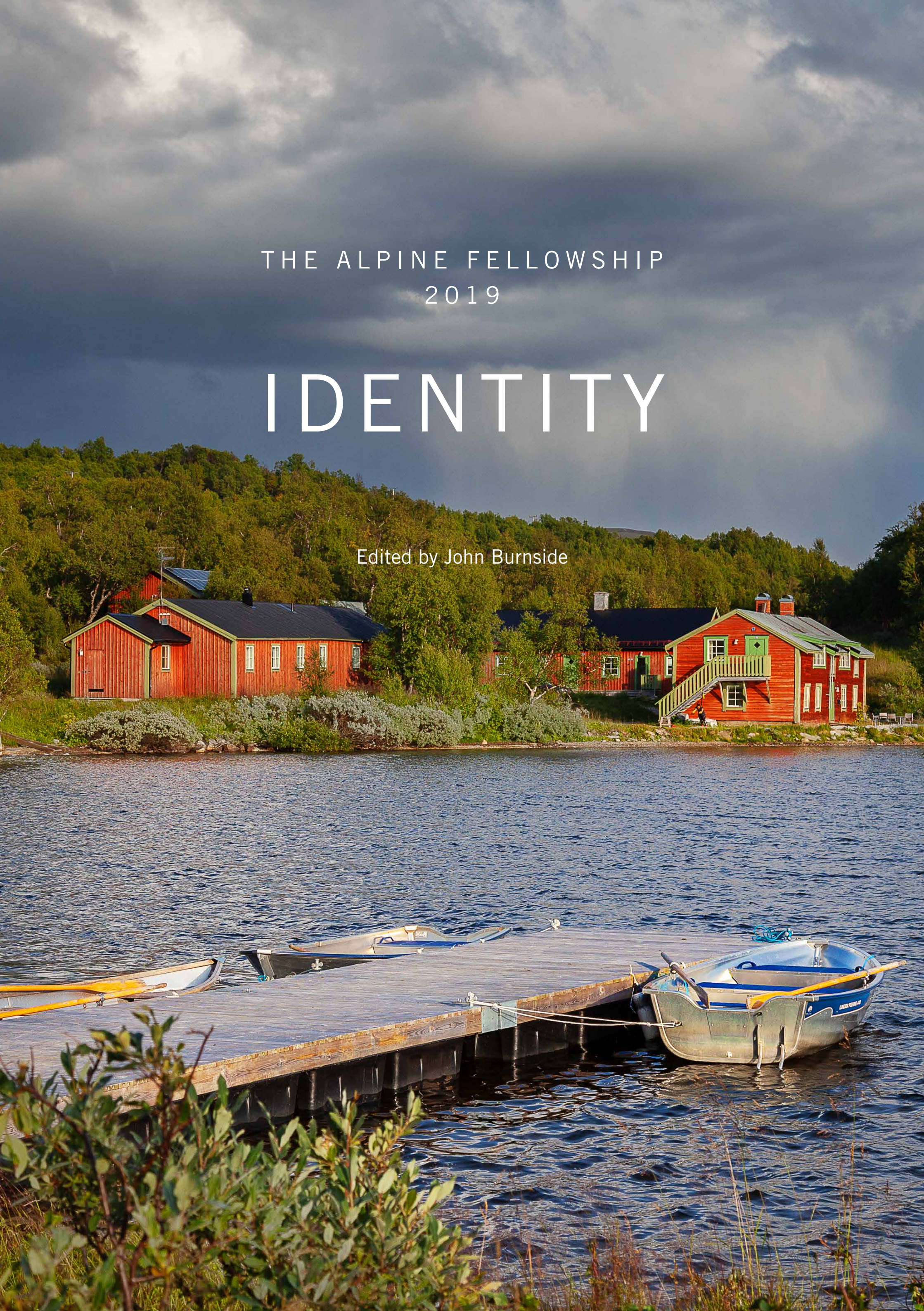
THE ALPINE FELLOWSHIP
2019

IDENTITY

Edited by John Burnside



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Contents

Opening Remarks 6
Transcript for the proceedings
By Alan Lawson

Opening Remarks 14
Transcript for the proceedings
By Jacob Burda

Prizes

Writing Prize: First Place 22
THE IMITATION OYSTER
Ashani Lewis
Writing Prize: Second Place 31
PRAYERS AGAINST EXILED GODDESSES
Putul Verma
Writing Prize: Third Place 39
DEATH BEARS
Caroline Zarlengo Sposto

Drama Prize: First Place 54
ROLL FOR INITIATIVE
Lucy Foster

Visual Arts Prize: First Place 60
A SOARING TO NOWHERE
Sudipta Das
Visual Arts Prize: Second Place 64
DREAMS OF BROKEN DOLLS
William Stok

'For he himself has said it': Some Thoughts on Englishness and Masculinity in the age of Brexit 66
By John Burnside

Is Masculinity in Crisis: How to discuss issues facing men 80
By Iman Amrani

'Another Brick in the Wall' 106
By Nakul Krishna

Poem: 'New Moon' 116
By Gillian Clarke

Gender and identity in the theatre space 118
Transcript from panel discussion
Jessica Swale in conversation with
Charity Wakefield and Nell Leyshon

The challenge of identifying 160
Transcript from panel discussion
Iain Martin in conversation with
Damian Le Bas, Douglas Murray and Maajid Nawaz

Identity in Art 206
A brief summary of an impromptu talk, given with slides
By Julian Spalding

Identity: Post-Colonialism and Post-Truth 214
Transcript from panel discussion
Dominic Thomas in conversation with
Sukhdev Sandhu and Cristina Ali Farah

Poem: 'Sunflower' 246
By Cristina Ali Farah

We are what we eat 248
Transcript from panel discussion
Josh Tetrick in conversation with Jacob Burda

Postscript 290
By John Burnside

Opening Remarks

Transcript from proceedings

By Alan Lawson

The question, where are you from, has always been an awkward one for me. My roots, which have been cut and re-potted numerously, were once in Scotland, and from my mother's side in the North of Spain.

I now live in self imposed exile in the Swiss Mountains and given how often I pass into France, or Italy on any given weekend, without so much as a thought, it should make me something of a standard bearer for some brand of European Identity. Yet I don't feel particularly 'European'. Or indeed particularly Swiss, Scottish, or Spanish. But that doesn't mean I don't have local allegiances, places that feel like home. What I'm going to suggest over the next ten minutes or so is that identity is both extremely potent in driving much of our behaviour, but also largely an illusion. That it has much to do with love and loneliness, and the making of a home, but when it predicates behaviour it can also be entirely destructive.

So let me return briefly to the notion of European identity since so much of our bandwidth is being taken up by things like Brexit in the UK, Lega Nord in Italy, or AFD in Germany, and almost every European country has some version of identitarian movement. By that I mean a movement that places local traditions, cultural homogeneity, and national or geographic identity above say multiculturalism, liberalism, and globalism. (Of course, this is a somewhat crude distinction, but that's part of my point. The making of communities that identify over ideology, or religion or landscape, appears to be not only extremely desirable to human beings but often predicates much of human behaviour, even if those identifying conditions are abstract, invented, or a foil for some other motivation)

I respect the European project as the making of an identity where tribal factions are replaced by a broader more inclusive sense of I. And the slow cultural homogenization that comes out of something like a European project has much in its favour. Clearly one argument for the EU is the prevention of war in Europe, with the principle that a shared identity will stop us coming to blows. Rightly or wrongly (because I think history might suggest we simply displace the enemy next door with a collective enemy elsewhere) it does however seem to recommend the view that we will go to extraordinary lengths to protect and preserve an idea of identity, however flimsy the notion may be.

What strange creatures we are… That we'll give our lives for a flag, or a symbol, or a phrase. And what extraordinary lengths of cruelty humans have gone to in response to mankinds' allegiance to a particular identity. We can turn to any part of the world, at any point in history, to see examples of this, but the '*re education*' of Muslims in China, seems to me to be a precise and current example of state fear and cruelty against a community who identify with something beyond simply the State.

The invented sense of belonging that is 'European' may not forge until all Europeans fight side by side against another continent, or until we've all spoken the same language for a very long time, or worshipped similar gods, be that Google or Amazon. Or just that the syncretic process is far too young to assess. The point here is that there is a long tradition of individual identity being held within broader cultural or religious identities, and the more successful identity 'movements' (for want of a better term) have, I think, been paradoxically both more tolerant and syncretic in detail but also generally forced upon people.

When Aristotle begins The Ethics by saying 'Man is a social animal', he is prefacing individual moral action with this idea of belonging to a bigger set. And other than living as a hermit, we just can't seem to avoid belonging in some sense.

As an aside note (and obviously no time to explore this now): the opposite to belonging is an interesting cultural position, and has often been the micro state for artists and writers. The court fool or jester, Shakespeare's 'Touchstone' inhabits that space, the creature that lives on the back of the cultural status quo, but whose role is to point out all the faults and illusions of their host. Because as Jan Kott says, 'The Fool knows that the only true madness is to recognize this world as rational'.

Now, whilst the European movement has, if anything, been fabricated to put away swords and bring us together under one banner, it has opened up not only questions about European identity or national identity but in many ways a kind of identity crisis. Referendums, as we are all aware of, force binary decision making upon people, and that means voting to some extent on your sense of belonging. I don't find it surprising that a big city like London feels broadly European, or that people in Cornwall or Newcastle may not. But that is far too simplistic, analysis of the votes on things like ethnicity and wealth show far more complex lines of division. An LSE article by Rakib Ehsan on the asian leave vote asks:

'Why did some South Asians vote for a campaign that was, at times, seen as bigoted and xenophobic? Why did a number of middle-class South Asians

(most notably those living in West London) not vote in a way which their socio-economic status would predict?

One reason (he suggests) might be that many voters within the British South Asian diaspora don't feel European. When the Remain campaign sought to appeal to a sense of European identity, and warned that people were about to lose that identity, it didn't make for a particularly convincing argument.'

So my point, which may be fairly redundant, is that much of the politics we're living in is not so much about evaluation of trade, or economic possibilities, or geopolitical strategy, but simply a reflection of the identity packages we subscribe to. If we felt European, we now feel extremely upset and angry that we've abandoned our community. If we never felt European in the first place we perhaps feel a strengthening of the local bonds and traditions that had been fading.

The vitriol from both sides shows how vital this identity is to people, to the point that people will reduce so much of their lives to a position even if it means breaking friendship, or behaving shamefully.

This reduction of one's moral and existential drivers to an ideological position or community is deeply unsettling to me. Indeed I find it hard to align myself with anything unless there are a thousand caveats. I suspect we look to the group because as Aristotle claims, 'we *are* social animals'. But that in itself begs the question of what are we as we make this bid to the larger community. And there begins a whole conversation about things like essence and existence. Some of us might subscribe to the idea that we are some*thing:* that we need to find ourselves, so to speak. Others, myself included, might prefer the French existentialist position that existence precedes essence: i.e. we become what we do, so to speak. These are some of the conversations that will be had over the coming days.

We can probably agree that perhaps more identity possibilities exist than ever before. Less and less are people defined by geography, they can find their tribe online, and tribes exist of gamers and activists, where once we might never have known anyone beyond our valley. There is more choice than ever it appears.

But that valley that we escape through the online forum is of course not just a human valley but a home for the wild. Unlike our wild neighbours we don't seem to be content to just do, we need as I believe Nietzsche said '*the why*' and with *that* we can cope with almost any *how*. Wild things cope or don't with the how, and that's it, we don't see depressed song birds, or suicidal deer. We see deer that starve, and crows that eat them. We it seems are somewhat different, we look up at the night sky, and ask 'why?'. And I suspect all our identities connect ultimately to this fundamental questioning.

That questioning is I think a statement of loneliness. Belonging is an attempt to relieve this existential burden, and religion has historically been the most successful at this, though I think Netflix may well prove to be the ultimate salve for existential angst.

So my sense is that every little act in the service of an ideology, religion, or club, or whatever, however true and beautiful and important, is an affirmation of belonging. It is a response to loneliness, or as the Buddhists would say 'suffering'. The tribe prevents loneliness, it tells us there are others, there is strength in numbers, there is purpose. It is, I believe, 'being alone' that predates all our questions, and ultimately all our ideologies. I don't just mean being physically alone but existentially in the sense that we can imagine the cessation of our lives, we can conceive of the world after we have died, and that opens up a wunderkammer of unsettling questions. So I'm led to a conclusion that identifying is an attempt at solving the question of existential loneliness.

Group identification is a kind of displacement activity. And like most of us, I have spent so much of my life engaged in this displacement activity, attempting to belong to various identities, and never have I found any ultimate sense of consolation. It's always been a sort of pyrrhic victory, every successful entry and acceptance into a world, or club, or place, leaves one with a deep sense of discontent, that there was nothing much there to belong to in the first place, that it was predominantly an illusion.

A more esoteric and anecdotal argument that the 'I' is not fixed but can be somewhat larger, more fluid, is that I've had numerous experiences, as I imagine you have, that attest to this belief. Long runs can find your mind wandering away from your body and begin to associate with the things around you, be that trees or sky or other people. Sitting still can allow the settling of the mind and an expansiveness and awareness that I am only partially an observer but paradoxically a part of all that I observe, indivisible. And recently I had an experience diving in Thailand where, weightless we drifted through a school of bat fish, and I was somewhat indescribably inside and outside myself, looking upon these creatures that came up to my eyes and looked back upon me, as though we were both at once perplexed yet familiar to each other.

We can be more complex, we can be open to so much more, less inclined to the obvious or inherited, and that's how I feel about identity. It's a bit like that thing you do as a child when you stare at a river and you become aware that the river is there but not there, because the bit of water you focus on goes out of sight in seconds and is replaced by another entirely different body of water, yet we refer to it as a particular river. And I think of ourselves in this way. Here, but not here , somewhat caught between past and future. The 11 year old child that we once were, the promises we've broken, the ideologies we've abandoned or adopted, the shared body that we've since punished with vegetables, when we once swore we'd never eat them as an adult…

So why did we choose this topic this year? Because there is a whole piece of theatre being enacted before our eyes, Trump, Brexit, Europe, Migration, the project of globalism, and our planet—our home (the only place we belong)—the eco system is collapsing. I don't just mean global warming but the less advertised catastrophes, 2.5% annual decrease in insect numbers (that's potentially **no insects** in the lifetime of our children) or—97% loss of Britain's wildflower meadows, *possibly where the insects lived??* that's not just a question of biodiversity but biomass, the sheer annihilation of other species ought to be more than sotto voce collateral damage. In the midst of all this the dominant voices are the demagogues—yet we shouldn't blame them entirely, we live in democracies, and yet our democratic voices have become hysterical. Complex arguments reduced to 280 character slogans, with 33 characters apparently the average for a Twitter post.
Plato's famous argument of the large and powerful animal was precisely a critique of democracy, that it doesn't work, that government will only ever placate the mob: be that through lower taxes, less migrants, or more jobs. I always, optimistically, felt that this was only true in the absence of education. That a demos of critically thoughtful people could elect good government and so forth. And by and large that's true. Broadly speaking the cultures we inhabit are incredible places of diversity and respect, with laws and rules, that protect the weak and vulnerable and curb the possibilities of the ruthless and

Jacob Burda and Alan Lawson

tyrannical. We have parks, and museums, and theatres, and we've created complex language to share ideas. So whilst we watch this theatre of demagoguery play out, we ought to remember that all is not lost by a long shot, indeed the presentation of say Britain or Europe as political or cultural catastrophes is part of the problem. We are, by and large, nations of reasonable and kind people, with private fears, losses, and loves, and a shared desire to belong, to make a home, and to make sense of our place in the world and our time here. So I want to conclude with two things: an assertion and an appeal. My assertion is that our sense of identity, personal or group, is largely an illusion born from the existential questions that define us as human. At best, there are infinite creative possibilities of selfhood, because mind is, I believe, boundless. At worst, identity is voluntary enslavement.

My appeal is that we refute the simplistic rhetoric of the demagogues and engage in thoughtful reflection and discussion, with 'selves' that are permeable, curious, creative, and guided by a boundless mind.

Opening Remarks

Transcript from proceedings

By Jacob Burda

I've reached the ripe old age of 29. Sometimes I feel as if that's also the number of different identities I have. I thought this again the other day when I was signing up to an online dating platform and had to figure out how to present myself. I was struck by the different ways in which I could choose to appear; some of the identities that I thought about presenting are unusual, and extremely unusual in combination, so I had to figure out which genuine parts of myself to omit so as not to come across as a fiction.

A related challenge is going on for me internally as the various voices within me present a host of different stories about who I am.

Some of the narratives I have about myself suggest a life of silence, of reflection and introversion. Others a life of action, of big projects, running companies and making a name for myself. Yet others I have been born with—thrown into, as Heidegger would say—and others I have worked hard to establish. Some help me make sense of my past, telling different accounts of how and why I have come to be who I am. Others offer visions of the future, visions about who to become and which path to take.

What's challenging is that although they all want very different things, I find myself compelled by all of them in different ways and at different points during my day. They each carry some promise, something that excites me and pulls me towards them. Yet it feels like they can't really be achieved in combination, such that siding with one comes at the expense of all the others. I find this inability to live them all out at once extremely hard to bear.

To address this issue I decided to write my PhD on the question of how to lead a life containing multitudes. The way I framed it was by asking how the finite and the infinite can be reconciled. Here we are, these bounded, limited creatures, and yet we find ourselves with the most astonishing intimations of infinity, of a world beyond the world, only to be thrown back onto our finitude in the very next moment. How can these opposites be reconciled, I wanted to know. I gave a conceptual solution that seemed to satisfy the demands of the examiners. And yet, while the Thesis passed, I still stand here today somewhat clueless about how to achieve in practice what I addressed in theory.

Having addressed the problem philosophically I found myself turning to psychology. I wanted to find out where these identities were coming from, and what purpose they were serving. An initial explanation was that identities are what we take on from a young age to protect ourselves from descending into chaos. When self-doubt creeps in, when we feel unloved, worthless, unsure and inferior, identities can offer a way out. By identifying with certain narratives we don't have to feel what's difficult. Identities bring order and structure. They act as armour, as a line of defense that tells us how wonderful and superior we are when what we really feel the opposite. And yet, what's intriguing and promising in the earlier stages of life can begin to feel narrow and constricting as we get older. In my own case, I realized just how limited the breadth of my experience really was. I sometimes felt like I was stuck in a tight feedback loop that was trying to interpret everything I was experiencing in terms of a set of certain narratives I had about myself. Doing this kept me oriented to an idea of what I should be feeling rather than to what was actually true. My identities were rooted not so much in reality, but rather in an idea of it.

What felt helpful at this point was to turn to examples in art that echoed what I was undergoing. In 'Notes Towards a Supreme Fiction' Wallace Stevens wrote that 'the sun must bear no name but be in the difficulty of what it is to be'. In Hugo von Hoffmansthal I read of what he called 'Das Gleitende'—the experience that the world is somehow slipping away, escaping, once our attachment to concepts and judgments begins to crumble.

In general, I developed an affinity to the period of Vienna around 1900. The artists and writers of that time were keenly aware of society's increasing pluralism and the resulting lack in cohesion. They were trying to situate themselves in this new world, finding themselves attracted to the idea of participating in the whole whilst knowing of the danger of being swallowed up in the process. The nature of the individual in a disintegrating society became the focal point of concern. Of the different styles on offer Robert Musil wrote in his 'Man without qualities': 'I try to unite them all, and I find myself dissolved as a result.'

Poetry begins in the middle of this cacophony. For me it is mostly through Rilke's poetry that I am led to an experience of identity that challenges the sense of pluralism and offers a potential way out of fragmentation. Rilke writes:

Be—and at the same time know the condition
Of not-being, the infinite ground of your deep vibration,
That you may fully fulfill it this single time.

'That you may fully fulfil it this single time.' For me this kind of line points to the existence of something beyond the 29 identities I mentioned at the beginning. What if there is a deeper truth buried here, something about myself that is hidden, waiting to be uncovered. Wouldn't life then become a quest to uncover this true essence?

I had a similar experience recently during a moment of great loss. It was as if everything became silent all of a sudden and all the usual distraction strategies failed to work. Life's finitude hit me in the face at full speed.

I remembered Pablo Neruda's question:
'What if a huge silence
Might interrupt this sadness
Of never understanding ourselves.'

In a way, this is the true romantic moment. The moment you become aware that, to live your life fully, what is required is a turn towards yourself, away from the endless distractions of the world.

The sociologist Alexander Reckwitz has perceptively observed that our current times are highly romantic in this way. More and more people are busy searching for themselves, beginning their spiritual paths, their journeys inward to discover who they really and truly are. There is a concern with the unique, the particular and the individual, a logic of 'uniqueness', as Reckwitz writes, which stands opposed to the logic of the common. What we want is to stand out rather than to fit in.

The beginnings of this project lie around 1800. While France and Britain were busy building and consolidating their empires, the Germans, painfully lacking in anything resembling a real empire, created romanticism out of this sense of a lack of external representation. The poet Novalis wrote:

'We dream of travels throughout the universe, but is not the universe within us? We do not know the depths of our spirit. The mysterious path leads within. In us, or nowhere, lies eternity with its worlds, the past and the future.'

By turning inwards, the romantics began to create, through poetry, prose and art, the modern day notion of self. This notion they imbued with the sacredness and holiness formerly reserved for religious forms of experience. The distinction between the sacred realm of god and the profane realm of the everyday began to crumble. Thus aesthetics since the 19th century is increasingly concerned with discovering the sacred amidst the ordinary.

This elevation of the quasi-religious self is an important factor in understanding our fascination for self-improvement or self-perfection. Our focus on our selves, on our self-feelings, needs and goals, is only comprehensible when we begin to see that the self is the secular descendant of the soul. Our focus on and fascination with ourselves carries with it religious echoes and sentiments.

Improving or perfecting the self can take many forms. Many of these are rooted in the experience of oneself as separate from everything else, and thus more easily improvable. The neuroscientist and psychologist Dan Siegel refers to this as the 'quest to perfect the separate self.' This quest, he argues, is one of the main factors fueling our obsession with social media and modern day forms of self-representation. Siegel also says that a lot of people who come to him for psycho-therapy suffer from a lack of connection to others as well as their surroundings. The quest for self-perfection, Siegel concludes, masks a deeper inability to feel connected to what's outside of oneself.

