Elmbridge, Surrey, smile. A survey of more than 400 local authorities by Halifax Bank put the stockbroker town at the top of the British quality of life league table. A range of criteria from employment and income levels, house prices, and the standard of local health and education services were used in the rankings: Elmbridge was closely followed by Hart, Wokingham, Chiltern, east Dorset, south Buckinghamshire, the Aylesbury Vale, St Albans and south Cambridgeshire. Nine of the 10 happiest places in the country to live were found in the southeast or the east of England. In the north of England, the happiest place to live was deemed to be Hamilton. Scotland’s highest ranking entry was the Shetland Isles at 114th. Elsewhere, a University of Warwick study into lottery winners suggests that while money may not bring you love, it can bring increased happiness. An investigation into men and women in England, the happiest place to live was deemed to be Hambleton. Scotland’s highest ranking entry was the Shetland Isles at 114th. Elsewhere, a University of Warwick study into lottery winners suggests that while money may not bring you love, it can bring increased happiness.

Ireland is the best place to live in the world

According to The Economist magazine, Ireland is the best place to live in the world. Comparing a country’s wealth, health, freedom, unemployment level, the quality of its family lives, its climate, political stability and security, gender equality and community cohesion, and the strength of its traditional values, the magazine produced a league table at the end of 2006 that placed Britain in twenty-ninth place – the lowest ranking for a pre-expansion European Union nation – just behind France in twenty-fifth and Germany in twenty-sixth place. The top ten countries were Ireland, Switzerland, Norway, Luxembourg, Sweden, Australia, Iceland, Italy, Denmark and Spain. The Economist ranked 111 countries, Zimbabwe was at the bottom of the list.

British children are amongst the laziest and unhappiest in the world

A survey of 3,500 children from 10 countries around the world ranked Britain as the seventh least healthy nation. Between the ages of 7 and 16, the average British child spends 4.333 hours – or half a year – in front of the television or the computer. The survey found that children in UK spend an average of 34 hours a week playing computer games or watching television, but less than 30 minutes a day being active. Only Indian, Russian and South African children fared worse. The healthiest country in this survey was Australia. Australians actually spend slightly more time watching television or using computers but they compensate for this by being far more active, especially in individual and organized sport. China was the second most healthy country and Germany the third.
To the right lay revolutionary tomatoes and to the left lay revolutionary lettuces, while in the glass in my hand — filled to the brim and frothing with vitality — was the juice from revolutionary mangos. It was thick, unfiltered and fabulously sweet. It was also organic. Revolutionary mangoes. It was the juice from the brim and frothing with vitality — was the juice from the Cuban Convertible Peso — and those who make do with the Cuban Convertible Peso, which has grown from 3 to 9,300 tons. Crop rotations, pesticides and beneficial insects.

The economics of various organoponicos differ. At the Metropolitana Organoponico in the city centre, two of the four workers who tend the plot said that the land was owned by the government and that everything grown there was split 50/50. It’s very good. That means that food does not have to be brought into the city, said one of the men.

At Alamar, Mr Salcines said that once the workers had grown the surplus of fruit and food that gave to the government, the surplus was theirs to sell with the profits then divided among them. Such a sense of co-operation — along with the free meals for the workers — added to the heady sense of idealism that was present at Alamar, the sort of socialist idealism that has earned Cuba many international supporters over the years, despite Castro’s dictatorial rule and his repression of political dissent.

Such farms barely existed in the late 1980s. Back then, Cuba’s economy was extraordinarily reliant on subsidies from its political older brother, the Soviet Union. It’s agriculture was designed with one aim in mind — namely to produce as much sugar cane as possible, which the Soviets bought at more than five times the market price, in addition to purchasing 95 per cent of its citrus crop and 73 per cent of its rice. In exchange, the Soviets provided Cuba with 63 per cent of its food imports and 90 per cent of its petrol. Such a relationship made Cuba extraordinarily vulnerable. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, such subsidies halted almost overnight. Suddenly, the future looked bleak.

Nowhere was the impact felt more strongly than in the stomachs of the ordinary people. Figures produced by the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (UNFAO) suggest that the daily calorie intake of the average Cuban fell from about 2,600 calories a day in the late 1980s to between 1,000 and 1,500 by 1993. Essentially, people had to get by on half the food they had been eating.