My sense is that there is an important truth in what Siegel is saying. I know from experience the exhaustion that comes from building an identity rooted in separation. Only very recently have I begun to explore the implications of this insight beyond the theoretical and intellectual. Deep knowledge of this truth, I suspect, requires a visceral form of knowing. A knowing with and through the body. There is rich wisdom and hopefulness in practices that help us connect to ourselves and each other beyond the realm of ideas and semantic formulas. I can only speculate, of course, but perhaps the need to conjure up different identities becomes less and less pressing as the underlying sense of separation is reduced. Perhaps, after all, there is a way to live in the experience that Buddhists point to when they say that the whole notion of identity is an illusion, a fabrication that falls away once we realise the inherent emptiness of our concepts.

I am looking forward in the next days to exploring this theme of identity together with you, and as we do so to discover more and more of the connections we might experience within ourselves and with each other.

Writing Prize

First Place

THE IMITATION OYSTER

By Ashani Lewis

Her father is a real estate agent in the Yukon. He's a trapper on the side—not in the strictest sense, since her mother thinks that snares are cruel. But they make a small income from meats and furs. Her mother kills the animals and her father guts and skins them. There are lots of good meats in her childhood, some fish, wine on Saturdays. They don't eat out much. Every restaurant is themed, and they all close at winter when the Yukon river freezes over. Her mother can't look at a deer after she's shot him, until it's cleaned and cut and turned venison, but she does the shooting and she's the better shot. Her mother is a poetess and teaches her about deep sadness. Her father cooks.

When people in New York ask about her childhood, she talks about the Canadian wilderness like it's been filmed in Berlin; cold shots. Not at all. Flat water, deep blues and greens, Klondike Kate's, elk. They live in a fortified timber house near the Curling Club where the kitchen is the living room. It's the gun room, too. She uses the vernacular of what she imagines to be Berlin (chaining cigarettes, concrete, driving without direction) because she isn't sure how to translate the colour of the walls of her home. She isn't sure how to say that July warms them, makes them look like fossil-wood, or how to convey the smoke from her mother's pipe shining over the hanging guns.

July comes slowly in the Yukon. A couple of summers after she finishes school, she waitresses a fundraising dinner at the old Commissioner's Residence, one of a few local workers supplementing a touring catering company. It's real July; the evening is still light. There's music on the veranda and silver cutlery. Someone has laid out little cotton flags in red, white and blue. One of the touring caterers calls them kitsch. He has thick hands.

He's from Vancouver, travelling through to the Northwest territories and Yellowknife, looking to film once he gets there. She doesn't ask 'To film what?' She smiles charmingly, and says "That feels a little different from catering." He takes her in like she's compensated somehow for his having to endure the little cotton flags and says, "Not that different."

It's real July, a real July night, and the old Commissioner's Residence feels like a strange place to be. A kitschified heritage site. The ghost of seams of gold, sitting dirtily in brackish lumps; the ghost of hands that silt it. Cotton furnishings. Fingerprints on the laminated epithets of historical significance. The business is in taking the gold away, she thinks; we don't know what to do with it. Inside the Commissioner's Residence all is fur-and-bone wall mounts and bunting.

She turns to the man from Vancouver, watches his thick fingers arrange things delicately on plates that would be carried shining above everyone. Things she'd never eaten—folded violets, asparagus, diaphanous meats.
; Selves on top of each other, as plates are piled on a waiter's hand.

A whole life, dry-cured and spiral sliced.

When she moves to New York that year, her mother is unsurprised. She rents a room in Washington Heights under the table and starts waitressing almost immediately. After a couple of months, she starts working at a sushi restaurant called Kaki, which takes itself very seriously for being in the basement of a middling hotel. Smoke breaks are prohibited in case the smell of cigarettes on the staff interferes with the dining experience. She makes friends with Marion, a girl from Ireland, who receives the diners in perfect Standard American English and who has a vaporizer. They pay particular attention to a certain type of men dining with women and designate them 'NHH'—not her husband. She likes serving men who are sitting on their own. One takes the leaf of the table plant between his thumb and finger. He has very fair, almost babyish hair. Marion and the other girls have told her she ought to hate it when the diners flirt with her, but she's still at the point where she finds it flattering. 'That's because you've the psyche of a child. It sets a bad precedent.' She doesn't hate it yet, certainly not from this man.

He's different, even for New York; more than ever she feels the power in the small circuit between the kitchen and the tables. The whole thing of the restaurant heightens, the music, the low light. Dark wines she has only served. He asks where her accent is from. "Gold rush," he says, and smiles in a way that is quite unfamiliar: a shyness that is only part affect, above all things, polite.
; Lobsters cook themselves. Crawl into the coldest part.

They talk about cilantro. He orders everything she recommends. She's busy with another table's drinks when he asks for the bill and so Marion handles it; when it comes, he murmurs something—really murmurs, like the women who come here with Not Their Husbands. He leaves a name (Tad) and a number with Marion for her. Marion clarifies his intentions. "Oh, he's a *gourmand*."

Tad is waiting for her at the window table of a Korean fusion bar the next weekend, with four tiny bowls of kimchi placed at equal radii from him. He looks comfortable waiting. As at the hotel restaurant he assumes a shy sort of power dining alone. Their talk comes easy; she is well versed on her mother's side in tossing out the quiet little profundities that Marion has said New Yorkers like, and she finds Tad's near-constant litany of proper nouns (Bourdain, Miyake, Gochujang, Pernod) addictive.

He is only a couple of years older than her, but it feels like more—although occasionally she is struck by how like a baby's his blonde hair looks. The kimchi blinks with vinegar: red circles of cold. He tells her she must try soju. She orders it at the bar and carries it back to the table, one in each hand, falling into waitress step. Tad watches her set them down, smiling with the overlong incisors in which she instinctively knows he takes a secret pride.

They start dating, almost immediately. Tad fries her first ever asparagus with salt, pepper, butter, parmesan. He shows her the lovely places of New York. In Chinatown she tries something called Young Ginger and the Thousand-Year-Old Egg. It sounds to her like a Nordic folk tale: Little Matt and Mother Roundabout, The Lad and The Devil. When Tad speaks, she smiles charmingly and doesn't tell him that she understands cuts of meat.

He doesn't really cook whole meals, but he loves to introduce; loves to see her 'little face' learn figs and asiago, loves to display his fingers on a plate his old girlfriend painted. "Smoking will ruin your little tourist palate," he says, and kisses her deeply. Marion doesn't like him. His friends are similar, and talk about German beers and the hermaphroditic Venus motif in Spenser. They wear long coats. Two of them are beautiful. She brings him kippers in bed one morning. She knocks before she enters. He doesn't sit up, watches her shift his books, a coffee cup, from the bedside table with one hand to make room for the tray. Eyes, incisors smiling.

"Red blood runs in fishes too," Tad says, like he's teaching her poetry. She is momentarily furious. Hasn't she seen at five the red blood of fishes? Hasn't she dipped her fingers in their guts, watched them tug at life on her father's lap, seen them laid out in silver like a cut dream? She knows better than he ever could—has killed them more and better than he ever could. But she remembers that she had been amazed, sitting with small fists at the riverbank and learning from her papa that fish guts are not silver they are dark like clay slip or any organ and so his tone doesn't matter.

Still there are moments like it. He barely lets her add salt to a meal he cooks her. One day he lets himself into the little apartment in Washington Heights and finds her frying a cube steak with veal stock. "Where did you learn that?" he says, and the incisors come out. "Not from Marion I'm sure."

"It wasn't expensive," she says. He declines to try it; that week they go to a hole-in-the-wall bar and he orders her a salad with lump crab and white chocolate.

"How is it?" he says, satisfied. She doesn't say 'It's horrible': she smiles, charmingly.

Tad tells her that they're going to a Bacchanal (the truth is that one of his friends has got in some natural wines). It's very classical—'Wannabe-Hellenist', she thinks, in Marion's cadence—but compelling nevertheless. Oil and vinegar are laid out in clay bowls for bread and someone is talking about what it means when Greek tragedy becomes decorative.

"These instances of deep brutality are painted on plates and mixing vessels and made convex and filled with wine."

"—and smashed at parties—."

She sinks into a deep couch. Natural wines taste darker, older. Neon blinks and she remembers that she is in America. Drunk limbs muddle proximities. Thud and glimmer. The film skids along the walls and the alcohol slides like fat. A thin and glittering skin over her eyes: things reform their shapes and when Tad hands her a plate of ice it glistens with wellness.

"Oysters," he says, and she does not say 'Duh.' He's right, anyway, to assume that she's never tried one. The oyster gleams—before it slips down, she has the sense that she had in the old Commissioner's Residence, of seeing visions shining in a china plate.

It tastes blue-green, it tastes of flat salt waters. The Bering Sea, the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta: a single moment; a bank.

She tries to tell Tad something about poetry and deep sadness, but he cuts her off at "My mother—" and says "You just can't think about your parents when you're fucked up."

She takes another oyster. River oysters. Tad's friends are talking to her, the two beautiful ones. "Did you know," says one, "the reproductive organs of an oyster contain both eggs and sperm. It's possible for an oyster to fertilize its own eggs."

"Hermaphroditic Venus is perfect," says the other. "Complete unto itself as source and sustainer of life."
; splash and the classical intoxication followed by soda water.

In bed the next morning he bites down on the inside of her foot. She keeps her eyes closed and pretends to sleep. "You're sweet," he says. "Hey. Did you have fun last night?"

"I liked the oysters."

He Tyro smiles. Kisses her ankle. "Of course you did."

Before winter ends, Tad ruins it. "I think you'll really appreciate this." The restaurant is dressed like a surgery in white and glass; the wings of the revolving door beat once before she can follow him and the shutter effect sets her off-kilter. He's ordered almost before she reaches their table.

They are served a single oyster each, on the same plate. No ice, no lemon, a tiny ramekin of horseradish pearls. She looks at him, duly appreciative; when she reaches for the oyster, he removes her hand. "I wasn't going to let you in on the secret until after you'd tried it, but I want you to appreciate this." His hair is so blonde against the white and glass of the restaurant.

It shines with mollusc health. "This is the most innovative oyster you will ever eat. Only one man in the world makes it like this. He uses blue marlin, the only kosher fish in the swordfish family and he mixes kelp with something like gelatine to create a kind of film. Then he wraps the marlin in this little veil of kelp and sits it in a real oyster shell and it looks exactly like an oyster." As Tad talks, he lifts one into her eyeline and holds it to the light. It does slip around exactly like an oyster.

Always some thin, filmy thing, she thinks and eats it. The kelp scudding over some poor jelly like spume or the skim of milk.

It's delicious, of course—she supposes that it tastes like any little muscle—but there is no blue-green, no spindrift. (Nothing of the Bering Sea).

Tad is looking at the imitation oyster, proud of it, proud to know about it. He wasn't expecting her to understand, she realises. For a moment, 'It's so clever' feels like everything terrible about New York, everything that she doesn't need. She needs a break; a green bank.

She stands steady at the edge of the Nisutlin river and raises the gun from her mother's kitchen. Aims—focuses until she can see the animal's dark eyes in the gunsight.

Ready to take it back home, to skin and gut herself.

Writing Prize

Second Place

PRAYERS AGAINST EXILED GODDESSES

By Putul Verma

My mother talks about her life in India, collecting the stories together like knives and forks. Sometimes she lays them out in order, more often a sudden memory hooks on a story and she pulls it out and gives it to me. These are the stories of the first seven years of her life in **K**ashipur.

Mangos turned to liquid in their skins, the sticky juice running down her arm to the elbow in the still afternoon heat. A tree in the woods that shed a pink and yellow carpet and grew its roots from its branches. Festivals celebrated on evenings with the fug of firecrackers in the air. Sacrificed goats and banana leaf plates. I've heard the stories so often they're mixed up with my own now, jangling against dirty city snow, rhubarb crumble and the smell of ballet classes. My mum, Bashita, was the seventh child, and a girl at that, unwanted by her mother. "She hated me" she says, but this was before partition when she was her father's favourite and he took her on his visits and she was going to be a doctor just like him. Her mother's coldness didn't matter then. It mattered years later, long after partition and the bus journey with women and children from the village to the Calcutta slum. Her father broken, her mother set on survival told her it was marriage or medicine, the choice of one to save the family or the other to leave it forever. This, she was told, was the limit of her power in the world. My mother's resolve, rooted back there in those visits with her father, had grown tough. She chose exile.

I visit her in the house in the little Midlands suburb. When we came here I was the same age she was when she took that bus to Calcutta. Today we sit surrounded by things from the decade she made this home for us—the hostess trolley which makes people smile and mention Demis Roussos, but still used for visitors. A glass fronted cabinet with small bowled wine glasses with green stems. There are no gods and goddesses. She closed a door on them when she left and hasn't opened it till now.

Because this time, as she recounts those years in Kashipur, there's something new. In the village, my mum says, goddesses shared the verandas of the village houses. Light, strength, power, wealth, wisdom—those are things you want to seep into your home through the walls. But out there in the woods was a banished goddess, not powerful, but frighteningly disfigured—and untrustworthy because of her sympathy with snakes. Bashita, the little girl, finding her way home in the dark, ran past the thicket where the infective goddess lived and she prayed: *Hare Krishna—protect me, Hare Krishna—protect me—Hare Krishna protect me.*

Manasa goddess of snakes, ancient, one-eyed, ugly and powerless, watched her run.

In the rainy season, the women told Manasa's story, reading from the epic tale of her life and praising her. It was the time for snakes and so for this brief moment they flattered her for protection. Manasa has few powers and this minor one isn't enough to end her exile, but from her dark place in the woods she heard her story told aloud and it pleased her for a while.

And that's how Manasa is evoked today, entering through this one memory and sitting next to me while I listen. She has one scarred closed eye and there is a green and black snake winding up her arm, its flat sleepy head resting on her shoulder. Her sari is faded rough pink cotton with a lime border and trails mud. She's pleased to be remembered, although still furious as she always is—and when I leave, she comes with me and sits next to me in the car.

Manasa would prefer to have her story told to her, but I'm an exile too and don't know how, so she resigns herself to telling it herself. I don't think she always tells the truth.

She tells me she's Shiva's daughter which seems impressive and unexpectedly grand on the M42 to London. But she was an unwanted daughter born in secret and hidden deep in the ground. From there she drew her power over snakes, but that's an ancient rural power which doesn't give her status amongst the newer gods and goddesses in the shiny cities of the world and this makes her seethe with the injustice of it. She's tenacious though and fierce in her belief she deserves more, even if she's ugly and comes from the mud with the snakes. She's been in a lot of fights. I look at the scarring and think that must be how she lost her eye, but she doesn't tell me and I don't ask.

When we get home she comes with me into my flat, cardboard packing boxes making me weave awkwardly into the front room. Manasa's already waiting for me there as I put down my bags. She's feeding milk to the snake from my mug. The mug says "I💚tea" and I wonder about the appropriate crockery for a goddess and her green and black snake.

I sit down opposite her and she nods a gesture questioningly around the room. The boxes closest to us are half filled with books and around the boxes like pinned butterflies, books are laid face down on the ground to keep their place. A box of saucepans is a table for an empty wine glass and a pizza box. All the signs of a reluctant get-away. “I’m leaving” I say.

There’s a long look from that eye as if she’s considering something—I wonder if it’s a question. It’s not though—it’s more of her story. Maybe it’s an answer.

She’s Shiva’s daughter, she tells me, but her place wasn’t amongst the gods and goddesses reborn over and over again in gold and silver, jade, alabaster, copper, marble, porcelain. Her snake’s eyes are red but there isn’t a statue in the world where they are represented in rubies. Her skill is only in the squalid guts and mess of nature and remembering her stories was left to women. This, she was told, was the limit to her power in the world. But she wanted to be worshiped and this nurtured a simmering rage that turned murderous.

The women were respectful to her and it was worship of a kind, their secret admiration of her scars and the resolve that lost her the eye. But the men could not stand her, this muddy snake goddess. They would not pray to her. Manasa was not a goddess to direct armies. To her the only fights worth having were gouging, bloody fights where you had a hundred chances to show pity and didn’t take a single one of them. So Manasa looked for the bloodiest fight to show her power. She picked a rich landowner who hated her most. He was repulsed by her ugliness, her shameful birth, her direct unrefined way of talking with none of the coy, sly manipulation that soothes a man’s pride. He was incensed that she asked for more than those things entitled her to—the space she took up in the world and no more. He used all the power he had to ban any worship of her. Manasa chose him and demanded he pray to her and she demanded it over and over again. He laughed at her and refused every single time. Manasa didn’t have the skill of the higher goddesses—serene and entitled, their revenge falling cold and cleverly plotted on the heads of the poor humans who have slighted them. She reared and lunged, an attack triggered by pain. She killed six times. Six men—his six sons—all poisoned and they died as painfully as she could make it happen.

The goddess Manasa fills the room as she describes her murders, her voice slithering around the boxes and seeping in through the walls. It’s hard to tell if it’s a whisper or a roar. It feels like a heartbeat vibrating inside the earth.

The wine glass wobbles, then smashes on the floor and the lush saturated colours of Manasa’s story are whipped out of the room, leaving us together in the dim monochrome of my flat. I get up to find the dustpan and brush in the hallway cupboard while Manasa leaves her coiled snake sleeping and starts picking through clothes in a box. By the time I come back she’s shed her sari for jeans and a red and black Metallica t-shirt. Kill em all tour 1983. Not subtle, but it’s a good look on her.

Manasa sits down and the snake winds its way up her arm and settles its head on her shoulder again. There was a seventh son still alive, she says, after she’d poisoned his six brothers. He was due to be married and his bride-to-be, Behula, came to the goddess to beg her not to kill him too. Unlike my mother and Manasa, Behula didn't want to fight her way in the world. She'd fallen in love with a seventh son so there was no family money left for him and neither of them minded that. They planned a quiet life doing exactly what was expected of them.

Behula was skinny and pale with dark circles under her eyes. She was older than brides usually were and up to now had lived by brewing herbs and infusing oils and creams as cures for illnesses. She didn't look extraordinary in any way, but she could read herbs like a musician reads notes. She heard the tone of every leaf, tea and tincture and listened as she layered them together to create a score, each one with a semi-quaver of difference to suit the patient. People came for miles when they needed her skills, but they were suspicious of her command of nature, thinking it supernatural. She lived alone in the woods outside the village and was never invited to weddings or naming ceremonies. It was one thing to risk dark forces when illness or death was the alternative, but there was no reason to bring them into your home at times of joy.

Manasa looks peaceful now as she tells the story, cross-legged in the armchair, her empty eye closed but less scarred I think. I suddenly feel a sliver of hope. My mother prayed to her in the woods and Behula came to her for mercy. Both exiles, just like her. I look around at the half packed boxes and think I'm an exile too. This is why she's here. To tell me she will be here to help me if I ask, just as she helped Behula when she asked.

Behula married the seventh son and on their wedding night, Manasa came to their bed and killed him.

Even though Behula's father-in-law had lost his seventh and final son to Manasa, he still saw her power as a sordid thing she happened on by birth, more natural than supernatural—useful in its place, but too low to worship. So he cajoled the respectable gods and goddesses by making sure no rite was forgotten. Six daughters -in-law before her were ordered to burn on the pyres of his sons and now it was Behula's turn. This, she was told, was the limit to her power in the world.

Her husband was laid out on a raft and Behula climbed up next to the body and set off past the burning place and into the distance, the life she'd planned shrinking behind her. Every day she prayed to Manasa. This is unjust, goddess. This is unjust. This is unjust. Not begging, just a fact. She guided the raft for miles through the web of backwaters, the body of her husband next to her as pale and cool as the day he died, preserved by poison. She passed village after village. The people were startled to see her at first and then as she went further they came to the banks when news reached them she was approaching. Thin, burnt dark by the sun and delirious in the heat of the day, only the constant mantra to the goddess kept Behula going. Children swam to the raft with fruit and water and eventually the people, impressed by her conviction prayed to the goddess too. Months passed like this and Manasa listened to each new voice saying her name.

Manasa tells me she took pity on Behula and returned her husband to her. Was it pity though? I'm not sure she has a knack for it. Was she finally satisfied by the worship of the people who joined Behula in her prayer? A hundred times as many wouldn't have been enough. Then I think about Behula.

This is unjust, this is unjust. It was a prayer to power but not to Manasa's. And I wonder if maybe, just that once, Manasa performed an act of worship of her own.

For a moment, I hear every one of those hundreds of voices too—this is unjust, this is unjust, this is unjust. Just as they become unbearable, they fall quiet suddenly and I see Manasa is wearing a pink sari with a lime border again, but iridescent silk this time, shot with silver thread. The green and black snake turns its head. Its eyes flicker like rubies.

Then I'm alone. All that's left is tackiness like mango juice on my skin, the flat dead smell of ancient mud and the sickly sensation of rocking on water. I get up and begin to unpack.

Writing Prize

Third Place

DEATH BEARS

By Caroline Zarlengo Sposto

The bouquet of neon-colored plush bears bloomed overnight, as the rain tapered off in muted sunrise. Orange, yellow, turquoise, green, purple, and hot pink, lashed to the utility pole near the spot where they'd covered her body with a sheet. By lunchtime, silver mylar balloons crowned the burgeoning shrine. By evening lit candles surrounded it. When an eighteen-year-old street evangelist is shot dead, she becomes a cause.

Two agitated teenage boys had pulled up to the curb. One stepped out of the car, asked for a pamphlet, and pulled a gun. Rachel Blandon thought she heard a balloon popping, struggled to keep her collection jar, then felt herself fall. As she drifted into darkness, the raindrops hitting the sidewalk grew loud— louder than the screaming ambulance driving down the wrong side of the road. But the pounding she heard wasn't raindrops. It was her heart pumping blood through the hole in her chest.

She wanted to be the fish tossed back into the water … the one that wasn't big enough. But she wasn't thrown back. Her heart stopped beating, but for a few moments, her mind continued, coldly on ….

"She's dead," a flat, male voice pronounced.

When Rachel heard those words, a mixture of annoyance and relief washed through her. Dying had been exhausting. She wouldn't want to do it more than once.

But death wasn't what Thaddeus had told her. No angels. No Devil. No Jesus. No loved ones to meet her. If it had been temporary, she would have felt gypped, but it was permanent, so it had to be good enough. With that last, hazy thought, Rachel Blandon was gone.

That evening, Jill Morton sat at her Channel 5 news desk, still annoyed with her hairdresser for getting her highlights wrong, she read the following words:

"Once again, the gentrifying Newland Heights Neighborhood has been the site of violence. A charity worker was gunned down today on the corner of Ninth and Jefferson. The victim was identified as eighteen year-old Rachel Blandon, a member of the Morningstar Covenant. At the time of her murder she was collecting donations. Witnesses say the assailants fled the scene in a black Chevy Cruz. Anyone with information should call 1-800-222-TIPS."

Rachel Blandon became a sign of the times.

Thaddeus Blandon hurried out of the morgue with a sealed zip-lock bag in his overcoat pocket. It contained his step-daughter's still-ticking Timex, the gold-plated cross she had worn at her throat since the day he baptized her, and the object that explained why God had taken her life.

The coroners had cleaned the blood from her personal effects, but the ticket to Las Vegas remained tinged at the edges.

Rachel Blandon became a fallen child.

Thaddeus entered the Morningstar Institute, to find his wife, Esther, laying face-down on the sofa. At the sound of the doorknob, she looked up like a herding dog poised for a command.

"The Lord took Rachel before she could join her earthly father in Satan's headquarters."

Before Esther could catch her breath, Thaddeus took her chin in his hand with an intensity that bordered on violence and hissed, "You were lost in sin when you were with that man. God gave you to me."

Esther sobbed again and Thaddeus said, "You haven't got enough faith, Woman. Leave your sorrow at the foot of the cross."

As Thaddeus slept, Esther lay awake in the dark remembering the night, eleven years ago, when she left Rachel's father. She had been Linda Powers then, just twenty-six years old, with a seven-year-old daughter, named Jessie. Linda had just moved back in with Jessie's father, and they were talking marriage, when she found a condom in the washing machine with his work uniform.

After the yelling and screaming, she stuffed her clothes and Jessie's into a black garbage bag, shoved past his beer-blurry form in the doorway, and hustled their child out of the apartment.

Linda drove Jesse down the highway in silence with no idea where they were going. She checked them into a roadside motel. In the dingy bathroom mirror she saw that the mark where her twenty-four-year-old boyfriend had struck her was blooming into a bruise.

The next day, they drove around some more and came upon a carnival. Linda, displaying ostentatious cheer, bought ride tickets and cotton candy for Jessie. To protect her mother's feelings, Jessie played along.

On their way to the car, they came upon a large trailer painted with a motif of crosses and doves. A plump lady with dyed, red hair was giving away little Bibles with green leatherette covers.

"The little girl looks like she could use some lemonade," she said. "Have a seat under the awning out of the sun!"

She poured two tall glasses of oversweet powdered lemonade and offered a plate of cookies, while casually telling Linda how God had saved her from drugs. At the end of their visit, she said, "Come back for fellowship this evening. We're having a potluck. There'll be lots of nice people. You're a beautiful soul, and you'll fit right in."

Thaddeus Blandon was the last to arrive at the potluck. He was like no one Linda had ever seen. Dressed in an Italian suit jacket and open-necked silk shirt, his tanned, chiseled face and piercing green eyes gave him a sensuous intensity. He talked about God with fearsome passion. Thaddeus seldom smiled, but when he did, his face erupted like a firecracker.

"Before I came to Morningstar, I was broken," the red-haired woman said. "Thaddeus saved my life."

"Amen," said another.

At the end of the evening, Thaddeus gave Linda a big hug and invited her to come to fellowship at the Morningstar Institute in the city.

"We're like-minded people," the red-haired woman interjected. "This is a community."

That night at the motel, Linda listened to the tearful voicemails her boyfriend had been leaving by the hour. She decided to go home the next day, but found herself driving past her apartment and on to the Morningstar Institute with Thaddeus on her mind.

The Believers were happy to see her and Jessie. They served a home cooked lunch, and asked them a lot of questions about their lives.

It made sense to Linda to accept their invitation to spend a few days at the Morningstar IInstitute, as a volunteer. When Thaddeus learned Linda's boyfriend was leaving voicemails, he protected her by taking her phone.

Six weeks later, when Linda and Jessie were baptized, she became Esther, and Jessie became Rachel. They wore white muslin gowns and wreaths of flowers on their heads. The ceremony felt like a dream.

"We honor this new journey," Thaddeus said. "By what name shall you be known?"

"Rachel," Jessie said, as she had during the rehearsal.

"Beloved Child of God," Thaddeus said. "Your name is good. May it reflect your true self, empowering you to live a new life of love and righteousness. Family of Believers, I ask you to look at this child of God, and say, to her, 'Your name is Rachel.'"

"Your name is Rachel." They said.

Linda became Esther in the same manner.

Later that year, God told Thaddeus to take Esther as a wife.

Esther moved into Thaddeus' quarters, while Rachel moved into the children's wing.

When Rachel turned eight, there was no birthday cake.

"Every day is a holiday with God in our hearts," the adults explained. "You won't have too many more birthdays," her mother added. "The world is about to end. Famine and war will soon be upon us, and God will pluck us up to Heaven in the rapture."

In this new life, with every day a holiday, Rachel was reared with relentless reminders of God's omnipresence, bedtime stories about the apocalypse, and beatings in the name of love.

Rachel Blandon became an unworthy sinner.

There were no televisions, radios, or computers at Morningstar, and the only phone was the cell that stayed in Thaddeus' pocket at all times. As the chosen keeper of the True Faith, God anointed him to keep the Believers informed.

Two days after Rachel's shooting, Thaddeus stood in the pulpit of the Morningstar Covenant Chapel and preached. "Are you obedient? Are you bringing others to know Him? Rachel's death is sign from God calling people to repent. You'll die and go to Hell if you don't give up your sin to Jesus Christ, who spilled his blood on Calvary. God spared Rachel by taking her home before she ended up in Satan's hands. The wicked will be cast into Hell. America will be cast into Hell with all of the abortions, homosexuality and pornography. Wicked cities like Las Vegas, where men and women take pleasure in sin, will burn. God appointed a day when He will judge the world in righteousness. He is going to judge your every word and every thought.”

Rachel Blandon became a cautionary tale.

That afternoon, Thaddeus drove Esther to the street shrine. She knelt on the sidewalk in front of the death bears to set Rachel’s framed, captioned portrait among the candles. She set up a statue Jesus, which gave the unintended impression the Messiah was sermonizing the bears. She then took red and gold paint out of her bag, and adorned an adjacent wall with the word, “Rejoice.” Though she had no artistic talent, she attempted to paint a dove beside the words.

The overall effect of Esther’s added touches weren’t lost on the young passersby. As the month wore on, they began stopping to Instagram selfies by the shrine. They captioned the dove painting, “The Holy Chicken.” When they were stoned, they left caramel lattes as offerings beside the portrait.

Rachel Blandon became ironic.

Rachel’s own youth had offered no comparable moments of zaniness. When she was fourteen, she completed her education at the Morningstar Institute, and was assigned street ministry in Newland Heights. At first, this meant shadowing a senior minister who stood on the corner yelling about the Gospel while Rachel handed out pamphlets and solicited funds for vague humanitarian projects.

Rachel Blandon became a street corner fixture.

When she turned sixteen, her ministry mentor married and became pregnant, and Rachel was sent out with a girl her age named Sarah Welch. When they were being driven to their drop-off point, something about Sarah’s demeanor filled Rachel with a wariness.

An hour after they were first dropped off, her intuition bore out. Rachel was witnessing to a young man carrying an Urban Outfitters bag when Sarah interrupted, pulled her aside, and whispered, “Some old lady just gave me a twenty. Let’s go to Starbucks.”

Rachel was dumbfounded.

Sarah continued. “We don’t have to beg all day, as long as we bring in enough money, they’ll never check on us.”

“We’re not begging,” Rachel said. “We’re witnessing.”

Sarah stared into Rachel’s eyes like she was staring into the sun. “Stand here all day, and hand all the money over if you like. “I’m going to Starbucks.” With that, she let go of Rachel’s arm and started down the block.

Before Rachel knew it, she was sitting in the crowded cafe with Sarah drinking her first-ever cup of coffee.

“Let’s stop by the library before we go back out,” Sarah said. “I want to check my Facebook.”

“You go on the internet?”

“Sure. I use my birth name and avatars instead of photos.”

“But …?”

“Come with me, and I’ll show you.”

In the weeks that followed, Rachel learned that Sarah did a lot of sinful things without remorse. She took money from her collection jar, went to the library to chat with people online, and read People magazine. Rachel was horrified to learn that Sarah used tampons, even though the Covenant forbade the girls exploring their bodies before marriage.

Despite her fear, Rachel soon had a Facebook account under her old name, “Jessie Powers” and an avatar that looked like a cat.

Rachel Blandon became a risk taker.

Before the season was over, she was in contact with her father, who was now dealing Blackjack in Las Vegas.

Sarah fled Morningstar at midnight on her 18th birthday. Though her parents wept, Thaddeus reminded them God forbade any contact with Apostates.

Rachel, now temporarily on her own in Newland Heights, continued to message her dad.

> *U can leave when U R 18 He told her. > I’ll buy U a plane ticket online.*

It was the first promise of a birthday gift Rachel had received in ten years.

When the day arrived, she paid 50 cents to use the library printer, folded the ticket with great care, and tucked it into her coat pocket, before meeting her fate at the corner of Jefferson and Ninth.

As months passed, the death bears, with their impassive faces, plastic noses, glassy eyes, and felt tongues became ever more mawkish in context. When sleet turned to snow, they fell into bleak hibernation, their drenched stuffing freezing them solid, their plush bodies encased in ice crystals. Once the temperature rose to a melting point, they paled, as neon hues streamed to coalesce with rainwater on the sidewalks, flow into the gutter, and rush down the storm-drain.

That spring, Candace and Geoff Crawford bought a building near Jefferson and Ninth. They planned to open a Yoga salt room that served artisan vegan sandwiches to the new crop of upscale residents who walked around wearing earbuds.

The power couple wanted the faded bears with their frayed neck ribbons, and the Holy Chicken taken down.

With much conferring, and reliance on thesaurus.com, they crafted an open letter to the paper about the detrimental effect moldy bears, spent candles, and cheap artificial flowers had on property values.

In response, members of the Morningstar Covenant putted up in a van and tied a fresh batch of silver Mylar balloons to the shrine.

Soon Channel 5 covered the story.

Geoff Crawford, aware of the cameras, stood beside his wife. Shoulders back, stomach in, face set in an intelligent expression. Candace read from her prepared statement:

“I feel for the family, and understand their loss. But there is no permanence in trinkets. There comes a time, for the good of all of us, when mourning must cease.”

Three nights later, the shrine caught fire. The official cause was a poorly-placed candle, though many suspected arson.

The scorched death bears were taken down. The detritus swept up, bagged, and hauled to the curb without fanfare.

Two hipsters with lumberjack beards shambled down Jefferson Avenue. They paused for a moment where the shrine had stood. One remarked, in showboat volume, “Ask not for whom the bears hang ….”

As if in response, the last silver Mylar balloon broke free from the rough-hewn pole to catch the glint of the sun before it floated out of sight.

And Rachel Blandon became eternal.

From left to right:
Putul Verma, Kiana Karimi, Daniella Gitlin, Sudipta Das,
Zoe Bullock, Lucy Foster, Ashani Lewis

Drama Prize

First Place

ROLL FOR INITIATIVE

By Lucy Foster

When the Alpine Fellowship announced that the theme for their 2019 symposium would be identity, I became incredibly excited as it perfectly matched an idea I'd been looking to develop for a long while, which is about exploring identity across the course of one night and one game: Dungeons and Dragons.

I've long wanted to write a drama centered around *Dungeons and Dragons* due to the performative nature of the game. *Dungeons and Dragons* is a dice-based tabletop role-play game. In short summary, all players create a character for themselves, based on predefined races and classes within the game, and they have certain strengths and weaknesses based on who this character is. For example, they could be very charismatic, but not very wise. A 'Dungeon Master', or game leader, will then create situations that your characters will react to. Whenever you need to take an action, the success or failure of this action will be determined by a combination of your character's abilities, and the luck of the dice.

As I began to consider the various ways in which this game can fit into a full scale production, I thought a lot about the stereotypes that people often think of when I tell them that I play 'D&D': typically, the cis, straight, white male geek. I've been playing D&D for multiple years now, and I have never had a Dungeon Master who is a cis, straight, white man. My groups have always been incredibly diverse, with many female players, queer players, from a range of nationalities and races. The discrepancy that I saw from people's perceptions of both *Dungeons and Dragons*, and of myself when people heard that I played it, seemed so disparate from the supportive, diverse, engaging world that I knew, and this was something that I was incredibly keen to explore.

What is particularly interesting in D&D, however, is that a lot of the game ends up centering around rather typical fantasy tropes—the grumpy dwarves, the woodland elves, tavern wenches, and the like. These traditional stereotypes, often fixated on both sex and race, can be enforced or defied primarily by the people who play them. In D&D, the whole world is defined by your own imagination, and you can accept or reject each situation as you choose for your characters. For example, the very first character I ever played myself was a 'Dragonborn Bard'. I knew very little about D&D at this point, and from my point of view, a dragon seemed like the most interesting race, and a musician bard seemed like the most interesting class. However, many people laughed when I told them I played this, because it wasn't a combination that was usually picked. It made me think that you could tell a lot from a person by the characters that they choose to play, and the way that they play them.

I wanted to use this basis, the basis of a fantasy world wrapped in trope, to explore what it means today to conform. Specifically as part of this, I want to use this production to explore what it means to conform to modern-day genders. What defines us as being women or men? What does this mean in relation to the bigger choices that we have to make, particularly as we reach our late 20s and early 30s—around finding partners, having careers, having families? And what happens when one of the players is pregnant and not willing to keep the baby, and her boyfriend, another player, is desperate to become a father?

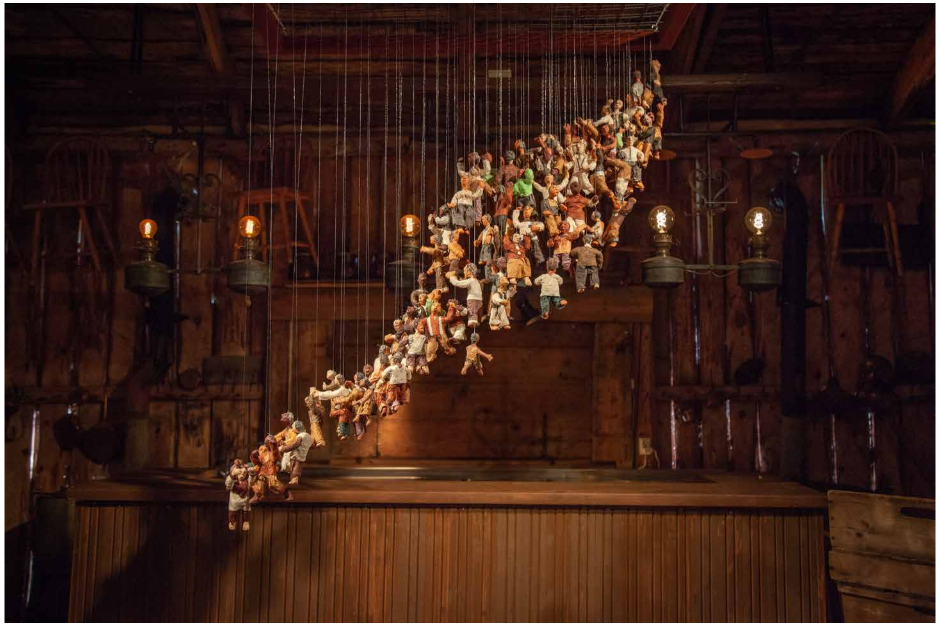
I started with this concept in the writing process, mismatching a number of thoughts and ideas into what would become my first draft. Inevitably, a lot of the redrafting process involved cutting back on characters, ideas, killing sections that may have been funny, but didn't really move the narrative forward, and honing down into the core ideas that I was looking to explore around identity. Across this process, my director, Nick Blood, was on hand to read drafts and provide feedback, and his fast and extensive responses were absolutely essential in helping me get the script into the place that it needed to be in time for the reading at Fjällnäs.

One of the most unexpected findings that came out during the writing process was another way in which this play, and my themes, related to identity. That was through the idea of 'role-play'. As the five characters, and their motivations and obstacles, became more realised, it also became clear that many of them had pre-defined the 'roles' that they thought they should play in society, from a 'woman who has it all' to simply 'father'. It made me consider—how do we self-define who we are, and then how do we continue to 'play' at that role in order to fulfil it? And how often do we succeed and fail based on a combination of our own abilities, and just plain luck, much like the roll of the dice in D&D? The idea of life being a type of role-play, and the identities that we inhabit being 'roles' that we see ourselves fitting into, ended up becoming a central theme within this production, highlighted as well by the final title of the piece: *Roll, Play.*

Seeing the play directed by Nick Blood, performed by an absolutely astonishing cast, and having this happen against the backdrop of the Swedish lakes and mountains in Fjällnäs, was such an incredible experience for me. Having a great team not only meant that the performance itself was wonderful, but it also gave me a lot of food for thought for future rewrites of the piece. I'm very excited to take it further, and see where this play, and its themes, will go next.

Julian Spalding writes: There were nearly 1,000 entries, twice as many as the year before. The theme Identity attracted a very strong contingent of documentary photographers, particularly images of ethnic minority communities from around the world. The two runners up were Baran Caginli, a Turkish artist who, hauntingly, half obliterated the faces of children with their own fingerprints used for identification, and the British painter and photographer William Stok, who submitted deeply disturbing, collaged portraits of his brother suffering from schizophrenia.

The winner was the Indian sculptor Sudipta Das who expressed her and her family's experience as displaced immigrants. Das's most magnificent creation, so far, are her crowds. Her manikins enable her to deal with numbers as never before in art, masses of individuals, each with their own personalities, destinies and identities, not lazy, computer-replicated identikits, still less mere numbers on the increasingly notorious and potentially tragic National Register of Citizens in the Indian state of Assam, which could lead to another displacement of hundreds of thousands of people. Das doesn't turn her back on what is happening. Instead, she looks, thinks, and feels. Her crowds, like 'Soaring to Nowhere', which was the outstanding winner of the Alpine Fellowship prize in 2019, and her more recent 'Land of Exile', are really clouds, clouds of individuals who have been uprooted but still, for a time, have each other, raised above their homes and the places they hold dear, as if on the tide of a flood, to be deposited … somewhere else. Das shows what we are doing to our fellow human beings. This is why her work is so resonant today.



Visual Arts Price—First Place: *A Soaring To Nowhere* **by Sudipta Das**

Visual Arts Prize

First Place

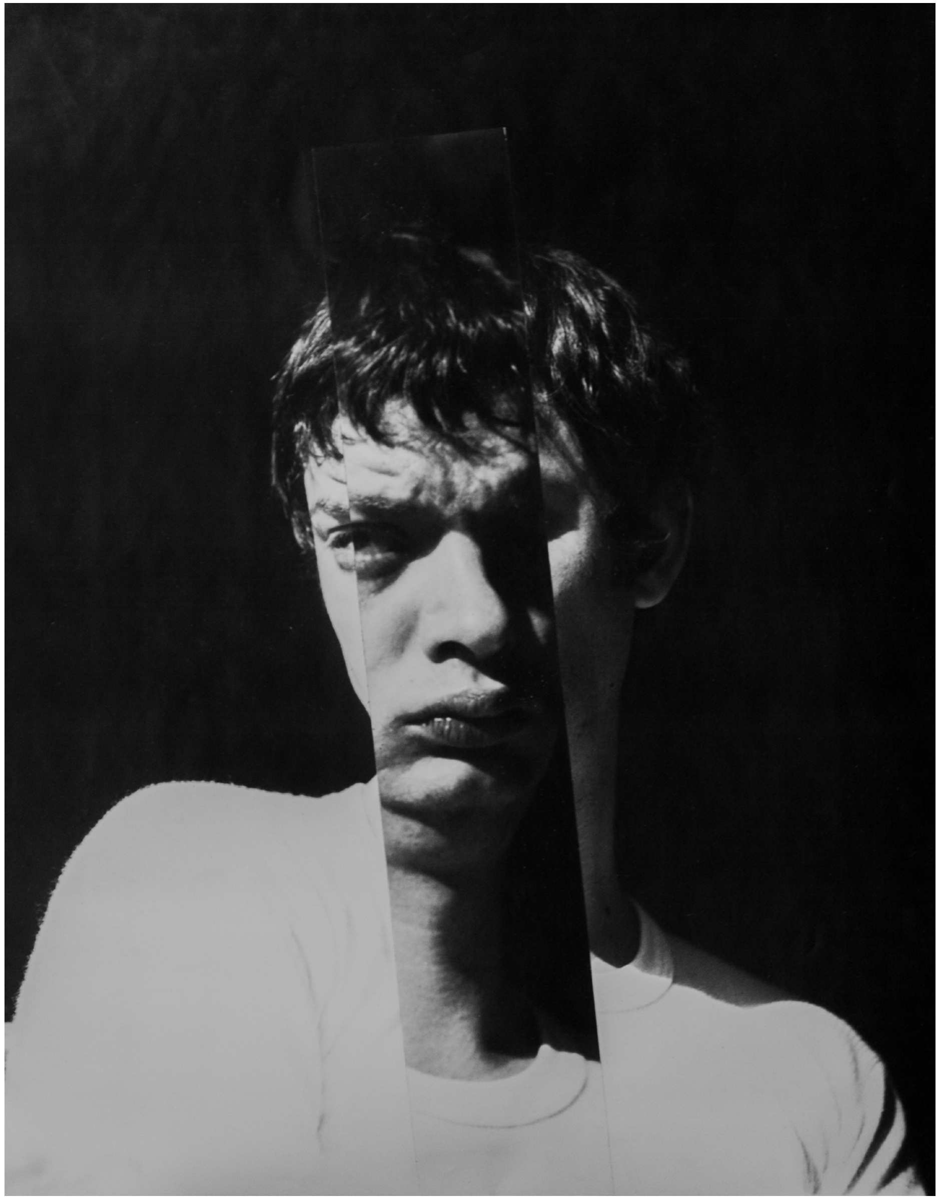
A SOARING TO NOWHERE

By Sudipta Das

My works are echoing a melancholic tune in the air, wells up from the world, which is crumbled into many pieces. It dreams of a time when people find their refuge in humanity rather than the limited identities such as races, religions, and nationalities. 'A Soaring to nowhere', a body of work, which is retaining the chronicles of unending voyages of dispossessed across the cultural and political boundaries, as a central theme in my artistic pursuit. At the same time, it pushes me further regarding the exploration of materials and mediums, which equally serve the concept with the subject matter.