Without subsidies and limited resources, the Cuban regime took the decision to look towards self-sufficiency. In 1991, it turned to natural compost and the production of natural pesticides and beneficial insects. The UNFAO stressed production at all costs. Fernando Funes, head of the national Pest and Diseases research unit, told Harper’s magazine, ‘In that old system it took 10 or 15 units of energy to produce one unit of food energy. At first we did not care about economics, but we were realising just how inefficient it was.’

A second step Cuba took in the mid-1990s was that of establishing the establishment of mass tourism. Yet while this has provided the government with a ready source of millions of dollars in foreign exchange, it has also helped produce a dual-track society with its tensions and clear divide between those who can afford to pay for foreign currency — or the Cuban Convertible Peso — and those who make do with the lowly Cuban Peso, which cannot be used to buy many goods.

In 2007 the Department of Education’s Get On campaign, designed to increase the level of UK literacy, reported that 3.2 million adults lacked the reading skills of an 11-year-old child and thus did not have the necessary reading skills to sing classic songs such as Frank Sinatra’s ‘New York, New York, at karaoke nights. More complex karaoke hits, for example Robbie Williams’ ‘Angels’, were found to be beyond the reading skills of 18 million adults.

Millions of UK adults too illiterate to play karaoke

In 2007 the Department of Education’s Get On campaign, designed to increase the level of UK literacy, reported that 3.2 million adults lacked the reading skills of an 11-year-old child and thus did not have the necessary reading skills to sing classic songs such as Frank Sinatra’s ‘New York, New York, at karaoke nights. More complex karaoke hits, for example Robbie Williams’ ‘Angels’, were found to be beyond the reading skills of 18 million adults.
Some time this year or next, humanity will officially cross the urban milestone. By around 20 spectroscopy, the economic value generated by industry and services had grown to exceed that generated by agriculture, forestry and fishing. For the first time in history, more than half of the world's workforce was employed in industry and services; today, around two-thirds are.

In stressing these positive aspects, however, there is a danger of underplaying the scale of global problems. The positive aspects of urbanization do not hide the direct and indirect environmental problems that urban areas concentrate. Cities may be centres of wealth and opportunity, but they are also centres of resource consumption and pollution.

Around a billion urban dwellers – a sixth of the planet's population – are homeless or live in crowded tenements, boarding houses or squatter settlements, often three or more to a room. In cities where the environment is under stress, cracks in the physical environment endanger life and health.

In Latin America, much progress has been made since democratically elected mayors were introduced and cities began to enjoy some revenue autonomy. Porto Alegre, in Brazil, which pioneered participatory budgeting – giving each district's population more influence in prioritizing municipal investments – has a life expectancy and infant mortality rate that is lower than that of the United States. In Asia and Africa, hundreds of thousands of the poorest urban dwellers have benefited from better housing and sanitation through their own slum-dwellers' and shack-dwellers' federations.

Such federations are now active in 16 nations and, with the help of international organizations and local politicians, have grasped the fact that a large part of the world's poverty is now concentrated in the world's largest economies, including China, Brazil and India, as well as Japan and the USA. The growth of 'mega-cities' with 10 million or more inhabitants is one of the most striking features of the 21st century. Although it is often said that such megacities are born of modernity, they have long been a feature of the world's urban history.

In Africa, Africa's first and strongest black nation, the nation that the first large group of blacks to arrive in the UK came in 1948 on the SS Empire Windrush from Jamaica is put into perspective. Abolition is the alphabetical starting point – we learn that your descendants shall gather your fruits. Your descendants shall gather your fruits. But many of those most at risk from its effects live in and around cities in Asia and Africa, and have contributed very little to greenhouse gases.

Two changes are needed in the UK. First, an overseas aid programme that recognizes the importance of an urban agenda, one that invests in the social, educational and environmental management, including the management of public space, and works with and is supported by grassroots organizations, can successfully challenge anti-poor and anti-environmental policies and present viable alternatives. Similar centres are developing in cities in many other nations.

Meanwhile, on the environment front, urban centres concentrate much of the world's pollution and greenhouse gas emissions. Positive policy that breaks the link between high living standards and the consumption of fossil fuels in urban areas is critical. But many cities are still not ready to move away from this unsustainable pattern of development. Urban consumers who purchase their products. Of course, urban policies need to be directed towards people and industries and their wastes is dangerous without good waste management, it provides more possibilities for waste reduction or recycling.