Soon after reaching Korea I started to hunt for an art form, which is deeply rooted in the cultural life of this terrain. Eventually, my search end up on a highly fascinating traditional Hanji paper doll making, known as dakjong-e. As the imageries, dwell inside me began to curl around the new finding, I decided to appropriate the medium and technique of dakjong-e into my works. The dolls embody a distinctly Korean aesthetic with their signature comical expressions and rustic textures as well as their muted colours, which peep through the dyed hanji. In the first stage of appropriation, the comic expressions were substituted by rather serious and more realistic ones, but the textural qualities of costumes as well as tonal variations in the colour were retained intact. In the second stage, the costumes were also eliminated, here the human figures became very minimal and characterised by the devoid of cultural specificity, and it enables them to share the notion of the universality of human conditions.

I find the dakjong-e is enriching my language and it facilitates the communication with the spectators of this culture as well. More than all this cultural transaction pointing to a new direction in which my practice grows. I began with painting and went through a stage in which the notion of painting and sculpture are merged each other, and now it is being liberated completely to a three-dimensional space, where one can actually feel their presence from all directions.



Visual Arts Price—Second Place: *Dreams of Broken Dolls* **by William Stok**

Visual Arts Prize

Second Place

DREAMS OF BROKEN DOLLS

By William Stok

After an exhibition, where over 3 nights, I slept in total 8 hours because I was building up large scale sculptures in the gallery that I had been preparing for months, I found myself in a situation where every day, as I attempted to go to my studio, I started to sweat and feel physically ill.

In this period of near breakdown, I was forced to stay at home and I started looking at photographs of my brother, Pietro, where I could mirror myself as his alter- ego. An archetype that I have used later in my painting, every time I need to speak about myself. My brother since the age of 15 was labelled as a schizoid type: I was the only person he could confide in. During his lifetime he phoned me continuously to read me his poetry, related conversations that took place, his dreams of broken dolls, or giving birth to a baby crocodile; a terror of coming face to face with his double. He walked on tiptoe to have the sensation of flying and thousands of images were incessantly attacking his mind that drove him more than once to think of trying to kill himself.

The photographs that I took and manipulated want to enter inside the person through fragmentation, a term that Pietro was fascinated by. In reality it's clear that there was a complete difference between my situation and his, but it is not what I felt in that month, when I couldn't face going to work in my studio preferring to be creative at home, led by his photographic image.

By entering into this identification, I found myself healed.

‘For he himself has said it’: Some Thoughts on Englishness and Masculinity, from 1945 to Brexit

By John Burnside

My title for this piece is taken from the Gilbert & Sullivan opera, *HMS Pinafore or, The Lass That Loved a Sailor*
:

BOAT.
For he himself has said it,
And it’s greatly to his credit,
That he is an Englishman!
ALL
That he is an Englishman!
BOAT.
For he might have been a Roosian,
A French, or Turk, or Proosian,
Or perhaps Itali-an!
ALL
Or perhaps Itali-an!
BOAT.
But in spite of all temptations
To belong to other nations,
He remains an Englishman!
He remains an Englishman!

It's interesting here that, the statement: 'For he is an Englishman', which should settle the matter, is backed up by the assertion 'For he himself has said it." Why is this significant? or necessary?

As our terms of reference for these discussions note, there are "tensions that can arise between assignment and conscious identification" in any situation where identity is in question. Such tensions are clearly illustrated, for a reader of poetry, say, by Elizabeth Bishop's refusal to allow her work to be published in an anthology of 'women's poetry', not because she wanted to contest either of the appellations ('woman', 'poet'), but because she chose not to be identified as a writer of some kind of literary sub-genre perpetrated only by females. In a more modest way, I was, for a time, obliged to contest the designation as a 'nature poet', a term applied to my earliest published work because it was 'about' 'nature'. Perhaps, I wanted to say, but not 'about' in the way the other in this case meant it, and not about 'nature' in that way either. This probably seemed perverse, even petulant, to the interviewers in question, because—as one of the two or three ecosophical / ecocritical poets working in Britain back then—I *was* engaged with nature, after my own manner, but I was doing so (to my own mind, at least) in a way that was very different from my more romantic predecessors. Like Bishop, I did not wish to be cast as a member of a sub-genre that, in the late 80s, was still seen as safe, pretty and altogether marginal.

This minor disagreement pointed to a larger question about identity, however, which is: how wide the gap may be between the way one person identifies him/herself as *x* or *y*, and the way *x* and *y* are seen by others. I need hardly point out that we live in an age when this issue is not only to the fore, but is also more perniciously and persistently perverted than in any time in living memory. Social media has shown us that names can be far more powerful than sticks and stones; while that old sin 'bearing false witness' (an offence that used to mystify me back in school) has gained a new relevance. On the positive side, this history of deliberate mis-identification has been taken up by 'minorities' across the board, creating movements that, from Civil Rights and Stonewall to Me Too that have consistently spoken truth to power. On the micro-scale, however, it permeates the language we use daily, allowing for subtle, almost imperceptible erosion of what have come to seem niche values and identities. Think, for example, of terms like 'intellectual', now almost interchangeable with 'nerd'; think of the current portrayal of hapless, bumbling fathers in TV advertising, or of men throughout the media; think of the problems that arise, not just in the United States, but more and more elsewhere, around words like 'liberal', 'Marxist', 'socialist' and 'Communist' (all, in some lexicons, synonymous with 'Soviet' i.e. dictatorial). Talk to my teenage sons and listen for the anxiety and subdued anger in their voices when a term like 'toxic masculinity' crops up in conversation.

With Brexit (my eventual concern here) a new group emerged, a group ripe for vilification, though to date, other than 'toff', on the one hand, and 'chav' on the other, no perfect label has been agreed. This group consists of (mostly white) English men, and is divided into two main categories: the cunning manipulators like Boris Johnson, or Nigel Farage, who deceived people into voting Leave, and the lower-middle / working class white men who stupidly followed their lead and brought about what was, under the conditions in which it was presented to the British public, an unthinkable outcome.

So how did this happen? And more significantly, what happened to Englishness, in the years leading up to Brexit, to leave it open to such facile manipulation? And for those of us concerned not to throw the baby out with the bathwater, could it be that some—perhaps the most valuable—virtues of Englishness has been lost? Who dares to say, now, that he is an Englishman, without fear of misunderstanding, (unless, of course, he goes to some lengths to show that he is being ironic)?

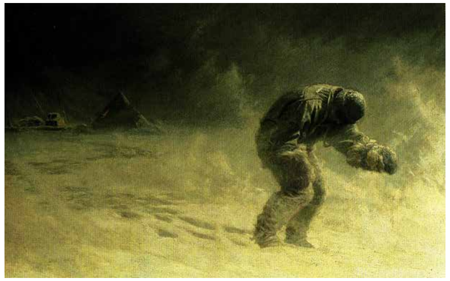
As it happens, I am not identifiably 'English'. I was born in Scotland and, though I moved to Northamptonshire at the age of 11, I lived for the rest of my formative years in Corby, a steelmaking town to which so many Glaswegians and other Scots had migrated, it was renamed by its disgruntled neigbours 'Little Scotland'. In 1965, when I arrived, this industrial New Town, with its thick fug of ferruginous pollution, loomed over by the Corby Candle (a high chimney in which waste gas from the works was burned off) could have been anywhere in Scotland's industrial Central Belt; cycle five miles in any direction, however, and you were in rural England, with its stone cottages and Saxon churches and desire paths that, once, John Clare might have roamed. An irascible and solitary teenager, I spent my life exploring this landscape, returning on my bike again and again to landmarks of an older England like the Triangular Lodge, at Rushton, or the village of Rockingham, taking the bus down through deep lanes and dappled copses to Great Oakley, or to the Alfred East Gallery in Kettering, where I fell in love with a peculiarly English form of Orientalism. After I got a part-time job, my modest record collection quickly expanded to include works by Britten, Vaughan Williams and, most of all, Michael Tippett. From that dream of Northamptonshire, I moved on to a dream of Cambridge and its surrounds. Ely. The Fens. The Suffolk Coast. Pretty soon, I was a devotee of a very specific, land-based, highly interpreted Englishness—an Englishness I did not, and felt that I could not possess—and I would have had no argument with John of Gaunt's description of my new homeland, in *Richard II*:

> This other Eden, demi-paradise,
> This fortress built by Nature for herself
> Against infection and the hand of war,
> This happy breed of men, this little world,
> This precious stone set in the silver sea …
> This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England.

The notion that such a land must be inhabited by a "happy breed" (of men and women) seemed neither unrealistic nor alien to me, in sociopolitical terms. True, England (the entire British archipelago, in fact) was saddled with an appallingly unjust class system—I knew that, just as I knew that the land around me was owned, then and now, by a handful of families and corporations who had no right to it; but this wasn't real Englishness. Real Englishness was Byrhtwold's exhortation, in *The Battle of Maldon*:

> 'Hige sceal þe heardra,   heorte þe cenre,
> mod sceal þe mare,   þe ure mægen lytlað.
>
> [Mind must be firmer, heart keener,
> spirit must be larger as our strength diminishes.]

or John Donne's sermons, or maybe the last act of Captain Lawrence Oates, whose example was set out for me to rediscover, every time I made one of my frequent visits to the Scott Institute in Cambridge:



J. C. Dollman
A Very Gallant Gentleman

Not just Oates, in fact, but the oft-misunderstood and maligned Robert Falcon Scott himself, who, however flawed, seemed to care deeply for his companions, as his own strength was gradually depleted:

Thursday, March 29th 1912

"Since the 21st we have had a continuous gale from W.S.W. and S.W. We had fuel to make two cups of tea apiece and bare food for two days on the 20th. Every day we have been ready to start for our depot 11 miles away, but outside the door of the tent it remains a scene of whirling drift. I do not think we can hope for any better things now. We shall stick it out to the end, but we are getting weaker, of course, and the end cannot be far.

It seems a pity, but I do not think I can write more.

R. Scott

For God's sake look after our people."

I could offer other examples of Englishness that I admired then, and still admire. Some are fictions. Perhaps they all are. They are not consistently of a type: from warrior-poet Siegfried Sassoon to cricket commentator and anti-Apartheid activist, John Arlott, (an unassuming giant whom I was fortunate enough to meet back in the 1970s, when I was just out of college). Arlott, a Hampshire lad with a with a rich, deep voice, was a rather modest man whose moral character was evident, not just in all he said and did, but in his person. His wit at the microphone was legendary, (he once described Australian tailender Ernie Toshack's batting technique as being "like an old lady poking her umbrella at a wasp's nest" while Keith Miller, arguably one of the finest all-rounders in cricket history, was brilliantly characterised as "a cross between a Viking and an irresponsible schoolboy"). It is rare that sports commentators come equipped with a poet's gift for brevity and the sharp eye of a Hogarth, but Arlott was not only that, he was also a lyrical writer on wine, (he once remarked that "wine is a successful effort to translate the perishable into the permanent"), not to mention a dignified and effective campaigner against racism who risked his career to fight apartheid. During our one evening together, I was painfully and no doubt visibly in awe of a great Englishman who, after he died, was described by Gillian Reynolds, (writing in *The Telegraph*) as a figure not just esteemed, but also revered, for his "independence, his Englishness, sense of fairness and justice, sympathy for the underdog and relish for the beautiful and the good." He, for his part, treated the awkward young man into whose acquaintance he had stumbled with supreme tact and kindness and, on learning that I was a Dylan Thomas enthusiast, invited me to his house in Alresford, to have a look around his wine cellar, while he dug out some Thomas memorabilia from the depths of his writing desk.

I linger particularly on Arlott here for that list of characteristics Gillian Reynolds proposes as ‘English’: independence, a sense of fairness and justice, sympathy for the underdog and relish for the beautiful and the good. These, it seemed to me, were the virtues of a responsible masculinity (I hope I can assume, here, that I should, need and cannot presume to speak of the feminine equivalents, for obvious reasons). Fairness. Justice. The greater good. The beautiful, wherever it might be found, from a graceful catch in the slips to Tippett’s *Fantasia Concertante on a Theme of Thomas Tallis*. Add to this, from Scott’s party, camaraderie in difficulty and the sense that honourable pursuit was more important than merely winning, throw in respect for the land and for all, not just the most privileged, of its people, and that, for me, offered a basic code that, while it may not have had a host of practitioners, was something to which the best might aspire. I would summarise that aspiration as a lifelong openness to grace. Which leaves the question of what we mean by that slightly awkward word, (it can hardly be denied that, in the age of technology, all the fundamental words for a discussion of values—grace, spirit, the heart, honour—seem to have acquired a somewhat dubious gravity.).

My working answer: Grace is the bodily knowledge that God—or Tao, or the Infinite Game, if you like—is no respecter of persons. That this infinite game is larger than all of us, and that our only obligation is to play it, honourably, and to the full, at whatever cost to our pettier interests.

As I say, something to aspire to. With the acceptance that failure is possible, even inevitable.

*

I am all too aware of how naïve—and old-fashioned—this sounds. And of course, all of it must be qualified: we did and still do have a vile class system in Britain, and most of those who have always run the country have ‘cared’ for their so-called inferiors either cosmetically, for political purposes, or not at all, as the faux aristocrat, Clifford, points out in D. H. Lawrence’s *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*:

‘And don’t fall into errors: in your sense of the word, they are not men. They are animals you don’t understand, and never could. Don’t thrust your illusions on other people. The masses were always the same, and will always be the same. Nero’s slaves were extremely little different from our colliers or the Ford motor-car workmen. I mean Nero’s mine slaves and his field slaves. It is the masses: they are the unchangeable.’

By the time of *Chatterley*, the first truly industrial war had revealed the incompetence and callousness of the English ruling class, as here in Siegfried Sassoon’s thumbnail portrait of a general:

‘Good-morning; good-morning!’ the General said
When we met him last week on our way to the line.
Now the soldiers he smiled at are most of ’em dead,
And we’re cursing his staff for incompetent swine.
‘He’s a cheery old card,’ grunted Harry to Jack
As they slogged up to Arras with rifle and pack.
But he did for them both by his plan of attack.

So yes—this was, at times, the reality. There was also, however, at the heart of Englishness the basic assumption that to be an Englishman was to aspire to better. To aspire to the values we have discussed so far—and to hold dear another key principle, in one form or another. That principle was that a man should be judged, not by his standing, but by his merits. In reality—that is to say, in terms of worldly 'success'—we knew that this was a dream, pie in the sky; what mattered was family, school, Oxbridge, the right connections and the depth of entitlement to which one could indecently lay claim. But what did that matter to us? We were not interested in *that* craven 'reality'. We were interested in honour, grace, justice—and we assumed that all men of good will, from the richest to the poorest, had similar aspirations. Indeed, I do believe that many working Englishmen managed to sustain that idea for a long time—right up until the end of WWII and perhaps beyond. At some point, however, the façade began to crumble. Honour came to seem illusory, and very old hat. And grace?

It would have been a failure of one sort, if the people at the top of the food chain had openly abandoned these values; that so many for whom the stakes were middling to low should do so, however, was a far more embarrassing failure—and when it finally came, under the Thatcher regime in the 1980s, it was almost obscene in its bare-naked cynicism. Now, the rhetoric was dog-eat-dog, winner takes all, the monetization of everything and the overriding significance of the bottom line. That so many who espoused this miserable ethos should have been ruined by it, even as they continued to praise its proponents, was both ironic and a cause for shame. They were, of course, suckers from the start—just as the common Brexiteer is a sucker for deregulators and other 'toff' profiteers. The great irony is that, not for the first time, the English—arguably the most class-bound society in Europe—have voted for an idea that, like Thatcherism, was not only NOT in their best interests, but militated violently against everything that being English stood for.

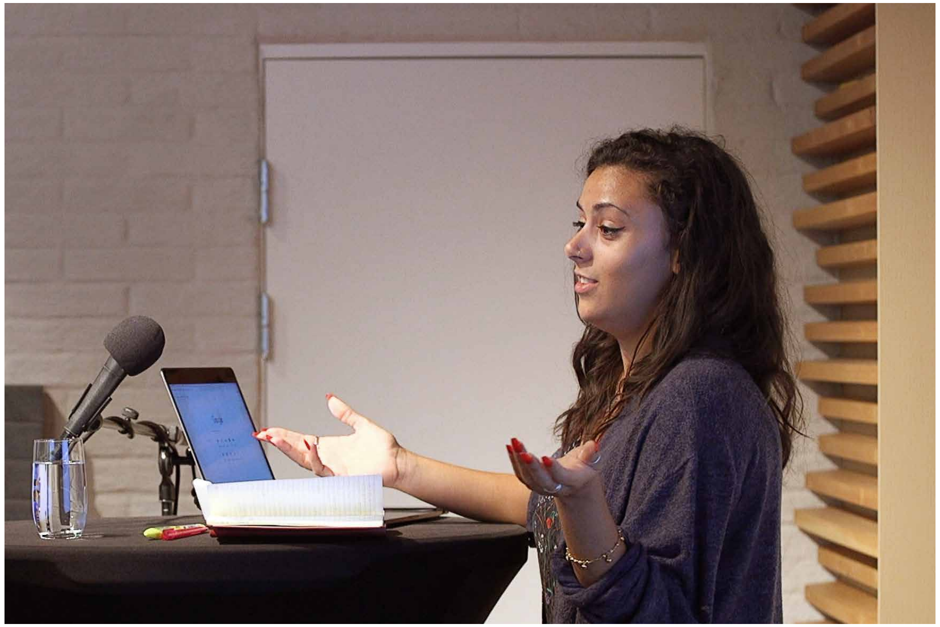
*

But wait. Am I not being lazy here? do I really mean to pass Thatcherism off as an *idea*, when it was nothing more than a justification for rampant greed and short-termism? An ethos that, to be fair, we didn't even think up for ourselves, but imported wholesale from Reagan's feverishly deregulated U.S.A? Well, for me, there was one aspect of Margaret Thatcher's message that was an idea, of sorts, and one that patently exposes the stupidity and lack of ambition in her party's politics. That idea is summarized in these words, spoken by the Iron Lady in 1987:

'They are casting their problems at society. And, you know, there's no such thing as society. There are individual men and women and there are families. And no government can do anything except through people, and people must look after themselves first.'

Now, to hear one's PM claim that 'there is no such thing as society' is a bit like hearing a school crossing guard opine that there is no such thing as traffic. But what we are seeing here is the aspiration to something rather ugly, an aspiration that undermines those very properties of Englishness that I listed earlier. Instead of forging (or at least aspiring to forge) a code of conduct in relation to, and with a sense of radical responsibility for, the other, Thatcherism's No Society rule says that we must act in isolation, purely for the sake of self-interest, and to the detriment of the common good, if need be. Such a position, however, soon leads to crude and simplified identifications of the other as the mere and inevitable product of his or her social history. When people used to tag me as "from Corby" (i.e. a migrant worker) and engage accordingly, I would sometimes retaliate in the expected ways—why would I not? Not surprisingly, the outcome was often unpleasant. Thus was the stereotype perpetuated. Most of the time, though, I managed to avoid such ugly scenes—though only with a little help from a more or less, though not quite imaginary friend, a talking animal who sat somewhere at the back of my mind, rehearsing his favourite joke over and over, but never quite putting it out there. I refer, of course, to the passage in which Pooh encounters a more than usually existentially inclined Rabbit, from A.A. Milne's *Winnie-the-Pooh*, published in 1926:

'"Hallo, Rabbit," he said, "is that you?"
"Let's pretend it isn't," said Rabbit, "and see what happens."'



Is Masculinity in Crisis: How to discuss issues facing men

Transcript from lecture

By Iman Amrani

Well, I'm very glad to be doing this early on so that I can sit back and listen to the rest of you guys presenting and doing your panels. If you didn't already see, my name is Iman Amrani, and I'm a journalist at *The Guardian*. And I was asked to come here because I did a *YouTube* series on modern masculinity for *The Guardian* and I took a slightly different approach to what I thought people were expecting from us.

Let me just start at the beginning. The first question everyone asks me is why would a woman do a series on masculinity? And there are so many layers to that but I'll go down the professional line, which is [that] I always found myself drawn to issues, interests, around male dominated spaces, be that music and hip hop, or football, or terrorism because of the identity question in that. And I covered the Bataclan [Theatre] attacks, Charlie Hebdo, the attacks in Belgium, the attacks in the UK as well.

So I did all of those things quite intensively in the communities where these young disillusioned men were, and I could see these patterns between these different countries. And when I was covering drill music and knife crime in the UK, this was a completely different community, and it was also a very male-dominated space, and I was seeing lots of other similarities. And then when I was looking at what was going on in the United States, with the shootings, the white supremacists, and not just white supremacists, people who were in [terrorist] cells and had different motivations but were predominately white, I was seeing that there yet more similarities with these disillusioned, disenfranchised, angry men, who had presented that anger with extreme forms of violence. So I had this interest there already, and then back in 2017 the other thing that triggered me to want to do this series was the Me Too movement.

So when the Me Too movement started, it was quite clearly about abuse of power, and I think there were really clear objectives and motivations of what it was in the first instance. But as it moved on, I identified with a lot of my male friends that they just felt uncomfortable being part of the discussion and debate around Me Too, in fact they felt like it wasn't a discussion or debate, and that it couldn't be participated in. They were supposed to sit there and listen to women's experiences, which obviously I have a lot of time for that. But you reach a point where there has to be dialogue, and there has to be a true and honest and open dialogue where people can say things that are uncomfortable. And I was looking around, seeing that the conversations were happening in online spaces, or in the living rooms, and these people who I was around who were great thinkers, they were very intelligent, and they were too scared to say what they really thought around the gray areas of Me Too. So I'm talking about later on when it went on to Aziz Ansari and Junot Diaz and the writers and the comedians where it just got a bit more complicated. It wasn't so black and white. And I just thought, for myself, I feel so frustrated going round and round in the same conversation, I just felt like it made me feel like I wasn't doing anything as a journalist who is interested in pushing boundaries and being curious and stepping out of my own bubble. So I wanted to take the conversation somewhere else, and try and talk to men who potentially had very very different experiences and social bubbles to myself, because that is what made me want to be a journalist in the first place. I can sit around and write about my vagina or my own identity from behind a desk and I could make a career out of that. But that's not why I wanted to be a journalist.