For decades, arguments have raged between those who feel that rural poverty is the primary development issue, and those who feel that urban problems need more attention. But this over-simplifies the links between agriculture and urban areas in this context. Agriculture usually supports boom local urban development. Hundreds of millions of rural households are less poor because of money from family members working in urban areas or from urban migrants who provide income. Urban development can disrupt agriculture, pollute land and water and displace poor rural dwellers. But, again, this is down to bad governance.

Hopefully, as the world becomes more urban, attention will be attracted to the importance of good urban policy for poverty reduction, in rural and urban areas, and for environmental management, including the management of green infrastructure.

The Oxford Companion to Black British History provides an enlightening insight to the enormous. The Oxford Companion to Black British History is an important contribution to our understanding of the black presence in Britain. It is a valuable resource for anyone interested in the history of race and ethnicity in the UK.
Comedy to the rescue

Want to know what's going on in politics. Forget the news. Armando Iannucci explains how comedians are filling the gap where serious debate used to be.

I was watching Mastermind recently and a contestant had chosen Alan Partridge as his subject. My reaction was a combination of being thrilled at being responsible for something that was asked about on Mastermind, while thinking, God, Mastermind’s gone downhill a bit, hasn’t it? I sometimes find myself lowering my opinion of a body when it asks me to appear in front of it.

And yet comedy matters to a lot of people. Surveys show that a high proportion of people aged 18–36 get most of their information about British politics from Have I Got News For You. In America, similar figures show that Jon Stewart’s topical comedy, The Daily Show, supplies many 18- to 36-year-old Americans with their main news fix.

Why is comedy taking up so much space in our culture? Why is it so present, so dominant? There are things that should matter more, but at the moment they just aren’t there.

I suspect that most of us who work in the creative arts occasionally feel that what we’re doing is interesting, fun, and is probably the only thing we can imagine ourselves doing. But is it a proper job? Is there a point to what anyone in the creative arts is doing? Isn’t the same question what one’s spent all this time on – that spending one’s life just imagining things, making things up, performing a crucial role today. It matters because it’s an act of imagination, and imagination is one of the things that defines us as human beings rather than monkeys. It’s an act of imagination that’s just as valid as scientific inquiry. I think, as a drama or a novel. But I think we sometimes see comedy as an inferior art form.

This is not me. Comedy allows the imagination to be at its most revolutionary. Because, when you treat something comically, you can do anything. You can distort or exaggerate; you can break out of the form, you can be as real or as unreal as you like. You can invent, you can deny, hide or reveal, you can be as free or as controlling as you like. The most ground-breaking novels are usually comic. In return, though, you make a devastating pact with your audience. Because, though you can pour all your energy into doing any of these things, if they’re not funny (worse still, if they’re not instantly funny) then you’re a failure. No court of appeal.

There are other questions of taste and taboo in comedy, my instinct is always first to ask, is it funny? That’s why I probably would have had more sympathy with the Christian right’s attack on a group of names, Jenny Spring’s The Opera. The opera, had been less amusing, and would have had more sympathy with the Danish cartoonists if their efforts in depicting Muhammad had been a lot more witty. And I’m sure the Labour MP Gisela Stuart was correct in her worry about a send-up of the Pope. The media have the imaginative freedom to do anything they like. The most ground-breaking novels are usually comic. In return, though, you make a devastating pact with your audience. Because, though you can pour all your energy into doing any of these things, if they’re not funny (worse still, if they’re not instantly funny) then you’re a failure. No court of appeal.

That’s why: evidence, was one of the things that defines us as human beings.

Part in cultural life. Look at politics. So much of it today is conducted in the form of a joke – not necessarily an amusing joke – that it’s practically impossible for a professional joke-teller to go any better. When Gordon Brown has to get comic writers to supply him with some gags about the Arctic Monkeys and the Arctic Circle, is there anything left for a comedian to say, to do? And yet comedians have heard from others, even if they’re not instantly funny) then you’re a failure. No court of appeal.

That’s why: evidence, was one of the things that defines us as human beings.

Surprise, surprise: hangovers affect student performance

Does having an alcohol-induced hangover impair psychomotor and cognitive performance? You might have thought this question was a no-brainer but psychologists at Glasgow Caledonian University spent £40,000 trying to find out. The research, for the Alcohol Education and Research Council, recruited 70 students – half drank alcohol, half abstained. The next morning both groups were evaluated to perform a variety of simple tasks. Those with hangovers reported tiredness and lapses in concentration but, according to the research, alcohol did not impair short-term memory. However, the ability to carry out functional tasks was affected. What made this research distinctive was that, unlike most other studies into alcohol and its effects, this research was not conducted in a laboratory.
The social life of jokes

What kind of jokes do we tell? And what, if anything, do they tell us? Marie Gillespie, Professor of Sociology at the Open University, reports on a national survey of British jokes carried out by the OU and the BBC, and explores the relationship between jokes and social life.

What's in a joke? Why would anyone want to do a joke survey? Surely, a joke is just a bit of fun? Jokes are, by definition, not serious. You could call them a pleasurable escape from social restrictions. And they might even be a way of coping with the absurdities and adversities, the tensions and trials of life. Jokes circulate, most commonly between sex and death, disaster and stupidity, circulate in multiple and fluid forms. Jokes tell us something about the way we are supposed to speak about serious topics. They can be rude or silly, dangerous or clever, defiant or compliant, hurtful or nontoxic. But they have no fixed serious meanings. Matters of life and death, success and failure, are all up for grabs and flexibility in how we are used to speak about serious topics. They can be rude or silly, dangerous or clever, defiant or compliant, hurtful or nontoxic. But they have no fixed serious meanings.
Boxing, Masculinity and Identity: the ‘I’ of the Tiger
Kath Woodward, Senior Lecturer in Sociology and former Chair of DD100, has been busy researching the boxing world. Her new book on the sport was published in 2007. Here she explains why she is so interested in the sport of kings and the significance of what it might mean to have been a contender.

Boxing seems an unlikely subject for the academic interest of a middle-aged, non-violent woman like me, but this is the focus of my latest book, Boxing, Masculinity and Identity. The ‘I’ of the Tiger. I have always followed the sport (but never participated!) and argue that its relevance extends beyond the confines of sport.

Boxing is an exciting sport that retains much of its popularity, but its practices are also troubling, especially for spectators, which is what makes it such an interesting site for research. It retains considerable popularity among boxers, spectators and followers and the sport is part of a wider cultural field. In addition, its inherent troubles, especially for spectators, which is what confines of sport.

also pose some issues in the contemporary world in which it might seem to be something of an anomaly, especially in the context of civilizing processes. It also, through the emergence of women’s boxing, has exposed some of the ambiguities and complexities of new gender identities.

Boxing, Masculinity and Identity. The ‘I’ of the Tiger explores the changing sociology of identification, especially in relation to gender, in the sport by focusing upon the making and remaking of masculinities, and how the sport can be explored and viewed in both the more public arenas of the media and the cinema. Women’s boxing is increasing in popularity, especially in the USA, but the book focuses on the traditions and cultures of men’s boxing and the gendered identifications that make it difficult for women to be part of the dominant discourses of boxing. The configuration of gender is also addressed through a discussion of methodologies and the situated knowledge that is produced by doing research, especially in so strongly differentiated a field as boxing.

Gendered identities are made visible and invisible in the sport, with particular versions of masculinity carrying strong visibility in the spectacles and performances of boxing and in the myths that pervade whether they are told in the gym or in the more public arenas of the media and the cinema.

Boxing offers a space in which the ambiguities and vulnerabilities of masculinity are on display and in the reiteration of hegemonic masculinity and traditional versions of what it means to be a man and, most importantly, what it might mean to have been a contender.

Give bad balls the boot
In our second extract from 50 Reasons to Buy Fair Trade, Miles Litvinoff and John Madeley show how people who sew fair-trade footballs, basketballs, volleyballs and rugby balls get a living wage, decent working conditions, medical care and low-cost loans. That’s a real first in the sportsball industry.

It’s a little known fact that around three-quarters of the world’s footballs are made in and around the city of Sialkot in Pakistan, whose sportsball industry employs approximately 30,000 people. It takes close to 700 hand-stitches to make a 32-panel football, and an experienced stitcher will complete up to five balls a day. Wages are low for the men, women and children who sew the balls, mainly working for subcontractors. In the past, thousands of children as young as seven had to work long hours with their families to help make ends meet, often going entirely without any shows.