So I started this whole journey at the sharp end of the debate, shall we say, and I decided to get completely out of my Guardian liberal bubble in London and go to a Jordan Peterson event in Birmingham. A few people I work with really did question that. They were like, why are you going to a Jordan Peterson event? And I thought, there's so much journalism where people, they get all of their information online, they get all of their information from threads, and there's only one type of person, or only a few types of people who comment online, and there are loads of quiet observers who watch the videos but they don't leave any comments. And you only find them when you step outside and you meet them at the event.

So I went to a Jordan Peterson talk, and I was really surprised because having read what I'd read about him online and having seen the Cathy Newman interview on Channel 4, I thought I was going to be walking into a really really hostile space for someone like myself, and that it might be quite difficult to approach people. But it turned out, every person that I approached at the event described themselves as left leaning. And a lot of men described themselves as Corbyn supporters. And one guy even described himself as a Marxist. And I thought it was really interesting, I said to them why have you come to this event? What makes you want to come to see Jordan Peterson? And quite a few of the guys I spoke to said well it's not like we agree with everything he says, we just like that the space feels like a space where there's no fear. There's no fear of political correctness, you can talk about whatever you want. And I thought that was really interesting because a lot of the spaces which I've been around on, let's say the left, the liberal left, I felt like yeah, that openness for discussion is quite limited. And I felt more recently, much more recently, in kind of a unique position as a woman to be able to say actually I do want to open a dialogue, and I do want to hear what you've got to say, and I don't actually get anything out of shutting down this conversation.

So I met this guy called Neil at the event. Neil was a fascinating guy. He had all these face tattoos and looked quite aggressive. But I grew up in a hyper-macho household, so I wasn't very scared of him. I went over and started chatting to him, and he actually seemed more intimidated by a 5'3" woman approaching him because I don't think he's used to that. And we had a conversation about masculinity and he invited me to go and speak with him in Leeds. And I think just to pull it back a second to talk about Jordan Peterson, there are lots of things he says that I do completely disagree with. But I feel like a lot of the time when I've seen people focus on what Jordan Peterson talks about, they talk about the more fringe comments he makes, or the side points, and there's been a lack of engagement with the core principles of responsibility and meaning, which is continually repeated in all of his work. And I find that fascinating. I find that really interesting because of the work that I had done around extremism, and the work that I had done around knife crime, and this anger I was talking about earlier. I really felt that there was this lost sense of self, lost sense of meaning. The anger comes from somewhere because there's a void. And I just thought, oh, Peterson's making this point, that I'm not really seeing made anywhere else. Or if it's made, it's not packaged in a way which has the reach that he has had. So for all of the criticisms that he gets, about the way he speaks, for example, on the role of women. He has quite traditional ideas about the role of women and men. I actually thought engaging with the deeper ideas that he's had could be quite valuable. And a lot of the criticisms that he's had have failed to offer alternative solutions.

So when I was speaking to Neil, the main points that kept coming up was the idea of responsibility and meaning. And Neil had had a really intense upbringing. He had grown up in a Mormon family in Scarborough, he had been abused as a child, and he had attempted suicide, and he'd gone through all of the most horrific phases that had affected the men that were approaching me about this series, we did a call out at *The Guardian* and asked people what they wanted us to talk about. And he'd kind of gone through every extreme situation, to the point actually where, when he was nineteen, his father, who had been adopted and grew up in foster care, his father rediscovered his family and then ran away with his own sister, who he hadn't known growing up. So this guy Neil, who had gone through all of these difficulties, when he was nineteen his dad ran away to be with his aunt. And it was all over the news, and it just was a massive story. We actually, obviously I fact-checked that and we found all of the tabloid reports on that. And it was really such an interesting story. But he said that what Peterson had done was effectively help him to find a direction in his life. And

I thought that was fascinating. When you look at this question of religion. He stopped being a Mormon, and then he had this void. And what do you fill the void with?

And I think that is a really common question across the board, regardless of your race, or your background. The issues facing the—well, if we look at the backgrounds of the Jihadis who committed the Bataclan attacks, they're not people that have grown up with religion. They're people who have grown up in the care system, they're people who have been radicalized in prison, they're people that didn't have a sense of spirituality or faith. They were involved in crime before. I found it fascinating that there was this kind of hunger to find meaning and purpose. I'm going to show you a little bit of this thing with Neil, to see what you guys think.

…

So I think that Neil was just such a fascinating character. Like I said before, he kind of embodied all of these things which I think are the main components of this crisis of masculinity which we talked about. And he was just a guy that I found at a Jordan Peterson event. And I did find that by just going with an open mind, knowing what—you know, I know what the Jordan Peterson debate is. I know what Jordan Peterson talks about, I've obviously done my research. So I know all of the things that are around him, but I went with a really open mind of okay, I'm going to try and just listen. I'm not going to present the other side. I'm not going to present to him, oh, people say this about Peterson. I questioned why it was different. And I actually got a really interesting answer. And it was a genuine question, so I think that that was why I got such an interesting answer.

And I think that a lot of the time now, when I look at questions of masculinity, and Peterson had now become such a leader on the issues of masculinity in this crisis, if that's what you want to call it. When you look at it now, it feels like things are so politicized, and people respond so tribally to things that there is just this lack of willingness to engage with ideas that have come from the other side. And I think that that central thing of purpose and meaning was so important. I don't think that people can afford to let that be the property of just Jordan Peterson or the people that who are politically on the right, and seem to be now the defenders of men. I think that this is such a broad issue that we should be able to engage with these questions and not have to feel like we have to bring up every single other argument, and make it so unclear to come towards any solutions. Masculinity is complicated as it is, let alone overly politicizing it.

So this was my second episode that I did, and I found that the response was overwhelmingly positive. I think people were really surprised, especially because I work for *The Guardian*. I'm not just saying that, the comments all say, I didn't expect this from *The Guardian*. And I found that quite depressing, because I hadn't compromised on any values, my values are to be really open and curious. So I felt that that was a shame, that that was the impression that people had. And I think it's really important that, as journalists, we provide people with interesting life experiences and information that feeds the curiosity that other people have as well.

So in the next episode, I went onto interview a bunch of quite well known men. A rapper called D Double E, Jack Fowler from Love Island, MNEK who is another singer, Jon Snow from Channel 4 News, Vinay Patel the writer, and Francis Rossi from Status Quo, and that was really interesting because he is not from my generation at all. And he was really funny. Francis obviously couldn't stop talking about his penis, and kept pointing out that he had a cock and I had a vagina. We didn't put any of that in the video. Had nothing to do with masculinity. But it was fun, and I got to hang out in his studio, and it was quite fascinating because he's from a different generation, and speaking to him about masculinity was just eye opening for me. And it was to speak to Jon Snow. So what I was saying before, I could quite easily and happily, for other people, write about identity and write about being a young woman of color, and being a Muslim. And I have written articles about things like that. But I just don't find it that interesting, I find it really self-indulgent, and actually I find that I grow more when I'm outside of myself and when I'm meeting other people. And there was a particular thing that I'd like to show you from that video if you wouldn't mind.

…

That was just to show a range of the different men that I spoke to. And there were points—what I enjoyed so much about the series was having my own preconceptions challenged, right? Because it's just flipping the table a bit. And the points in that video, or doing those interviews, that challenged my preconceptions, and not all of these points made it to that cut, was Vinay Patel, who was the writer, he made a point about, when I said to him, what are the pressures that you feel as a man, and he said to me that he felt a pressure from girlfriends to always have a high sex drive, and that because of his depression he struggled with that. And I just sat there and thought that's so interesting because I really haven't had to think about that and he spoke about it in such detail. And I thought, yeah, I guess there is that stereotype, and he said there were times when he didn't want to have sex with his girlfriends, and they'd taken it really badly because they had this image of the guys always supposed to be up for it. And it had really taken a toll on his relationships. And I went away and I really thought about that, and he actually said he hadn't spoken about that before. And I thought, are you crazy? You just did that with two cameras there. But okay.

And then the other one was Francis Rossi, when he wasn't talking about his cock, talked about his relationship with father. But another thing I didn't put in the cut because we want to make—we're going to make a part two of it and we actually haven't done that yet. But he talked about how he thought he was quite a shit father because he had seen his role as basically providing for the family economically. So he'd been off on tour, and his family had this huge house, and he'd been paying all of this money, and he just felt like he hadn't been there at all for his sons. And I thought that was really interesting, because it's not very often that you get men, I think, finding it easy to openly describe their failures as parents. It's really difficult. So I really—and also Francis Rossi, he's got so much bravado that it was quite touching to see him let his guard down.

And similarly, Jon Snow, a point that he made that I walked off thinking about was we all know that abuse happens. But I guess in my bubble, it's not something that I think about frequently. And with that image of super privileged white men, there's never that room for those kinds of issues, which actually have their own characteristics in private schools, really privileged places. And I just had to think about that. I just had to put that a little at the front of my mind when I was talking to him. And it does probably affect how I watch Channel 4 News now.

But it was really interesting to have my preconceptions challenged. And I don't think that they would have made those points, those vulnerable points which made me think, if I had been aggressively pursuing some kind of line with them. I went into it really open minded. And that, you know, it can be hard at points some days, you're in a bad mood, you're like, I'm going to go do an interview with somebody, and you're just feeling a bit aggressive maybe. And it was good to, as a human, not just as a journalist, put myself in their spaces and have to open up.

So in doing all of this, I also was really careful in that openness not to use the words "toxic masculinity" because I think it's really charged. And I've had so many people come to me and say, oh, I've watched your series on toxic masculinity, and I find that really interesting, because I'm like, why do you call it toxic masculinity? I never say that word, I'm so careful to never ever say that word. Because I think it's like opening a can of worms. What does it mean? And it has a meaning, but I don't really want to address that. Because I'm trying to get to these points, like what I've said about Jon Snow and Francis Rossi, and I want them to talk about that. I don't want to talk about language. I don't want to talk about the patriarchy. I know what that means. Where does that take me in terms of understanding somebody else's experience? So yes, it's definitely not a series about toxic masculinity, so if you talk about it later in the weekend, please remember that. And actually in the comments even, people wanted to debate toxic masculinity. There's something about that phrase that's just kind of grabbed people, and it's mad.

I think that in doing all of this, the big takeaway that I have from it is that we talk about this crisis, and I think there are lots of things which, you know, there's the extreme violence that I've spoken about, and I guess the high rates of suicide in men, and even the fact that there are so many men that are looking to *YouTube* videos to hear the voices that make them feel heard and like they belong to something. And that's really quite, can be quite terrifying actually, if people feel like they're not getting that space in real life or in the circles around them.

But I don't think that it's a completely depressing image. I think that when I went and spoke to people, I actually found that there were just so many interesting characters that had found answers, and were working through solutions, and had great things to say and great contributions to make. And they just needed to be given that space, and to be asked, and for that environment to be created where they knew that it was safe. And there's such a lack of trust with journalists and the media now. I think that really contributes to that feeling of having a crisis because it's always pushed to extremes. Whatever conversation you're having, it's like you've got to push it to one side or the other, and that just continues to make everything more fractured and more divided. And then that's when you have this feeling of, yeah there is a crisis going on. When in reality, I think that there are quite a few glimmers of hope and possibility that we could work on.

And there were other episodes as well that I did later on. One of them was with Football Beyond Borders in South London with a charity that works with young men. I thought it was really important to go and speak to them because we often speak about young men. We have this concern over knife crime and all of these things happening in these communities, but we never actually speak to the young men who are affected by that. So I did that in the fourth episode.

In the fifth episode, I spoke to an organization called Band of Brothers, where they get younger men to older men, and we spoke about the intergenerational divide and how community had broken down a bit. So younger men have fewer mentors or uncles or people that they can go to for advice and to help give them life guidance. And they're trying to recreate that.

And in the sixth episode I did a big round up. So that's what I've done. I found it really interesting. It would be great if you watch it to give any feedback. And I'd also like to open it up and hear what you guys think about bits you've watched, or any thoughts you might have, because that's what I'm interested in. I'm actually interested in dialogue and hearing what other people have to say. So I don't know if you have a microphone, if anybody would like to make a point or ask a question.

Question: I was interested to know whether you had any thoughts on class in this context, because I noticed, I think, that a lot of the men, maybe apart from Jon Snow, they came from a working class background. And whether or not you felt that there is a pressure on young men in those kind of backgrounds that is different or maybe tougher than maybe more middle class backgrounds.

Iman Amrani: I definitely think that coming from the background that I come from, I'm more aware of the pressure of class, I'm more aware of what's going on. I came in covering the issues affecting young men who are radicalized and knife crime because I could get access to those communities because I have a good understanding of how that works. And I do think that there is a pressure when you don't feel like you have opportunities in life, when you feel like there's not really a clear route of success, and you're surrounded by people who are not doing anything particularly motivating, and you feel that sense of hopelessness, right? I think that that's obviously going to contribute to feeling completely disillusioned. But like I say, when I did this, I actually found myself going, oh yeah, it's difficult for posh white guys too sometimes. But I thought that was actually really valuable to do. And I think, yes, it's much more difficult if you're coming from a working class background. Of course, because there's less freedom. You can't just be like oh, I need to get out of this environment, I'll just go outside and go to the countryside. You know, just to, if you're inner city Birmingham or London, you can't just go outside and do that thing where you recalibrate or you clear your brain. And if you have money and opportunities you can—those simple things I think make a massive difference. So yeah, I do think class plays something in it. But I'm trying, in all of this, to open it up so that I don't come in with prejudices and try and make it too much about identity from my opinion projecting that onto something. If that makes sense.

Question: That was fascinating, thank you for sharing that, it was really interesting. I was really interested in the relationship between you as an interviewer, and a teller of stories essentially, and the people that you were working with. Firstly, whether you think that your identity as female, and possibly as a person of color as well, or someone of your particular background, meant that not only do you have access to people but whether that affects how open people will be with you, and whether actually, if you had been a Jon Snow outline, whether a lot of the guys that you spoke to would have felt like they could talk to you. I just wondered what gender does in that. But also part two is whether, it's something we're going to talk about later, as writers and theatre makers, how we bend our own identity in order to fit in in a group, and thought it was quite interesting that you slightly change your diction depending on who you're talking to. And how aware were you that you do that, and how much is it a journalistic tool, or is it also about getting on with people and forming a relationship.

Iman Amrani: I'll show you a video to answer that one. But the first question about being a woman doing this. I did get asked a lot why would a woman do this, do you think a man could do this? Oh, no, actually I got asked, do you think a man could do a series on femininity? And I think a man could do a series on femininity, of course, I mean, yeah, if you approach it open, in the way that I did. If you come to things open, and you're not projecting, I do think that a man could do it on femininity.

So Band of Brothers, this organization that works with younger men and older men, they have this rite of passage in the forest. It's something they do, I think it's actually quite a lot of organizations do that now. This rite of passage, they say we've lost this traditional thing of becoming a man, from being a boy to being a man. And that all happens in the forest and it's all very secret, and women aren't allowed to go. So I couldn't go along to that, and that was totally fine, I don't mind, I like doing, there's moments when I want to be all with women and we do our own thing, and it can happen both ways. And that didn't stop us having a great conversation.

But some men said it's different, if there's a woman there it changes the dynamic. And what I did notice was when I was one on one with men, or there was a small group, I think that I've got quite a non-threatening presence, I have a big personality but I'm quite short, and also I guess I'm not super imposing, but I'm quite friendly, so that made things easier. And I think Jon Snow said at one point, he said that he liked talking to women because he felt like they weren't in competition with him in the way that men were, and that they were always trying to one up each other a bit. And I thought that was really interesting because I really didn't care to one up anyone I was speaking to, it just didn't even occur to me.

So there is that, which I think it worked in my favor. But it could have worked in a completely different way. I think another woman might have a different approach and not be received in the same way. I worked really hard to develop trust, genuine trust. There are things that people have said on camera, and I've gone, yeah, I think that's come across quite badly, and I don't think would be a service to you, who has trusted me to have this conversation, for me to put that in the edit, because I don't think that's a fair representation of who you are. And so that's not about me being a woman, that's just about me being responsible and trying to build trust with the people I talk to.

So there's that. And then you asked about the accent. I actually do answer that somewhere, so let me just find that video.

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Cool, there you go. It's so embarrassing to watch that back, because I don't even think. I've been speaking to, I speak to Americans and I do an American twang, it's disgusting, absolutely vile. So, yeah, apologies, but I get really good quotes out of people when I do that, so yeah. Are there any other questions?

Question: Do you have any ideas about how to, though your work and research, how to broaden that safe space? So it feels like obviously that conference is maybe slightly more on the extreme side of things, and that's where they found that safe space. There's this void. I'm interested in how that might become more mainstream.

Iman Amrani: It's a cultural thing I think at this point. Because we've talked about identity in a number of ways. I think political identity is fascinating, and it feels like there's a script, I think, on the left a lot. I feel like it's the identity politics, which obviously I'm really interested in. There are aspects of it where I go, actually, I'm so tired of the same conversations happening, and the shutting down, the cancel culture, the non-platforming, all of that stuff. I just think that is what has made it so difficult for people to—that's what you need to do, you need to break that down. How do you break that down?

I don't really have an answer for that because it's so widespread now. It's in, when you go to my sisters at [inaudible], when I walk into [inaudible] and it's just so interesting, because they have all of that stuff. That is the bulk of all of that culture. And I find it kind of fascinating because you are all super privileged kids who are being really performative with all of this, acting like you really care about the average man, when really you've made the entire conversation about linguistics and about, you know you have to understand all of these words and codes and everything. It's like another way of making it super exclusive and you can't just open that conversation up. And then when you go out and speak to just random people in the street, they're not talking like that.

And so I think it's difficult if you've got in the universities and in the media, and in politics, this straight jacket on, where you can't say this, you can't say this, you can't say this, you've got to say this, and everything's got this binary. You're either on the good side or the bad side. You're either on the right or the left. Of course people don't feel safe to say what they think, because most people have complicated ideas that come from their own personal experience which isn't straight up and down, and it's very subjective. So I'm not sure if I completely answered it, I'm saying it's really hard.

Question: Yeah, I think what struck me about your style was compassion. And I think it feels like there's also a crisis in empathy and compassion. And if we can bring that into the mainstream somehow, then maybe those safe spaces might broaden, and I just don't know how to do that.

Iman Amrani: But I think that partially, and it sounds nuts to be saying this having written about identity and working at *The Guardian*, but I think the identity politics thing, like looking at everything through the prism of your own experience, you know this is about identity. I think identity is fascinating, and it's something to be looked at and challenged and analyzed, and it's really—I'm so glad that that's the theme of this year. It's fascinating to me. But it—so many people try and find identity and hold onto it, and then they won't let themselves see outside of that box, if that makes sense. I think that's really really dangerous. Really dangerous.

Question: Thank you for that, I thought it was wonderful, all your work that you're doing in general. I wonder about self-worth, because often, well watching this, and often thinking about the relationships between men and women at the moment, I wonder if it's a crisis in self-worth. I always feel like there's this self-help thing around women. Like, a man cheats on you, you work on your self-worth. There's this thing of building it. But we never really talk about men working on their self-worth. And I wonder if you feel like a lot of this comes from that. Of not having ever been taught that, or to work on it, or to have an idea of your own power as a man. That this is where this comes from. And also the other thing I wanted to ask, and it would be good to hear on that subject about their self-worth and their sense of their own self-worth. Because I feel like a lot of women are talking in this room. The other thing I wanted to ask was if you thought or had an opinion or an idea about the—it seems to me as women are really defining what their role is, it's creating, or has created, for good or bad, a crisis in what a man's role is. And I feel like the more I get, or we get further in our generation, that I'm part of a generation that are really women who have their own careers, can buy their own house, these material things that men are always supposed to provide. It's now creating this Jordan Peterson whatever it is, because it feels like men are not quite sure what their roles are. Which could also go into the self-worth. So I wondered if you felt like or if you saw that there was a correlation there.

Iman Amrani: One thing I would say is I try not to project too much because even though I'm doing this talk, in the videos, most of the videos I try and get the guys to say what they think and how they feel. I just ask questions. So I would feel a bit like, it would feel a bit not in the line of what I'm trying to do to say too much on that. I think you're right, maybe if any men would like to speak. And I think it's really hard to make massive generalizations. The self-worth thing is interesting, but I think it fits into the idea of purpose and meaning, because having a purpose gives your life a value, right? It gives you—if you have no meaning, and it's purposeless, it's got no value, there's no reason to have it. So I do think those things actually link up a lot, and that's why loads of men have said that Jordan Peterson saved their lives, and things like that, because he's given them a sense of purpose and self-worth, and that they matter, and that they can take responsibility for things, even when things are really really awful, that they're here for something, you know? That is a value, right? And I think as you can see things are really really interconnected, and you said something about the woman's role.

I think that is very much one of the key things that people say frequently is that, you know with women going out into the workplace, and having contraception, and lifestyle changing, yeah that's had a massive impact on men. And I think that's true, but also I think it's down to the way the economy has changed, the work for men who used to work in factories and things like that, and working class men then not having the same jobs that they used to have before, and the jobs which gave them an identity as well, back when there were miners and things like that. And all of that stuff contributes to it as well. That's not about the women, that's about the role of men as well.

Question: Yeah, I'm not saying it's our fault or anything. [crosstalk]

Iman Amrani: No, no, no, I know, I'm just, from that idea, I think that is true, but I think also it's just everything else as well. So I think it definitely makes a difference. Of course it does. It does.

Question: Thank you Iman, that was really wonderful. Before [inaudible] we'll talk about self-worth, on behalf of the fellowship. I wanted to ask you about the positive forms that this search for meaning or purpose was taking. Because you mentioned it often, it seems to be what drives them towards Peterson in the sense that he's talking about find your meaning, find your purpose. But what were the sort of things that people were then talking about that gave them that sense? What was it for men that made them feel purposeful?