In 1997, under pressure from Save the Children, UNICEF, the International Labour Organisation and others, major sportsball brands such as Nike, Adidas, Reebok and Puma signed the ‘Atlanta Agreement’, which committed them to employ child stitchers younger than 14. The next year the world football governing body FIFA adopted a code of conduct prohibiting use of child labour for international soccer balls.

Despite reported violations, the Atlanta Agreement and FIFA code were steps in the right direction. But they caused new problems. Manufacturing of low-quality machine-made balls moved to China. In Sialkot most of the stitching had been done in family homes. Many women, unable to leave the home to work, and prevented in Pakistan’s Islamic society from working in the same room as men, lost their only source of income.

By 2002 three Sialkot sportsball manufacturers had begun to make FairTrade-certified balls, initially for sale in Sweden and Italy, and now also available in Australia, Canada, Germany, Japan, New Zealand, the UK, and other countries.

Fair trade has made a big difference to the stitcher families. Pay has risen to about 50 per cent above the industry average. Wages are calculated to provide a decent income for a family as long as two adults sew fair-trade balls eight hours a day. This works out at around 6,000 Pakistani rupees (£57.00) per month per family – a decent income by local standards that ensures children can go to school.

Children aged under 15 are allowed to work on fair-trade balls. Children over 15 can work only part time so that they can continue their education. One of the supplier companies, Talon Sports, was an early winner of the International Labour Organisation’s Without Child Labour award.

The work is organized differently from before. Fairtrade-certified suppliers organize stitching in small village centres. Designated women-only units enable women to work without sharing the space with men. Acceptable standards of ventilation, lighting and safe drinking water availability have to be met. Workers receive information on fair-trade conditions, wage rates and the monitoring system in their own language, Urdu.

The fair-trade ‘social premium’ on sports balls is about 20 per cent of the price that the supplier company receives. ‘Joint bodies’ of workers and management agree how to spend it. The premium covers free health care for all employees, including hospital costs for pregnant women, and a lot more besides.

There are small bank credit schemes to enable workers to develop new sources of income, funds for local irrigation projects and for buying school exercise books. Talon has set up nurseries in some of its production centres, where women can leave their children to be properly cared for and prepared for school while they go to work. A third of Talon’s balls are now reported as sewn by women.

Talon’s Fair Trade Workers Welfare Society, which manages spending of the premium in partnership with the sewers and local non-governmental organizations, also supports a relief programme for refugees from Afghanistan.

The range of fair-trade balls now includes volleyballs, rugby balls, basketballs, junior and mini-footballs, as well as FIFA international match ball standard footballs. Football kits and goalkeepers’ gloves are also available. In the UK, the main supplier, Fair Deal Trading, considers the balls are no more expensive than other good-quality balls.

Fair-trade sports balls are becoming popular in the UK. Football clubs using them include Genesis FC, a Christian team from Loughborough who play in the North Leicestershire League. And when Royal Holloway, University of London, won University Fairtrade status in late 2005, the college rugby club played its part by using fair-trade balls. Much has been achieved, but fair-trade sports balls are still just a small fraction of those made every year in Sialkot, and only a small percentage of the sewing families currently benefit. There’s never been a better time to kick your old ball into touch.

The book, 50 Reasons to Buy Fair Trade, was published by Pluto Press in February 2007. Each account explores how you can help and by doing so help the planet.
Too individualistic: why England pay the penalty

Drawing on his research findings, OU Senior Lecturer Jon Billisberry explains why England’s national culture means that they will not win another major international football tournament until penalty shootouts are replaced with a fair method of determining the results of drawn games

If England reach the next European football championship Finals we all know what will happen. They will struggle through a qualifying group and then, in the knockout stages, the latest pre-obscurant wunderkind will get sent off for breathing too heavily on an opponent. The brave lads will soldier on and get a draw, only for some Galáctico to blast his spot kick over the bar in the shootout. This is so inevitable it isn’t funny. England’s penalty shootout record is the worst of any major football nation in the world.