Iman Amrani: That was a really interesting question because that's the obvious thing to say. Because meaning, what does that even mean? Purpose, what is that? And I guess most of the guys, I mean Peterson does talk about this, but most of the guys I spoke to, Neil said it's your family, I think family was a big thing, it's like having connections with people in real life. Interestingly, most of the men I spoke to didn't find work in itself as the purpose, right? Being in London, there's that impression is that your work and your body of work and what you do is your purpose. But most of the men I spoke to outside, they were saying their children, their relationship with their partners, they were saying things like having a role to do good in the world, to contribute to the community.

And when I spoke to people later on, not about Peterson, that wasn't supposed to take over everything but then it's kind of hard to avoid him when it comes to masculinity. But later on I spoke to men who were just trying to recreate those spaces in real life away from social media. Because I feel like so much of this happens online. People watch videos, they share videos, they're on Twitter they're on social media, and they're on Facebook and they feel super connected. And this is not an original point at all, but I think that that contributes to feelings of isolation. And when you're isolated, then you don't feel like you've got any purpose or meaning. You can be sitting there taking in all of this information but if you're not in a room with people like we are now, you can have a discussion, it goes back and forward, that's why it's so important to be able to come somewhere like [inaudible] or to be stuck in a room and have to exchange ideas. This kind of thing happens less and less because people think they can do it online but you just can't.

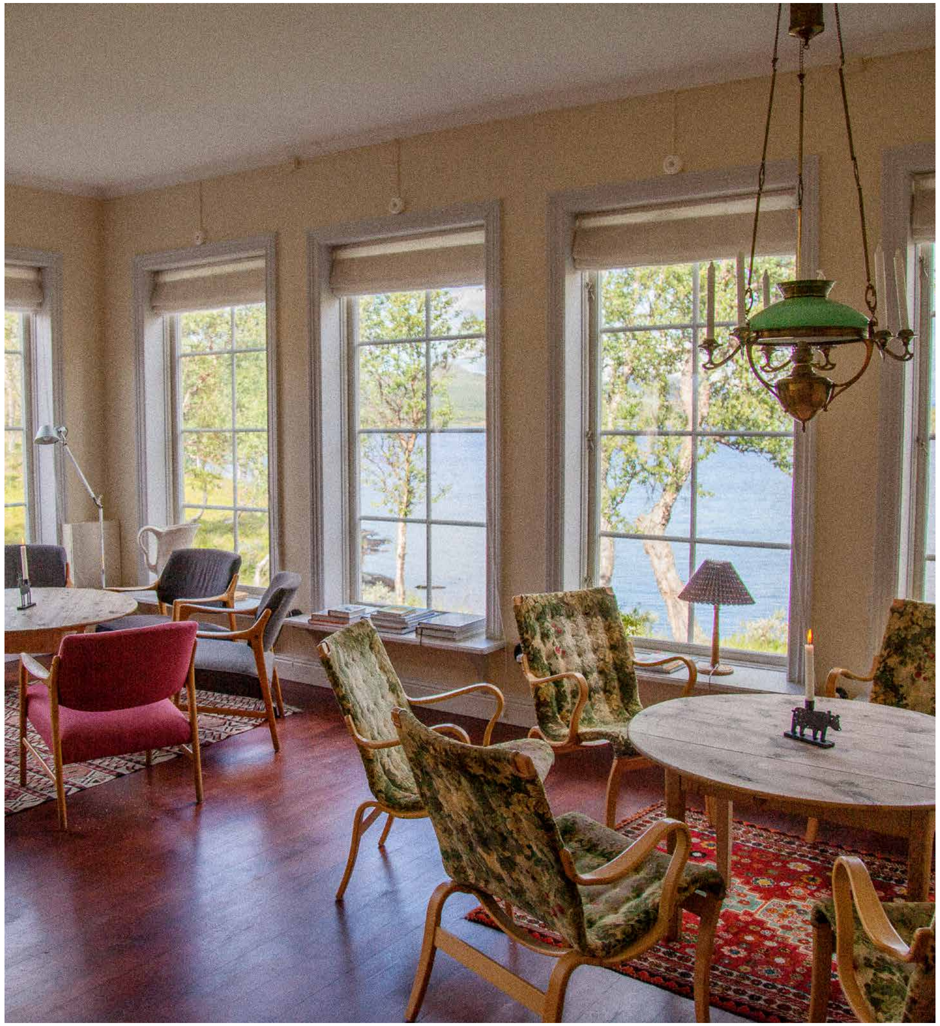
And so watching the groups that would get together every single week, whether it's the football group and they would do lessons with the kids on development or whatever, or the men who would get together and discuss whatever issues they had going on, I just think that was really interesting, making those connections in real life, human connection, with some kind of common ground.

Question: Just one final question I wanted to ask and make a point at the same time. The question was, I wonder how, was there much discussion of things like aggression and physicality, things which are often so stereotypically masculine features, which, it's not often that they are, but it's often these are things in the press that we see people talk in popular culture as these masculine features of being aggressive. And then I was curious as to whether that was something that came up at all. And then connected to that, I was wondering what you think about ways in which things like physicality or aggression, I'm not sure these are the right words, whether there are legitimate places for that, or legitimate areas for that. So maybe I can be clearer if I'm thinking of an example. So certain sports often create legitimate places for people to be thuggish or brutal. I think New Zealand rugby players often talk about, there's this phrase they have in lots of European rugby player's tradition. You go to New Zealand to train, and then they've come back and find that their careers took off. And they took off because the notion over there was you can be a thug on the pitch and a gentleman off the pitch. And it's very much this sense of, a little bit of what John was referring to, this gentlemanliness, and that strand of Englishness off the pitch, but on the pitch was this safe space for all sorts of things that people might or might not do—I mean I'm definitely not one of those people who would be brave enough to throw myself in there. But I just wondered whether that was something that ever came up, or was anything that was talked about.

Iman Amrani: Yeah I did ask, specifically it comes up quite a bit with the selection of men that I spoke to, I did ask them do you think that violence, I think it was: Do you think that violence is inherently connected to masculinity or not. So that was really interesting because they all had different responses, it's that nature or nurture question. I don't think there's a solid answer, definitely not one that I would give as a woman. I'm just interested in seeing what they think. Actually a lot of them did think that it was nurture, but as Neil said there was that point of wanting to be able to having both sides. Being able to be strong and aggressing when needed, being that protector, and I feel like all of the guys wanted to have that multifaceted exterior.

But it was interesting because when I started talking about this, when I say that it gets politicized, masculinity, it feels like on the left, the discussion about masculinity is quite a weak one. Masculinity is all about being in touch with feelings, and being really vulnerable, and if you want to do that, fine. But I was finding it really difficult to find on the left that case for being strong and aggressive as well. And I do think there are points when you need to do that, to be strong. I think when you look at the UK right now, it's like, oh my gosh. I wish that there were just more people that were a bit more… there's so much manipulation and there's so much… I don't see any strong characters where you think that this person is really principled, or this person really stands for this. I don't see strong people. You see people might think oh Boris Johnson's really strong. I don't think he's strong, do you know what I mean? And I think that it's really important to have those types of men and women.

But yeah, I'm sorry I feel like I've gone off on a tangent there a little bit. But I do have people mention it, and it is something that I'm fascinated by. And having like I say, having grown up in a super macho background, my dad's Algerian, and I spent time living in Latin America. I've got ideas myself which I've constantly have to challenge, of how I think men should be. Which has been part of this whole thing. But I don't think there was a one particular answer.



‘Another Brick in the Wall’

By Nakul Krishna

Most people know the 1979 song by Pink Floyd by its opening lyrics:

> We don’t need no education
> We don’t need no thought control
> No dark sarcasm in the classroom
> Teachers leave them kids alone

And then the chorus:

> All in all it’s just another brick in the wall
> All in all you’re just another brick in the wall

If you’ve seen the video that accompanies that song, you’ll know the images to which those words are set: small boys in top hats and tailcoats being marched unwillingly in a school that manages to look, simultaneously, extremely plush and like some Victorian factory.

Pink Floyd’s song, as you can guess from those lyrics, is about education (‘education’) and the ways in which it stifles individuality and free thought: ‘We don’t need no thought control’ The image of the ‘brick in the wall’ evokes many things at once: the teachers as bricks in a wall behind which the children are being suffocated. And eventually, the children themselves as bricks: featureless, mass-produced, interchangeable. As Pink Floyd seem to see it, a brick is the worst thing a person can be.

This use of the metaphor of the brick is very interesting to me. This is in part because I had for many years been interested in another use of the brick metaphor. The first time I encountered this use was in that classic of modern literature, published in 1942: Enid Blyton's *Five on a Treasure Island*. Four children, Julian, Dick, Anne and Georgina (who insists on being called George) and George's dog, Timothy, get involved in an adventure involving buried gold in a crumbling castle on a deserted island. In the middle of the book, there's a passage where Dick returns from a little solitary adventure to tell the other children what he's discovered. And Blyton writes:

'When he related how he had climbed down the old well, George and Julian could hardly believe their ears. Julian slipped his arm through his younger brother's. "You're a brick!" he said. "A real brick! … "'

This was 1942. This use of the word 'brick' is much older than that. A much earlier appearance in a children's classic *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, published in 1857 and set much earlier, in the 1830s, in Rugby School in England when it was run by that pioneering, slightly mad, educational reformer Dr Thomas Arnold. Young Tom Brown, after several weeks of being the shy new boy, has just distinguished himself on the sports pitch and won the match for the school team:

'… the feast proceeded, and the festive cups of tea were filed and emptied, and Tom imparted of the sausages in small bits to many neighbours, and thought he had never tasted such good potatoes or seen such jolly boys. They on their parts waived all ceremony, and pegged away at the sausages and potatoes, and remembering Tom's performance in goal, voted [him] a brick.'

How did we get from 1847 to 1979? From a world in which being a brick is best possible thing to a world in which it's the worst possible thing? How could the very same metaphor come to have such radically opposed uses?

A few years ago, I went digging in old Victorian boys' magazines to find the answer. Of the many hundreds of examples I discovered, the most revealing were these. The first is from a magazine called *The Haileybury Observer*, in 1852. Haileybury was the name by which the East India Company training college was more commonly known, the place where colonial officers were educated before being sent off, usually to India. In one issue, an old boy writes in to say he's been wondering about the metaphor himself: '"A brick!" Why a brick?'

Being a classically educated Englishman, he starts looking for analogies in Greek and Roman literature. He finds a line from Virgil that looks promising: 'In te omnis domus inclinata recumbit'. As he roughly explains this phrase, 'You are one on whom every reliance may be placed;—a support on which our house may securely rest in every danger.' 'Can any one doubt', he asks, 'that that is a more poetical periphrasis for "You're a brick?"'

There's an even older issue of *The Haileybury Observer*, from 1842, that has a story about a new student at the East India College being shown around by an old hand:

'… you must drink tea with me to night, and meet some of the top-sawyers of the College,—all bricks,—you know what that means of course,—τετράγωνοι ἄνδρες [tetragonoi andres], as Aristotle said in our lectures last term'

The line from Aristotle that the student is referring to is from the opening book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. I quote:

'the happy person … keeps the character he has throughout his life. For always, or more than anything else, he will do and study the actions in accord with virtue, and will bear fortunes most finely, in every way and in all conditions appropriately since he is truly 'good, four-square, and blameless'.

The Greek word that the translator has rendered as 'four-square' is 'tetragonos'. There is, as often, a minor scholarly controversy over this word. Some scholars think 'tetragonos' means someone whose achievements merit 'commemoration on a monumental stone'. Others think that this may have something to do with ancient Pythagorean cults, who supposedly believed the square, and the number four, to be symbols of divinity. I think myself that the scholars are overthinking this one. The most plausible explanation is the simplest: that Aristotle, and the Greeks more generally, associated the brick with the same homely qualities that we do, and readers of popular 19th-century fiction did: the brick is regular, reliable and solid. And surely those are good things to be.

Well. Are they? Even in the ancient world, we begin to see some dissent on this point. Pliny the Elder, in his *Naturalis Historia*, has a brief reference to the ancient Greek sculptor Polykleitus, and he quotes the scholar Varro's criticism of his statues as 'quadrata' and 'almost uniform'. 'Quadrata' is the usual Latin translation of the Greek word 'tetragonos': 'square'. And when Varro is calling those status 'square and almost uniform', he means, 'regular and, therefore, boring'.

How did that happen? How did being square change in the course of a few centuries from being a good thing to being a bad thing? Well, it shouldn't be so hard to work out. After all, pretty much the same thing has happened over the last one hundred years. If you look at the OED's list of meanings for 'square', and move past the definitions from geometry, you get this:

square, adj. 'Designating one who is out of touch with the ideas and conventions of a particular popular contemporary movement (orig. Jazz); conventional, old-fashioned. Formerly opp. hep.

We're talking now about the US in the 1940s and 50s, the same decade that Enid Blyton is writing her Famous Five books. It's worth noting that this use of 'square' emerges in the world of jazz musicians and audiences in the way that the complimentary use of 'brick' emerges in a world where young men are being trained to go run an empire.

The brick is about the virtues of predictability and regularity as the basis for trust. Those who praise you for being a brick oppose these qualities to their opposites: being capricious, whimsical, asserting individual idiosyncrasy. But these vices don't count as vices in the world of jazz. Jazz doesn't need stability, predictability and conventionality. It needs individuality, spontaneity and the capacity for improvisation.

There's a song from 1962, written by Malvina Reynolds and made famous by the folk singer Pete Seeger, that captures the general shift. Some of you may know it: it's called 'Little Boxes', and it's about American middle-class professionals in the suburbs.

And they all play on the golf course
And drink their martinis dry
And they all have pretty children
And the children go to school
And the children go to summer camp
And then to the university
Where they are put in boxes
And they come out all the same

Brick, square, box: you see the pattern. But the story has another stage. The backlash, in the usual way, produces its counter-backlash. In the 80s and 90s, we find polemical books being published—Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind* and Christopher Lasch's *The Culture of Narcissism* are two of the best known—that see these supposed rejections of middle-class conformity as verging on being rejections of morality itself.

Morality, as they see it, is all about curbing individual idiosyncrasy in light of the human need to live with others. They see something seriously wrong in a culture where what's important isn't that you're good, but that you're authentic. The only demand is to be true to yourself. It's all about 'keeping it real'. This, to the critics, sounds like a recipe for selfishness, superficiality, and disaster.

I shan't be taking a position in this debate. In fact, it's not clear that we need to take a single position on it. If the question 'Should we be bricks or should we keep it real?', the correct answer is probably, 'Yes'. For now, I'll stop with raising a few questions for both sides. And here, I rely on the work of the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor, whose book *The Ethics of Authenticity* I commend to you for the subtlety with which it explores these ideas.

As Taylor sees it, the obsession with authenticity has its debased forms. But it nevertheless expresses, as he puts it, 'a powerful moral ideal'. By 'moral ideal', Taylor means, 'a picture of what a better or higher mode of life would be, where "better" and "higher" are defined not in terms of what we happen to desire or need, but offer a standard of what we ought to desire.' In other words, being authentic is not some easy way out you take because you find morality too difficult. It can sometimes be just as hard to keep it real.

Taylor thinks this idea goes back to the German writer Johann Gottfried von Herder in the 18th century. Herder 'put forward the idea that each of us has an original way of being human'. But we forget this fact, because we succumb to 'the pressures towards outward conformity'. These pressures stop me discovering 'my own inner nature' and stop me listening to my 'inner voice'. Make of these ideas what you will, but I think Taylor is on to something when he says that 'This is the [historical, intellectual] background that gives moral force to the culture of authenticity, including its most degraded, absurd, or trivialized forms. It is what gives sense to the idea of "doing your own thing"'.

So what's a square then, and why is that a bad thing to be? Well, Taylor's history suggests that a square is someone who has succumbed to the outward pressures to conformity; the square is inauthentic; the square has failed to discover his own 'original way of being human', the respects in which he is unlike, rather than like, other people. He is failing to 'do his own thing', because he is doing—as it were—someone else's thing. This is the sense in which the values connoted by the term 'brick' have become—as Nietzsche put it—transvalued.

This leaves us with many questions. Is outward pressure the only thing that makes people into squares, or for that matter bricks? Why can't being a square be just one more way of being human among others? We may not want them in jazz, but we may need them—or even want to be them—when we're not doing a sax solo.

I said earlier that backlashes produce counter-backlashes. My favourite instance of someone transvaluing a transvaluation appear in an obituary I read in the New York Times for the American writer John L Goldwater, who died in 1999. You may not know his name but its possible some of you know of his great work: the interminable series of 'Archie' comics about wholesome suburban teenagers in the small American town of Riverdale.

The obituary described the comics' central character, Archie Andrews, as the 'carrot-topped, freckle-faced character perpetually torn between two loves, one blond, one dark. He was a hapless teen-age Everyman counterpoised to the hyperpotent Superman, who had made his debut just a few years earlier.'

This is a surprisingly revealing comparison: The Everyman is the obvious figure of conformity. The Superman, an idea that goes back to Nietzsche's *Übermensch*, is someone who does his own thing. When Goldwater was asked about his feelings on Archie, he reached for just the term one would expect: 'He's basically a square, but in my opinion the squares are the backbone of America. If we didn't have squares we wouldn't have strong families.'

The mixed metaphor does the job, but it is mixed—the weightless square as part of a strong back- bone. If only he had had a term that could convey not just regularity, but solidity and reliability. If only he had known of the brick.

New Moon

By Gillian Clarke

Venus in the arc of the young moon
is a boat in the arms of a bay,
the sky clear to infinity
but for the trailing gossamer
of a transatlantic plane.

The old year and the old era dead,
pushed burning out to sea
bearing the bones of heroes, tyrants,
ideologues, thieves and deceivers
in a smoke of burning money.

The dream is over. Glaciers will melt.
Seas will rise to swallow golden islands.
Somewhere a volcano may whelm a city,
earth shake its skin like an old horse,
a hurricane topple a town to rubble.

Yet tonight, under the cold beauty
of the moon and Venus, something like hope begins,
as if times can turn, the world change course.
Maybe black-hearted boys in love with death
won’t blow themselves and us to smithereens;

guns fall silent; the powerful cease
slaughtering the weak; the rich will not gorge
as the poor starve. Maybe good men
once more come to power, truth speak,
and words have meaning again.

From left to right: Jessica Swale, Charity Wakefield, Nell Leyshon

Gender and identity in the theatre space

Transcript from panel discussion

Jessica Swale in conversation with Charity Wakefield and Nell Leyshon

Jessica Swale: This is a conversation. It's quite weird having a conversation on a microphone, it feels suddenly very big. This is going to be a conversation about character and identity, about gender, and about the way that we as makers of work, (we are between us writers, directors, and actors) create character, which is fundamentally about identity. But in doing so, how much are we interested in creating new identities and passing them over onto a character, and how much actually are we talking about our own identity? Are we making characters in order to escape from who we are, and trying to be other people? Or are we making characters in order to further explore who we are? And what's our responsibility as makers of stories and tellers of stories? Can I write any character I want, or ought I to be writing about my own experience or experiences akin to mine? Is it appropriate to appropriate?

I am joined up here by two amazing—I was going to say two amazing women, but that is potentially reductive depending on how you look at this discussion this afternoon. Two human beings who I'm going to allow to introduce themselves.

Nell Leyshon: I've got to introduce myself because I'm the only person in the world who can pronounce my surname. I'm Nell Leyshon, I'm a novelist, I began as a novelist, and I wrote a book called *The Colour of Milk* that's been translated into many, many languages. I also write theatre, I came across theatre later. I'm a radio dramatist and I started performing my own work as people last year would have seen. I did a monologue [at this symposium] last year. I've just set up my own theatre company. I've spent sixteen years working with outsider artists, with people marginalized from society but very underground. And I've just started to make work with them. I've set up a company called The Outsiders Project to bring marginalized voices into the mainstream. And last, I'm a board member of the Globe Theatre.

Charity Wakefield: I'm Charity Wakefield, I'm an actor and an actress whose most recent work in Morgan Lloyd Malcolm's play *Emilia* was performed largely in a beard and a mustache, and I identify as she/her.

Jessica Swale: My name is Jessica Swale, I am a filmmaker, a playwright, a theatre director, and a mongrel of various arts. I am primarily a playwright, I wrote a play called *Blue Stockings* which is now one of the most performed plays in the UK and actually in the US too, which is about the first women to go to University and the riots that happened as a result. I wrote a play called *Nell Gwynn* which is on in the West End, which is about an actress who rose to the top, so you can see there's a theme in some of that work about women. But I also make a lot of films, adapting novels and making my own original work. I've just made a film called *Summerland* which is a commercial film but with two women in the lead, which was an interesting journey in terms of how you sell that to companies who say so what actor are you going [to get], how are we going to sell this film, who's the leading guy, and you go, hmm, there isn't one. Alright, so no one wants to give you any money. But I also work a lot for an NGO called Youth Bridge Global making community theatre, which is all about increasing diversity and support for people of all backgrounds, in war-torn and developing countries, just come back from Kosovo doing that. And I have been involved with Time's Up from the beginning.

And in order to start this debate which is about whether gender is important and whether identity is important in the arts and how we might define that and how it might limit or allow us space. I made a film a few years ago called *Leading Lady Parts* which I'm going to show now, it's very short. It's only six minutes long, but it was provocative and I hope that the themes of it will lead us into an interesting conversation.

…

So that was a film that I made a couple of years ago in response to feeling like somebody who was part of Time's Up, and somebody who was increasingly not out of my own choice identified as being female and that was a defining part of my work and how I was always interviewed or perceived or what I was expected to do. I wanted to find a way of articulating all the things I found frustrating about that, both as a writer and as a director, and in terms of witnessing my friends always being put in roles that I thought were nowhere near as interesting as they ought to be.

What was interesting was that whilst at the time it felt really important, when we aired that it had a huge response, it had 25 million views within the first couple of weeks, it was a really big hit. And then when you looked at the comments, it was a lot of people saying thank you for saying this, this is great. And then there was another wave of people, often women, saying, yeah, Tom Hiddleston, I'd love to see him as Mary Poppins, I'd love to see him in all those roles. And we started getting fan mail where people who'd drawn pictures of Tom, in all these different major female roles, saying oh can't he play those roles? Great.