Penalty shootouts have become the bane of the England football team. They have taken part in six penalty shootouts in international football tournaments; winning one and losing five (see Table 1). The only one they won was a false dawn as elimination by penalty shootout awaited them in the next round. In contrast, the success rate of some countries is very high (see Table 2).

Shortly after England were knocked out of the 2006 World Cup by losing another penalty shootout, Nathalie van Meurs, me of the OU and Gareth Edwards of the Leadership Trust Foundation met for lunch. We were meeting to discuss some cross-cultural research projects and our discussion drifted to penalty shootouts. We had seen tables like the ones in this article printed in national newspapers and they had piqued our attention. We thought we saw geographical clusters in the data and it reminded us of some cross-cultural index data from a Dutch researcher called Geert Hofstede.

Fortunately our colleague, Patrick Nelson, had a little spare research time, which we persuaded him to use unearthing the records of every competitive international penalty shootout that has ever taken place. Having got used to modern internet and electronic searches, he reports that it was quite exciting visiting musty international newspapers archives to read reports of games played in Thailand in the early 1970s.

Patrick’s endeavours produced a database of 184 penalty shootouts in competitive international matches that we were able to analyse (see www.penaltyshootouts.co.uk for more information). Once we had filtered out nations that had not played in at least five penalty shootouts, we had taken at least twenty penalty kicks in these (to make the data robust), and had competed in at least two penalty shootouts in major world and continental tournaments (to ensure quality of opponents and higher levels of stress), we had 16 nations in the sample.

We then calculated each nation’s win/loss performance in the shootouts and compared this with national cultural data from Hofstede’s website (www.geert-hofstede.com). We were particularly interested in his individualism/collectivism dimension because of recent comments by Sepp Blatter, President of FIFA. He said, “When it comes to the World Cup final, it is passion, and when it goes to extra time it is a drama. But when it comes to penalty kicks, it is a tragedy…Football is a team sport and penalties are not for the team; it is the individual’’.

What we found amazed us. The correlation between nations’ win/loss performance in penalty shootouts and compared this with national cultural data from Hofstede’s website was 0.029 (p = 0.009), which is immensely strong. The adjusted R², which tells us how much of the variance in performance is explained, was 0.352, meaning that about a third of factors influencing nations’ performance in penalty shootouts are directly attributable to the degree of individualism/collectivism, with higher degrees of individualism being helpful.

This means that, over time, assuming a randomized spread of nationalities, on average the most individualistic nations would win the greatest number of penalty shootouts. This is what happened in the 2006 World Cup.

To see whether our findings made sense, we looked at a number of other factors constant (e.g. skill levels, training). England only win 17% of the penalty shootouts they compete in. They are significant underdogs against some countries. Germany will win three out of four penalty shootouts against England, whilst Portugal will win an astonishing seventeen out of twenty shootouts against England.

This finding is somewhat counter-intuitive. Surely, if penalty shootouts are for ‘the individual’, they should favour more individualistic nations. How then, do we explain these results? The explanation seems to lie in the mind and how people respond to stressful situations; and nothing is more stressful to a professional football player than taking a spot kick in a penalty shootout in a tournament that you’ve dreamed of winning your whole life in front of millions of people.

Individualists are disadvantaged in two ways. First, as there are weaker social ties in individualistic cultures, there is less binding people together. In such national cultures, we would expect to see more singling out of individuals for criticism and less tolerance of failure. Second, people in individualistic cultures are likely to be critical of each other and more likely to see more singling out of individuals for criticism and less tolerance of failure. Second, people in individualistic cultures are likely to be critical of each other and less tolerant of failure. Hence, in individualist societies, people are likely to see more singling out of individuals for criticism and less tolerance of failure. Hence, in individualist societies, people are likely to see more singling out of individuals for criticism and less tolerance of failure.

There is unfairness in many sports, with particular national attributes contributing to success. The problem with the penalty shootout is that it is an artificial tiebreaker which has different success criteria to a normal game of football. The degree of individualism or collectivism does not appear to determine the result of these games; why should it be used as a tiebreaker? The penalty shootout has a predictable and powerful bias that provides an enduring basis to decisions on a fairness basis. The biased mechanism is imposed on a largely unbiased game. We cannot see how it can continue in use in international football tournaments as England are unlikely to win another football tournament until it is removed and replaced with something fair.