But then the other thing that happened which is much more interesting and why I wanted to share that is that quite quickly the debate changed enough that part of the response was people firstly saying, I don't feel represented by this. You've looked at how I'm marginalized because of race, or because of age, but actually I'm a disabled actress, or I'm regional. Why haven't you addressed all of those things? To which my answer was, it's a short film, it has to be funny. If it's 25 minutes long and we start trying to cover everything, it's going to distort it. Let's get other people to start telling those stories.

But critically, very, very quickly the debate changed, and people started saying this is very much about gender being defined in one particular way. And this addresses what it means to be female in the conventional sense, but actually I don't identify even with the binary anymore. And at Time's Up meetings we started having to ask questions about what it meant to be a group of women, and how exclusive that was. And that's led to lots of questions being asked about whether it's reductive even to think of it, whether this is more divisive rather than a way of provoking debate and bringing everybody together.

So part of my question today is how important is the gender divide or title, and whether it is important to you as theatre makers and as an actor, and what other parts of identity are important, and how important is your own identity in your work. And I want to start off by asking Charity about that, because she spent a year playing a man. And so can you just tell us a little bit about your experience at Shakespeare's Globe, and what you learned from that and what the debate was I suppose.

Charity Wakefield: So for context, I did a play called *Emilia* that was about a female poet who was a contemporary of Shakespeare's called Emilia Bassano, and there's some schools of thought that believe that—she's a known and published writer, but not very well known. And there are schools of thought that believe that she was in cahoots with Shakespeare, and that he might have borrowed some of her work, and that he may or may not have been obsessed with her, and that he may or may not have written about her in his Dark Lady series in his sonnets. So the play is an imagined biography of her life, and it's very comedic, and to up the ante on the comedy we had an all-female cast, so reversing some of the tropes we were just talking about.

And I auditioned for many different parts and Shakespeare is one of the parts, one of the characters that I was asked to audition for and I was very surprised to get the role, I didn't think I'd done a great job. I wanted to play him as this stuttering fool, but they wanted me to be very charming so I did that instead. So interesting, about your question about whether or not it's relevant or what effect it's had on me. I think that I approached it more in terms of playing a particular character, and how to get inside of that character than I did in terms of playing a man. But there are certain physical attributes that you have to work on when playing someone like that. And what could be my own version of this character that's so well known. I was never going to live up to anyone's idea of what this person was. So working on the text, the part is actually somebody else's perception, it's in the view of Emilia, so it's not necessarily Shakespeare, I'm not arguing that that's Shakespeare as he was.

I have never done anything that has required such close audience communication, and I think that the audience reacted to that character, and to a male character on stage, in a way that they react differently to female characters sometimes. And that I had more of a voice inside of that character, and it's hard to define whether it's because it was a man or because it was that particular character, but I felt that it was more of a platform for my own expression than any other character that I've done. But there is something in the physical release that happened when I was playing that character that I haven't had in another job in another part.

So that's a question to myself, why is that the case? Why can I be completely confident to hold court, to make jokes, to make bold choices, to do adlibs as a man, and I don't feel that I can necessarily do that in the character of a woman. Because I was doing that work physically, and that I made him very, I mean I did lots of other characters as well in the play, it wasn't just about that. I think I did eight or nine different characters, and I was constantly changing my costume and coming back on as another character. So it's quite a physical play anyway. And my version of him was quite sprightly and physical and he took up a lot of space in the room.

And I felt a real change in myself walking around as a person after performing him and during the day before performing him. And I had a lot of realizations about how I assume the identity of a woman, and I now, I think I even said to you two yesterday that I don't identify as a woman anymore, which I then thought that's bullshit actually of course I do, but I don't have any answers. All I can say is that from my personal experience is that it's raised a huge question in my own self as to why I perform the behavioral attributes as what I would define as a woman or to be feminine. Why do I do that? No one's told me to, I guess I just grew up copying other people. I don't know. I don't know necessarily [inaudible] different ways to describe identity but in terms of those basic gender stereotypes.

Jessica Swale: Do you, because Nell, you're the first woman to have written for the Globe. But we've also talked a lot over the last few years as people who get referred to as female playwrights, and about how frustrating that can be. How much are you over the gender debate with your work? Because you work with Outsiders and Nell talks a lot about wanting to investigate other people's worlds. So could you talk a bit about that in your perspective?

Nell Leyshon: I'm so over the gender debate in theatre, I'm afraid. Half of the theatres in London are run by women. A load of theatres now have 50% of women on the stage, huge representation of women on the stage. And I think I had a really interesting conversation with [inaudible] who's over there. I fought this battle when I was fourteen. Actually when I was twelve. I fought the battle of what I was going to do. And I'm really interested by this internalizing of these feminine role models that make us smaller and make us pacified, there's something becomes doll-like about us.

And actually my first battle was at the age of twelve when I was told I had to do cookery and dressmaking and the boys were going off looking after farm animals because I lived in the countryside, and making things out of wood. And I wanted to do technical drawing and they said there was absolutely no way, and I took it to county level on my own just as an individual, and ended up winning the battle. And it was actually very interesting, technical drawing. But like everything, the battle was everything. It was because they said no. So I kind of feel, and then I went to work in London, and I was chased physically around a room. And it's really fascinating, because you hear a lot of women my age saying, we were chased around the room.

So I feel quite ambivalent about this whole gender conversation around theatre, but I do find the bravery of the young women has re-galvanized me. And I think it's coincided with my children growing up and leaving home and becoming free again, and being able to do whatever the hell I want, which is incredibly liberating and quite inspiring.

I don't think of myself as a woman writer, and I think probably that goes back to what you were saying about the labels, whether people put a label on us or whether we put a label on ourselves. I see myself as a writer. I probably wanted to be male from when I can first remember. I think that it's something to do with the swaggering and lack of self-doubt.

And in fact I was the first woman to write for the Globe. Bearing in mind, it sounds more exciting than it is. Because the Globe burnt down, so nobody was writing for it for a long time. And I keep pointing this out, but nobody will really believe it. But the really, really interesting thing is that when I was asked to write for the Globe I said no. He asked me to come back and talk to him again and he said, you're the fourth woman to say no. What do I have to do? He was opening the doors and it was the women who were saying no. And we had internalized some kind of voice that said we couldn't do it. And actually I went home the second time he asked me and I thought why am I not doing the thing that frightens me the most? Which is now my new motto, is do the things that frighten you the most. So that was really interesting. And I think often women actually stop themselves from doing things. And as a mother of two sons, I've watched them swagger their way into the world in a way I used to. And I'm trying to re-find that. So I find the young women incredibly inspiring.

I think the reason that I have that ambivalence about gender in theatre is there's a huge focus on what's happening on the stage, and if you're already on a theatre stage you have a voice in society. And I think what interests me is the un-voiced, and the people who don't have that. And that includes the audience. And that also includes other people on the stage. And what really interested me actually is those untold voices. Which is why I work with Outsider artists, because I come across stories, I mean this is more complex and we're going to find out, I believe in it politically, that they should be in the audience, they should be on the stage and they should have their stories told by themselves. Not appropriated by another voice.

So a lot of ambivalence around that. But I still find it inspiring, so I have that ambivalence. But I still find young women's fury—but the only thing that worries me is that there's more anger, not just in your film, but I see more anger from young women about tiny things men do. Like men sit like this. Who gives a fuck that men sit like this? But there's more anger that men sit like this, than Boris Johnson's running the country having lied to us. It's not about personal politics, it's about lying and honesty. And I think that what we're doing is losing ourselves to identity politics and splintering. And there are really big issues, and there are big issues around austerity and class and access to the arts and access to having a voice that worry me a great deal more.

Jessica Swale: And it's partly reflected in the fact that many of us who were involved in the early Time's Up have since taken a step back because actually it became so defining that personally for me I start thinking, but I don't want to be an enemy of a man. I'm far, far more interested in the talks, when I looked at the sheet, and I went, oh yeah, talks about masculinity! Get me in that room, I'm not a man, I want to learn about that experience. And this fluidity of what identity could possibly mean—do you think now that as a writer, are you more interested in escaping your own identity, and investigating other peoples? Or, how much can you separate your own identity and how much is it a way of exploring yourself in the act of writing and creating character?

Nell Leyshon: Well, I've been thinking about this obviously since I arrived here, and this extraordinary place, and started to think identity and started to think about that question. I say I don't write autobiographically. It's not true. What I do is I process it, and it comes out in a different way. The problem is,

for as long as I can remember, I've been a self-analyzer. So I would wake up as a tiny child and I would do a little audit every morning. Have you done this, what have you done, what have you done, where's your conscience?

So my self-knowledge was quite strong from really early, and I felt I had a really strong identity. And I would have said, for a very long time, I know I have a strong personality, and I know I have a strong identity. But it's absolutely not fixed. It's not fixed in any way, is it? Because I could never get into cold water, and I've just been swimming in the lake. So what's happened to me? And we're kind of a bundle of capabilities and potentials. And until we're revealed to those, they're in time and place. I was born in 1961 in Glastonbury. Had I been born twenty years earlier in another country, I have no idea. Well I do, I have a very clear idea. I may have held onto some aspects of my personality, my stubbornness and my will, I'm very willful, strong in some ways. And I would still love lying in bed and self-analyze. But I would have been very different.

So for me, there's not an interesting thing in writing about myself, because I know. And I like to drive without a map. I like to explore and find new things. So I will write stories, but I know where they come from. And I'm warping it, so there's all of that. But I think the act of forcing myself to be silent and sit in a room and write was the hardest thing for me, much harder than getting in the lake. So I think we tell narratives to ourselves of who we are. We're telling narratives about characters, and we're telling narratives about who we are. I am this person, I have this set personality, this is who I am. I was brought up by these bohemians in Glastonbury, and then this happened, this happened. I can change, I am absolutely changeable. And I know when I started wanting to write, I didn't think I could because I talked too much. And now I can be silent for more than five minutes.

Jessica Swale: It's so rare though, isn't it?

Nell Leyshon: Oh my god, publicly shamed. So writing is an escape from the tedium of myself, but I'm hitting myself when I'm doing it. I'm hitting myself in a room, and I'm hitting myself how I have transformed my experience into characters which I imagine is something that you do. So it's complex. But the identity question as well, because I do feel that there's a strong identity, but I know that that's not straightforward.

Jessica Swale: And the fluidity of identity is something that we keep on coming back to, and what that can possibly mean. I was pondering in a very hot state in the sauna at lunchtime whether your identity, the quote about if a tree falls in a forest, whether your identity is to do with the people that you're surrounded with. Because I feel like, in the question of whether I identify as a woman or not, whether that's important, is important in a room full of other people, it's not important remotely when I'm on my own. But parts of my identity still are.

And I think that's one of the interesting transactions about performing, is that you're sharing something with other people. And it's a question for you Charity, which is we're always asked as performers to take on somebody else's identity, and take on someone else's opinions and to present them. And the wall between where you stop and where the character begins is an interesting one. And increasingly, as you become successful as an actor, you have more opportunity to choose the roles that you're playing. So do you have boundaries as an actor in terms of if you're asked to play a character whose politics you radically disagree with, or probably more precisely if you're asked to be in a piece of work with the politics that you don't agree with, where do you stand as an actor in terms of how much you are putting yourself as an advocate for that character's voice?

Charity Wakefield: It depends how much money I'm offered. I don't have to agree with the politics of my character. I have to believe that there is a genuine exploration and debate within something that I'm doing. And that's a huge privilege that I think I have now as an actor. I may not have been able to do that when I was first starting out, I was just desperate for work and to try and learn my craft. I'm always looking for something that is provocative, and that I can talk about and I can learn something from myself. And I absolutely love playing characters that are far away from myself. It's not necessarily helpful as an actor. Because I think sometimes as an actor you need an obvious identity as an actor to be re-employed. And I've been subject to re-employment under the same context again and again, particularly period dramas, particularly a certain type of character, because someone sees you do something, they want you to do it again. You are for hire at the end of the day.

But as someone that grew up with a very confused idea of her identity, culturally, and even I didn't know who my father was for quite a long time. And I didn't meet my real father until I was older and there's a lot of heritage that I still don't know about in my own family. And I moved around a lot as a child, went to lots of different schools really early on, and I think that I found a way to absorb myself into other people in order to get on in life. And a bit like what you're saying, I'm much more interested in what other people are doing.

And I also do a little bit of work on other stuff in my life outside of acting. And I think that it's the exploration, and the understanding and communication of ideas that I'm most interested in. But sometimes you have to take jobs that aren't perfect because you've got to work.

Jessica Swale: Do you think that, we're very used the idea that an actor will allow their identity to seep into the character that they're playing. Does that osmosis happen the other way around?

Charity Wakefield: It depends what you mean by identity. Do you mean like your personality or your politics?

Jessica Swale: In terms of do you feel like you have been personally changed, your identity has been changed by taking on other people's identity?

Charity Wakefield: I think the potential for my identity's been changed by playing Shakespeare. I don't think I'll understand that for a really long time, or what it means. It's unlocked huge ideas about what I might be able to do as an artist. Partly because my revelation with him was that he wouldn't be a very good public speaker, that he would need to write and explore. And I believe that I found a way into him because of thinking about his daily life and the boringness of it, and the way that he would be obsessed with thoughts of other people and go on lots of trips down to the banks of the Thames and meet all sorts of people from different walks of life and have to live that with them to be able to write that stuff, if indeed he was the person that wrote it all on his own.

So that gave me, again it's an unlocking of an idea that you don't have to be perfect to be able to create something, but you do have to start from somewhere. And if you don't have identity or context, whether that's in relation to your own upbringing or in relation to the place that you live, I don't know how you can create work, and I don't know how people can coexist because we ultimately need to understand each other. And I think so much confrontation that happens because of this human need to understand each other, and therefore to define somebody very quickly, when you meet someone and then the miscommunication of those assumptions.

Jessica Swale: Part of the debate this morning was to do with the fact that we're living in an increasingly divisive and divided society where we've got binary oppositions in a lot of ways. And the left is further left and the right is further right, and where's the possibility of crossing over in terms of our ability to listen to each other? And the fact that as people become more polarized it's more difficult to have a debate because it feels like it's harder to sit down with somebody who disagrees with you. And actually I count myself as very much left myself, but I really, really want to talk to people whose politics aren't my own.

And yet you feel very quickly, whenever we're put in that context as a writer as well, that there's an expectation that we might not be open-minded. And that's something as a writer that is increasingly important to mind for a lot of us, and feeling like we shouldn't be limited by our own politics because partly what we're doing and why we're doing it is because we're curious and we want to explore and we want to understand other people. But there is a big question, particularly at the moment, of how appropriate it is to try and take on or to investigate somebody else's opinion, and somebody else's perspective, somebody else's background.

I don't know if you find this, but I find particularly with film writing, that because I've traditionally been known as somebody who might write something period, something with women in it, etc., I will always get asked to write, oh do you want to do another project about the same old white woman who died two hundred years ago who was important for whatever reason. But sometimes I might get asked to write a project about for example Mary Seacole, and I don't know that that's my place to tell that story. Because she has got a very particular heritage. I'm white. I don't think that's my story to tell. But I'm in a position with a certain level of power in the industry where it might be easier for me to tell that story and then open up that debate and promote work and find jobs for people to come and tell that story alongside me. I would not accept that job because I don't think it's my place, and I absolutely think that it should be her story. It should be written by someone of her heritage. But it does mean that it's tricky for stories of marginalized people often to come into the mainstream. Nell, as a writer, how much do you feel like it's appropriate to appropriate, and what are your personal boundaries?

Nell Leyshon: I've got some really strong boundaries around this one. Which is really interesting. Sixteen years ago I started working with people whose stories were being taken by other people and being told by other people. And it seemed, some stories I kind of get it, if there's no one around to tell the story.

It really started when I started working within a very poor, very poor community where I live, which is in a very rich town in the South of England, but is a very, very poor part of it. And I started working with them, and I started developing my own ideas, but typical of me, I just did it quietly and did nothing about it, and didn't talk to anyone, I was just doing the work. I was teaching at the University, and I was also working at a theatre company one day a week. They wanted to write a play about the Gypsy population in the New Forest, which was a huge, huge population who were corralled like animals into these terrible places with no water, no sanitation. Corralled further, corralled further, until they squeezed these people into purpose built houses. And they wanted someone to write a play about it.

So they started talking about what writers, would I write the play, what other writers. At the same time at the University, there was a young guy Kenny, who was writing a script, and I worked out it was about Gypsies, and I asked him if he was a Gypsy and he said, yeah but don't tell anyone. So I said to him do you know any Gypsy writers who could write the play? So I was kind of determined then to find a writer who could tell that story. Because I think the thing is that we don't try hard enough to find those writers, and if they're not there, you have to give them the power and the mentoring so that they can tell their own stories.

Now, that doesn't mean I can't tell your story, I can't tell your story. It's not about self-censorship, I don't think. Because there were people incredibly comfortable telling stories about Gypsies at that time. I've met another woman the other day who wrote a play four years ago which she had absolutely no need. So for me it's, is there someone else who could tell that story. I think that's what it is.

And I think the people that I'm working with now who are really quite extreme, I mean I could imagine myself into a world where my mental health is totally fragmentary. But it's actually much more interesting for me to work with a woman who, you know, who I've worked with for, oh she's part of my life forever I've realized, who has the most blown-apart mental health, very like Neil. Bipolar Neil, with multiple personality disorders. And it's actually much more interesting for me to work with her. And she's now a really brilliant writer. And she writes about her own mental health in the most scalpel-like way, where she separates her emotions and her obsessions with sex, and it's fascinating. And it doesn't mean that I need to write about her. But of course it's interesting.

Jessica Swale: But we do have powers as writers and directors, and I think this is where lots of people trip up and it's something I notice increasingly important to both of us, but in order to, it's why we both teach, because we want to find ways of allowing other people that skill. Because actually increasingly I feel like I want to tell stories that are as challenging to me as possible, but I feel extremely conscious that I don't want to appropriate someone else's story when there's someone far better placed. And I don't want my version of that story to be told, I want their version of that story to be told.

Nell Leyshon: I think it's really important as well to start talking about where that censorship is around identity. And where it is where I really think the appropriation isn't right, because there is someone out there who could tell the story, or whether it's me censoring myself. And I think some of the contemporary movement around identity politics that I share with what you were talking about earlier, I'm in meetings regularly where I'm scared to speak. And that's not right. I'm very outspoken. But I will actually hold myself back from speaking because of the outrage I will cause. And I said earlier, it seems misplaced to be outraged at me for using something.

There's a lack of imagination that understands where I have come from, growing up, the language that surrounded me and what was going on around me and the journeys we take. And I think of my mother's generation, who's now 84, and where she's come from, where she was brought up, and how those views have changed and her identity, and what she understands about identity, her understanding. Identity is two-way. It's what we feel, but what people impose on us as well. There's a big journey for them.

Jessica Swale: And perhaps then that comes down to a bigger question, which is in theatre and film, if, and this is to posit a question for us as a debate over the next few days, which is, is it true to say that the arts has naturally sprung from a rebellion against the status quo, and against the system, and against the people of power?

I remember when I first started working for Out of Joint, which was absolutely socialist, was originally a socialist company when it was begun, Max

Stafford-Clark running the royal court in the 1990's. He said to me, I feel really sorry for you because when I started making theatre, we all had such strong politics because we knew what we were rebelling against. We were hitting up against the government, because it was Thatcher, and all theatre was about down with Thatcher, and that was our identity and that's what gave us motivation and that's why we wanted to stand up and speak, because it was the only way of having a voice.

But now, what are you now? You're in such a difficult, complex time. You don't know who the enemy is, or who the opposition is. And how can you decide, do you have the same sort of voice as a storyteller, because it's now really complicated to know what that ought to be. I thought that was a more interesting place in a lot of ways to be. And this was fifteen years ago, and now I think that has radically changed again.

But it made me think, is theatre so left-leaning, and so originally socialist anyway in its very institution that we're talking about trying to hear from diverse voices, but when have you ever seen a play that's, I could tell you a load of plays where I could say, that is a strongly Labour play. I don't think I could name very many plays where I could say that's a very Tory play.

Nell Leyshon: I've never seen one, I don't know any playwright who has any other politics. And the problem that I have is that the audience is the same. So it isn't changing anyone's point of view. Yes, it's wonderful, we're all in agreement, we leave the theatre feeling wonderful. What I'm trying to do, I built a theatre in May in an old shitty department store with a low ceiling, I mean it's a totally impossible and mad thing to do and a massive department store. And I got a scaffolder, who's one of the Outsider artists that I've worked with for fifteen years, and said can you get some? So he stole some scaffolding, which was spectacular, we've given some money to make up for it. But I built an 80-seater theatre, and we got a recovering drug addict to do the lighting. And it was spectacular, everyone who worked on it. We were mad, it was a two-month lunatic project.

But I built a theatre, and the most extraordinary thing was that 75% of my audience had never been to an arts event anywhere. Never mind theatre, they didn't know what theatre was. It was terribly beautiful I must say. We had in the center this perfect white circle of salt which I variously lit in pinks and blues and ultraviolet. And this perfection of this salt that we groomed. And then as the play went on obviously it was just trampled. But at the very beginning, the audience member occasionally would walk across it and the theatre people would be outraged. How can you do that, how can you touch that perfect circle of salt? But you're talking to someone who doesn't know what the word theatre means.

But I think that that is a model, for me, I'm very passionate about it because I'm just working on it now and building it up. But it's a model of social change. *Emilia* was the most galvanizing play. And probably, ironically, it is one of the things that has given me the oomph to finally do this. But I think it's a vehicle for social change because people are now approaching me, and you can tell, it's a joke really, but when you've got an audience, you can tell. You know that it's a totally new audience and totally excluded from society.

I mean, completely excluded. And people coming up going, I want a bit of what you're doing. And that's got a possibility of change. Because what you're doing is educating as well. And not in a patronizing political way. I'm not involved in the politics.

Jessica Swale: Perhaps that will allow room for people who haven't previously had a voice in theatre. Not just in terms of marginalized groups, but also in terms of a more diverse version of politics. Because if the arts is only one-sided, that does create problems in terms of how are we ever going to have a dialogue which is meaningful about identity when the arts is created—

Nell Leyshon: And the gatekeepers are agreeing with all the playwrights, and the playwrights are all agreeing with the actors.

Jessica Swale: I've sat on lots of boards of theatre companies and been selecting plays, and if there was a play with strong right politics, I have never ever read one in all my time of seeing open submissions, not in my twenty years.