Beckham pictured shortly after missing a penalty in Euro 2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Opponents</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Villains</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1990 World Cup Semi Final</td>
<td>West Germany</td>
<td>Knocked out</td>
<td>Stuart Pearce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996 Euro Quarter Final</td>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>Went through</td>
<td>Chris Waddle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996 Euro Semi Final</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Knocked out</td>
<td>Gareth Southgate</td>
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<tr>
<td>1998 World Cup Last 16</td>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>Knocked out</td>
<td>Paul Ince</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004 Euro Quarter Final</td>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>Knocked out</td>
<td>David Batty</td>
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<tr>
<td>2006 World Cup Quarter Final</td>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>Knocked out</td>
<td>Frank Lampard</td>
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<td>Steven Gerrard</td>
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<td>Jamie Carragher</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Selected nations’ penalty shootout record</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>South Korea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argentina</td>
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<tr>
<td>Germany (inc West Germany)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nigeria</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
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<tr>
<td>France</td>
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<td>Iran</td>
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<tr>
<td>Uruguay</td>
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<tr>
<td>South Africa</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
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<td>Spain</td>
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<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
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<tr>
<td>England</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Sport: new courses in Openings and Level 1

In 2005, the Society Matters centre spread called for the University to create sports-related curricula. Ben Oakley, from the Faculty of Education and Language Studies and Head of the new Award in Sport, Fitness and Health, outlines three exciting initiatives in sport-related courses at the University.

In September 2006, after a couple of years of discussion and debate about the relevance of sport to our everyday lives, two new members of staff, with a responsibility for developing sport-related curricula, were appointed to the Faculty of Education and Language Studies. I came from an Olympic coaching background via Portsmouth University whilst Caroline Heaney, a sports scientist with a particular focus on psychology, had previously taught at the Rugby Union. Both will be joined by a third member of staff who is being appointed at the time of going to press.

In collaboration with others we are currently working on three projects.

- A 10 credit point Openings course entitled Y164 Exploring Sport Online is being developed by the Centre for widening participation with support from other faculties, including Social Sciences, and will be delivered online from March 2008.
- A 60 credit point Level 1 course entitled Introduction to Sport, Fitness and Management, which considers the provision of millions of people.
- A planned co-production with the BBC of an Olympic sports project. This will take the form of a longitudinal series of programmes that will track the stories of those young people already training towards the London Games from now until 2012. The series will be broadcast from 2008 onwards and is likely to include an interactive website.
- There are plans for a wider Sport and Fitness award, which is being through the internal validation process at the time of writing. Other Faculties are considering developing courses in sport-related issues and also raising the profile of sport as a ‘hot topic’ in new courses.
1 India

India was partitioned in 1947 by Viscount Radcliffe (the subject of Auden's poem). Most of the provinces were allowed to decide which side to join, but the Punjab was split down the middle. Ten million people fled for their lives, and up to a million were massacred. Bengal was dismembered, with a ‘rural slum’ created in east Bengal – cut off from Calcutta. Kashmir, which was predominantly Muslim, joined India, leading to its partition in the first Indo-Pak war. In recent years there have been some encouraging signs of reduced tension, although India and Pakistan now point nuclear weapons at each other.

2 Korea

Americans still buy T-shirts that display a map of Korea emblazoned with ‘The Place Where Communism Was Stopped’. Yet the 1945 partition of Korea, at the 38th parallel, agreed by Roosevelt and Stalin, was meant to be temporary. Historians cannot even agree why the Cold War protagonists threw themselves into the subsequent Korean war – was it Stalin, Kim II Sung or General MacArthur who wanted it most? What is certain is that MacArthur proposed a nuclear attack on China in response to its intervention. The Labour Prime Minister Clement Attlee sparked across the Atlantic to urge moderation (those were the days!). The aftermath was a pointless return to the 38th parallel. North Korea has recently carried out a nuclear test in the face of international condemnation.

3 Africa

Italy invaded Libya, the French took Algiers, the British occupied Egypt, and Germany took part of east Africa. Even the Belgians got a slice of the Congo, fixed up by Stanley – the one who met up with Dr Livingstone at Victoria Falls – with disastrous consequences. They held an 1884 partition conference in Berlin to divide up the spoils. Greedy for Africa’s mineral deposits, the rivalry between European powers breezed up into the First World War. Although most of Africa has been granted independence, strong ties with the former colonial powers remain. France, for example, made 19 military interventions in Africa between 1962 and 1995.

4 Palestine

The British Expedition Force occupied Jerusalem in December 1917, running Palestine as a British colony until 1947, when it was partitioned into Jewish and Arab states. About 90 per cent of the Arab population were expelled from the Jewish state. Soldiers would typically surround three sides of a Palestinian village and force the occupants to leave by the fourth side. Even the names of the villages were changed as they lost their Arab identity: the village of Lubya, for example, was transformed into the Jewish town of Lwiba. In the late 1880s and early 1990s, a methodological dispute (the Methodonstrek) took place over the future of economic analysis. The Austrian Karl Menger argued that economics should be based on micro foundations, in which agents are treated like individual atoms. The historical school, in contrast, argued that institutions and history should be the basis for economic analysis. The result was a partition of intellectual labour into two camps – economists.

5 Vietnam

No agreement was made in 1945 to give independence to Vietnam. It was recouped by the French, which set off an armed resistance campaign led by Ho Chi Minh. Under the 1954 Geneva Accords, Vietnam was partitioned at the 17th parallel. Under this agreement an election was to be held in 1956, with Ho Chi Minh predicted to win 80 per cent of the vote. The Americans refused to sign the accord, propping up their South Vietnamese puppet dictator, and putting more troops into the conflict. The Cold War case to beat off the Communist threat was overwhelming: the House of Representatives voted by 416 to 0 for American intervention. The rest is history, but for once the partition did prove to be temporary.

6 Iraq

In 2002, 133 members of the House of Representatives voted against an unprovoked invasion of Iraq. On this occasion there was no scurrilous Labour Prime Minister to urge moderation despite considerable opposition in the UK. But what of the anti-war Tories? ‘We must partition Iraq and get out now’, argued the Sunday Times columnist Simon Jenkins. Let the governors of Iraq’s provinces decide whether they will go into Sunni, Shi’ite or Kurdish states, he advised. Never mind that these groups live alongside each other in Baghdad and many other parts of the country. Ethnic cleansing is a price worth paying. If his paymaster Rupert Murdoch would allow, why don’t we send Jenkins to Baghdad’s green zone to do the Viscount Radcliffe job?

7 Ireland

Around 95 per cent of the manufacturing output of Ireland was concentrated in the six counties that were partitioned in 1921. They cannot properly be referred to as Ulster, or even as ‘northern Ireland’, since Donegal, Monaghan and Cavan are all in the north and are part of Ulster. The partition was based on gerrymandering, to fix a false protestant majority. I was once in a faculty meeting where someone complained that we were not doing enough to recruit O’U students from the Irish catholic community. Well, retorted the Dean, dry as a bone, we did educate the military command of the provisional IRA (the recently deceased former UVF prisoner David Irvine also studied social sciences with the OU). Our Faculty can claim some small credit for helping to enlighten participants in the peace process.

8 Cyprus

My neighbour is from northern Cyprus. Though his childhood memory is of Greeks and Turks living in harmony, the family house is now the site of a Turkish football pitch. By all accounts, the British and Americans could have stopped Turkey’s illegal invasion of Cyprus in 1974, but they were more interested in keeping Cyprus as a military base. A potential union between Cyprus and Greece threatened its NATO status. Cyprus is actually partitioned into four parts: the Greek and Turkish zones, the UN patrolled border and the British military zone.

9 The London Borough of Haringey

A colleague in the faculty told me a story of an African friend who came to live in Tottenham as a teenager. His grandmother advised him that he should ‘kick those white boys’ arses’. The boy was shocked to discover that there were no white boys in his new school. In the London Borough of Haringey, former colonial subjects have been forced by economic pressures to live in the east, while city bosses are invested in leafy white districts such as Highgate in the west – a colonial partition in our very own backyard.

10 Economics and sociology

In the late 1880s and early 1890s, a methodological dispute (the Methodonstrek) took place over the future of economic analysis. The Austrian Karl Menger argued that economics should be based on micro foundations, in which agents are treated like individual atoms. The historical school, in contrast, argued that institutions and history should be the basis for economic analysis. The result was a partition of intellectual labour into two camps – economists.