Nell Leyshon: Have you seen one?

Charity Wakefield: No.

Jessica Swale: So there you go, there's a challenge. Maybe someone in the audience wants to write one. We are running out of time. Do either of you have any questions?

Nell Leyshon: I do. We talked about role models earlier, and I'm really, really intrigued to see who your role models have been.

Jessica Swale: Mine?

Nell Leyshon: Yeah. And Charity.

Jessica Swale: That's really interesting because I wasn't really brought up knowing, I don't have any role models who are female playwrights because when I was growing up I didn't know that women wrote plays. I didn't really think about the fact that I was female when I was growing up. I went to an all-girls school and it just was, so we just did everything. So in a way, weirdly gender wasn't a factor because we were all girls. So we all did, there were girls who were good at science, I directed the school plays, other people were good at Maths.

It wasn't until I went to University and suddenly I was the only woman who wanted to be a director on the course that I was suddenly aware that that was a bit unusual. But when I was studying drama, I never had access to work by women because on the [inaudible] syllabus, for example, when you get a list of twenty playwrights and you have to choose work by one of them, there was no women on that list for the entire time I was growing up, which wouldn't happen now.

Nell Leyshon: And what about as a woman? Did you have a role model as a woman?

Jessica Swale: I was going to say my role models actually were, ironically because now he's been cast down by Time's Up for behaving badly, but Max Stafford-Clark was my first employer. And he was a role model for me because he was a very generous supporter of my work and other young people.

Nell Leyshon: So no role models like, because we talk about toxic masculinity, but nobody ever talks about toxic femininity. And I think when I was growing up, I was really aware of toxic femininity right from the very beginning. And it is really toxic. And I think I meant our identity as a woman when you're growing up. You know when—

Charity Wakefield: What do you mean by that, toxic femininity? What specifically?

Nell Leyshon: Just the exact opposite to toxic masculinity. It's a real problem.

Jessica Swale: I think it's a really huge problem. I was thinking most of my role models haven't been—

Nell Leyshon: I think there's just a slightly sanctimonious thing women can do, of [saying] there's toxic masculinity, but all the women are bloody amazing. And we just don't address the other end of it.

Jessica Swale: Well most of my role models aren't women, and I think it's because I often found that I wasn't supported by women, it wasn't the women who were being encouraging, it was the men.

Nell Leyshon: No, I'm really intrigued by that. Charity?

Charity Wakefield: Well, I would say my mother. She would never believe that I would say this, I argue with her all the time, she's a really annoying person, she's very undefined, she's lived many different lives with many different people. She's going travelling, she's taking a gap year from work at the age of 70 in January, she refuses to tell me where she's going. But she didn't really subscribe to any kind of, she didn't subscribe me to any kind of identity, which I think has caused me to want to become an actor, and by mistake really, because her father was an actor. She was one of eight kids, they lived all over the place, they lived with lots of money sometimes, no money other times, in lots of different countries. And she always wanted me not to do this. So almost to spite my mother, she is my role model.

Nell Leyshon: It's really interesting. Because in the film this morning about male role models, I remember being a really, really young woman, I mean I really wanted to be a young man. But I remember looking at women and going, I'm not going to be that one, I'm not going to be that one, I'm not going to be that one. And I remember really clearly going through them until I hit, Glenda Jackson. Oh yeah, I'll age like her. She's gonna be okay. It's really interesting, you can say I'm that type of woman, I'm not that type of woman.

Charity Wakefield: But that's why it is important to include women's stories in theatre.

Nell Leyshon: Absolutely, yeah. I completely agree, yeah.

Jessica Swale: And the more variety there are in the stories that we tell, the more we get out of those stereotypes, because I absolutely agree. And I remember having a crisis at University where I didn't want to be female. All my friends were men, I only hung out with men. And it's because I didn't want to be the makeup-wearing silly person on a diet. That was just what I saw all the time. I went to Exeter so it was just full of people with huge estates on Jersey who just drove really fast cars around and wore pashminas, which there's nothing wrong with that. But it just wasn't me, and I didn't identify with that at all.

I was in the drama department which was full of bonkers people, but they were much more diverse. And I do remember thinking, I just don't want to spend time with women. Maybe I've had enough of it because I went to an all-girls school, but there's nothing interesting to me about being female. I just want to be a maker of work, and it feels to me like if you want to make things, if you want to be an artist, if you want to be a creator, you need a certain level of confidence and somehow that that means like what you were saying about being Shakespeare.

Charity Wakefield: But that's where I would argue that being feminine is not an identity, it's a behavioral affectation, I think.

Nell Leyshon: I'm just thinking now about toxic femininity now. Toxic masculinity is about being big, isn't it? It's being out there, it's violence, it's hitting. A lot of the guys I work with are hard core, they're all out there. But the women shrink inwards. They slice bits off themselves by dieting, by self-harming, and they're getting smaller and smaller. And we're swallowing these tiny role models of what these women can be like. And it is toxic. And it's just as toxic as—

Jessica Swale: And they put their expectation onto other people.

Nell Leyshon: Well yeah, it's whether we accept it. Because we don't have to accept the identity that people impose on us, if we are privileged enough to be in that position. Because our identity is a privilege. And I think we're going to hear some conflicting voices to that later because it's more complex than any of us have ever…

Jessica Swale: But I think that's particularly interesting, I'm sure we'll come back to this, but in terms of body image as well. Which is something that we haven't really addressed. But I was away at Christmas with my Mum, and one of the other women who was with us said to her, oh Jill, you do keep your figure well considering how much cake you eat. And my Mum was really upset, she said, but I really like eating cake, and do you think I shouldn't, do people think—and for the rest of the holiday, she didn't want to eat any more cake, simply because she thought that people would think it was inappropriate and a bit greedy. And I was away last week with a woman who said, oh you do eat a lot. You do eat a lot, how do you stay so thin? You eat a hell of a lot.

Nell Leyshon: I've heard it all my life, yeah. Boring.

Jessica Swale: And I just thought, but there's something very particular about the way women diminish each other, and want people to fit into a shape.

And that's a whole other debate, but I think it's important in terms of identity. But body image is also an increasing part of this.

Nell Leyshon: A huge amount of pressure, a horrendous pressure.

Jessica Swale: We are nearly out of time, we've probably got time for one or two questions or points from the floor if there's anybody who'd like to say anything.

Question: This was really fascinating to hear. So I've never been to 17th century Europe, but I write about it almost every single day. And Jessica now, in your really interesting comments, you seem to almost take it for granted or as self-evident that one shouldn't appropriate stories of individuals of different backgrounds when other people may be better placed to tell those stories. So I was wondering if you could speak in more concrete terms about why you think that's the case. What makes someone better placed?

Jessica Swale: I've often written as characters from a different time than my own. I'm quite happy to say I'm totally placed to write about Nell Gwynn because I don't know many women from the 1600's that are about to write that play right now. For me, the reason for choosing her story is because there's something in the politics of that story which I find really exciting, and I think is really important. And it's about finding a voice. That's what I care about and come back to again and again in my work. About working out what your own identity is and how you voice that. So that's a play about a woman who had no voice finding one. *Blue Stockings* is a play about young women who didn't have the opportunity to go to University and to graduate, but finding the tools to do that and to rebel against the system.

But I've just written a film about a young boy who similarly has not got a voice and finds one. I'm not an eleven-year-old boy, you might be surprised to hear. But I don't mind telling that story. Where I start to think it's difficult, and strangely I don't think I'd feel like this as a novelist, which I'm not yet, one day maybe. But I do as a playwright, and I do as a filmmaker. I feel like the stories that are being told are not diverse enough. And I think it's really critical a) if we're going to survive, and b) if we're going to ever have an understanding of other people, to make sure that as the arts we're more representative.

I live in Brixton. Whenever I go to the cinema, thankfully I'm in a relatively low percentage of white people in the audience because of where I live. I love that, and I love the fact that very occasionally, there's a film where the people in the audience look representatively like the people on screen. That's really important to me. I just made a film, set in World War Two, and it's so much more racially diverse than any village in England ever was. I did it on purpose, it's going to get commented.

But I don't feel very comfortable, and I wouldn't, if I got asked to tell a story about an important, say, Black historical figure. I think there are so many writers who would want to tell that story, and would want to have the opportunity to tell that story, because it's a marginalized voice, and it's a group of people that we don't hear from enough. In the same way that I don't really want to hear some guy's version of Nell Gwynn because it's about female empowerment. I also don't think some white, privileged, middle class girl is the best-placed person to tell that Mary Seacole story for example. But that's because I work with writers of colour who I know struggle to get their voices heard. And I feel like there are so many people that can do that and they ought to be doing that. And I've got loads of stories I want to tell, other stories.

Nell Leyshon: In sixteen years I've got some amazing stories. Extraordinary stories. I've worked with indigenous people in Labrador. The most incredible blind Inuit girl who was a beautiful writer, very poetic. It's her story to tell, why would I tell her story? She can do it. But she needs the wherewithal. I wasn't there long enough to do it. I spent eight years with the Romani Gypsy community. It was a huge privilege. And I got to know quite a lot, and I think I understood a hell of a lot, and I'll never tell the story, and I promised I never would when I went in.

And I think that at the beginning was my personal morality, and my personal political feelings about voices being brought to the table. And that was a decision I made myself. And I remember my literary agent at the time was Pat Kavanagh. And it was when people first started talking about cultural appropriation, and she said, you're not going to be one of those cowards, are you now? Because she knew, I was telling her what I was up to, she was asking. She said you're not going to be one of those cowards, you're going to write that book, aren't you? And I said no, I'm not. And she just couldn't see where I was coming from. But I have no regrets, because it's not my story to tell, and I've got a lot of stories. And I'm really happy that I know that, that I have that knowledge, and it sits somewhere in my bones, and it can stay there. And I'm very happy that it's there.

Jessica Swale: But I wonder whether there's an element of the fact that we both feel very strongly about this issue, is because part of our work is with other writers, and we are encouragers of other writers. There's plenty of playwrights and film writers who don't teach, and who don't work in empowerment. But because we do, it's probably easier for us to be able to say, well I'm not going to tell that story but I will find somebody who can.

Nell Leyshon: I just think it sits ill with you when you do it. I wouldn't do a good job, because I would know. I would know it wasn't right.

Jessica Swale: I don't think if was somebody who had more privilege than you, Nell, if it was a story of a privileged…

Nell Leyshon: It wouldn't interest me anyway if it was someone with lots of privilege. That's just not where my interest lies.

Question: So I'd like to chime in on exactly the same point, because coming from an alteration from my point of view, if we talk about this, it's not quite the same, but if we talk about it from the lens of painting, which is what I do, I've been limited to self portraits. You do portraits of people, and you do portraits of yourself, and there's people who might do portraits of themselves. And so in the painting's there's always a sense that the portrait that I do of someone else, it will by my interpretation. There will be things about them that I will see that maybe they haven't seen in themselves. And of course it would be lovely for them to also to do a self-portrait, and there will be a—so, in painting there's the sense that both are really important. They're just, they're different. And so I saw that, thinking about when you were talking about these boundaries set and my sense was that surely there's room for both, and I understand you're squeamish about it, but…

Nell Leyshon: That's a personal thing. I mean, to have a writer in the family is to have a bomb in a family. Make no mistake, I mean it's really a dangerous thing. And we've had it in our own family where a writer told the story so factually, and I did see the ripples and it was devastating, and that was before I started writing. So I think that probably informed the strength of my feelings, it can be very difficult.

Jessica Swale: But also it's not limiting. Because I say, so for example, I just got asked to tell the story of a man who was considered to be the Black Mozart of his time. And I said no, actually I'm not going to tell that story. Because I really believe that there's somebody who's better placed to tell that story, I just genuinely believe that. And then I found out who's telling that story, and it's a white woman. I thought oh well, never mind. She is actually a composer, and so there's already something that she connects with. But if that was the only story, if that was the only film job going, I might, I still wouldn't do it, but there are, I love to invent things, and I don't feel in any way limited by saying to myself, I'm not going to take on the story of those particular people in those particular communities. I've got no time to say everything I already want to say, and so I don't feel that it's restrictive to say, because there are an infinite number of characters.

Iman Amrani: Thanks for that, it was really interesting. I particularly like the points you made about the younger women. I find that really interesting that it's characterized like that, as a generational thing. Because I feel the same way, I just think that, maybe it's because there are so many young people that are on social media, that the ones who are most vocal are the ones who are taken as being the representation of young people. But I think that lots of young people can't really be bothered to engage with the micro-aggressions and all of those smaller details. I personally find it a waste of time. I'd much rather grapple with the bigger questions, but I don't want to wade into that whole micro aggression arena because it's so volatile. So I've kind of backed off saying—

Nell Leyshon: But that's self-censorship, isn't it, in a way?

Iman Amrani: Well, is it self-censorship, or is it directing your energy towards a place you would rather go? I don't want to waste my time saying that I don't want to engage with micro-aggressions. I want to invest my time in the things I'm interested in, so I'd completely agree with you. And I thought there was another interesting point about role models. And I thought I'd chime in and say that, growing up, I had male friends around me who were doing amazing things, and I happened to gravitate towards them. But I found that I had wonderful relationships with women on a personal level, so in a professional level I'd be mixing with guys, but I didn't find women particularly to be toxic because when I identified that, it was just like any person, right?

Nell Leyshon: Toxic femininity is an extreme, just like toxic masculinity is. I'm just making the point that nobody talks about it.

Iman Amrani: No, of course. I think it was just the point about how women can be toxic, all of those things I think are really complicated. And I thought, I did meet a lot of women that were really great, and lots of men that were really great, and it was more about their confidence in themselves. But it was the men who took me to the level in my professional life, when I reached a certain point where I started to be surrounded by women on a professional level. So I needed those guys to get to a point…

Nell Leyshon: Yeah, when I went for these meetings at the Globe, it was so interesting, and Jess and I talked about this at the time. And he said, basically all the women come into my office and they talk about what they can't do. So they say, I'm not sure I can do that, oh that's a lot of pressure, I don't know if I can really achieve that. And they talk themselves out of things.

Iman Amrani: One hundred percent, I've already had a conversation about that today.

Nell Leyshon: Yeah, and so many of my friends, my work mates have been men, who don't do it, and it's really contagious, and you stop yourself doing it. And I hear women doing it, and occasionally I'll say, to a young woman writer, Jess and I even said one day we should do workshops on it, just in terms of behavioral, really kind, supportive ones, just to say to people don't do that, don't express your doubts when you're in the room. When you've got the power in the room, stand in the big boots and say yes, I'll do it. Deal with the doubts later.

Jessica Swale: And stop apologizing for yourself, it's viral.

Iman Amrani: There was one other point I was going to quickly make, was a question that you'd asked about being able to tell stories. I think that people have way too rigid ideas of what stories you can tell. I mean, I'm doing a series about masculinity. But the things is, when I go into a space, I always without thinking, conscious of my presence in the room, what the room is, it's always been like that because, well maybe because I'm from a weirdly diverse background, I'm hyper-conscious of it all the time. So it strikes me as really weird when people say, oh I never really thought of myself as a man, oh I never really thought of myself as a woman. I'm just like oh okay, that's really interesting because I've always thought of myself as whatever, and then thought, I can make this work. So it's not been something that's held me back, it's like alright, this is how it is, and this is how I'm going to play it.

Jessica Swale: But also as a journalist, you're not excluding the men's voices by going and—

Nell Leyshon: No, you're giving people voice, and that's what was so impressive that's what I love. Is you're giving those guys a space to speak, and people don't, and that's what I've been trying to do. Is give people a place, and say, I'm not telling your story for you. I'll help you tell it, but you tell it. But I get them to perform it, so they're totally raw, so someone like Neil I'll actually get to do a one-man show, perform it. Which is amazing when you see it work. But I think you're giving people space, and you're giving them space to talk, which is amazing.

Iman Amrani: Thank you.

Question: I just want to say something about appropriation, because the issue with appropriation and why it is inappropriate is because like you're saying, there isn't that opportunity for the people who could tell the story better. And there is no doubt that I would tell a story better about working class Britain that someone who is not. Same if I'm telling a story about a young Black girl who grew up in whatever it is. The issue is not that you're taking someone else's story and telling it. It's that that hasn't happened yet for a lot of us. So if we had this equal playing field where everyone got to tell their stories, it wouldn't be an issue. It's only an issue because there's not been the opportunities for people. And that's not because there's a lack of people that want to be in it. So I would say appropriation at this point in time that we are at as humans is inappropriate.

And I think on the topic of identity and art, you can talk about it obviously, but it's hard to talk about it without talking about representation. Because I think it's a privilege to be able to get tired of your identity. Because maybe you've seen so much of it. But for some of us who haven't been represented at all, the revelation of seeing yourself on screen, whether it is as a Black woman or a working class person, is so powerful to the point that I was even unaware of it until maybe this year when I saw Black Panther, which doesn't seem like an important film as it's a superhero film, but I've never seen Africa portrayed in that way. That's not through the white gaze. And that touched me so much more deeply than I ever could imagine.

Jessica Swale: And there is no way, that film could not have been made by a white writing directing team. And it should never be.

Question: No, it couldn't have. And it would have been an outrage if it did. So I get the censorship and the appropriation issue, but you really have to consider maybe if you're tired of it or you have the option, also then what is your privilege? And I think I've been on both sides of it in that I'm a working class girl from a council estate in East London, and I've managed to get into acting, not through drama school not through any of the traditional routes, and made a bit of money, so I see it from the other side as well. I've been on both sides of it.

And also the issue of class in theatre especially. We can bang on about left and right, but at the end of the day, my little brothers who grew up on a council estate in East London don't even vote. Because for them it's the same thing no matter who's in. We don't see stories about that. And some of the experiences I've had growing up on a council estate in East London in the Black community is more right wing than anything I ever see from the Tories. But again, we don't diversify theatre. Maybe if we did, we'd have more of those stories. But not from the Tory, middle class white people that are Tories. It would be from kids on a council estate, showing a very right wing story that we would have never even imagined. So we can't talk about this without talking about class and representation.

Jessica Swale: Which is why there's something quite interesting happening at the moment in film, which is that whilst of course I'm not talking about super commercial, very well-funded mainstream filmmaking, because of people's access to phones, there are now people of all backgrounds in virtually all places have access to a way of recording stories. And so it'll be really interesting to see in the next five, ten, fifteen years, how the fact that you don't need the privilege of training or equipment or money or education in order to be a storyteller.

Nell Leyshon: Or gatekeepers.

Jessica Swale: If you can make work on a phone, which most people have even in a lot of the poorest communities over the world, not all of them but some of them, it does automatically expand people's ability to have a voice. And I hope that that radically changes the landscape.

Question: And I just want to say thank you for passing up on those stories. Because it is our responsibility to do so. And bring people in.

Jessica Swale: Give me your number, I'll send it your way.

Question: No, not even for me, but that is what needs to be done. So thank you.

Nick Blood: I'm slightly nervous of asking a question, because I don't want it to seem like it's critical or something, because I know any piece of artwork takes a hell of a lot of work and I don't think the [inaudible] is on the person making it to get everything necessarily right. But I stumbled across a bunch of articles about middle-class feminism. And I guess what I'm saying is a little bit of help understanding it, because one of the things I thought about watching the film was essentially you've got a bunch of very privileged actors who make a lot of money, who—I'm not saying they haven't had those experiences, but the majority of those people don't have to even audition for roles. And I wondered whether that was just a commercial choice, because you understand those faces mean that you get [inaudible], or whether there was some other reason. And if you had had in all of those *YouTube* comments criticism about middle-class feminism. And also help me understand exactly what that means.

Jessica Swale: It's a good question. I'm not sure I know, although I'm probably a middle-class feminist, so that's interesting. The motivation for making the film with that particular group of people was several fold, and I'll be brief. One, we knew perfectly well that by putting a lot of famous people in a short film, it would get views. And at that stage, which the very beginning of this movement, we thought it was more important for people to see that than to make something which was more representative which wouldn't be seen by anybody. And by making one film, what we did was that was the first film that we made with the group of people from Time's Up.

Everything else, there's been a bunch of other films made since then, none of which had as privileged people in it. But that film allowed us to get some money together to give more filmmakers the possibility of telling more diverse stories, which is what we've been doing. But you can see from the viewing figures that I feel like sometimes you have to compromise a bit between saying, do you want to make something which is mass-available in order to get out a very simple message as a starting point, or shall we make something which would be watched by fewer people.

But in terms of those women and those stories, I wrote that because that's my experience of working with those women and those stories. So for example, the girl who plays the Black Panther joke, so Wunmi Mosaku who's an amazing actress, I had cast her in Gemma Chan's role, and Gemma Chan is the actress who gets called out for being too white. Because I thought that should be played by somebody that it's really important to have, there's been an increasing debate about blackness and degrees of blackness which is really important to have. And Wunmi said to me, I'd love to play that role, where you say I can't give you the role because you're too white, but I'll be honest with you, I wouldn't even get in the room. I'd never have that conversation. People wouldn't want to have a whiter version of me. I'm too black to even be anywhere near being offered those parts. And I said, okay, so I need to write that. I need to write you not even getting in the room, not even being considered. So I rewrote it and wrote that extra bit to give her a new part. So we had Gemma playing someone who's a person of color, but white enough to be acceptable to the mainstream, which you can see by some of the roles she's been playing recently. And Wunmi, who is one of the most formidable and best actresses that I have ever seen, is absolutely astonishing but I've never seen her play a lead role in a movie. And I tried to put her as a lead role in mine, and for funding reasons you need to have someone who's got a bigger profile. And the actresses that will allow you funding, I don't want to talk too much about this, but in brief, when you're making a film, in order to get funding your actors have, it's literally a sort of A, B, C, D, system. Kiera is an AA, or someone is a C, someone is an E, and your film company will say, if you have this actress, we will give you two million because they're an A. But if you want to cast this actress instead, that's okay with us, but we'll only give you 250 grand. So in other words you can't make your film.

Nick Blood: So just quickly then on that point, was that dictated by the BBC or did you create your own ABC system?

Jessica Swale: We did this entirely independently, and then the BBC liked it… This was constructed because that group of women is the group of women that were part of Time's Up. So we were meeting once a week to say, we are the British establishment. And what was happening was every week we were getting in really interesting activists to talk to us about what we should be doing, and how we could encourage, and how we could engage in a debate. So we were all going on marches, etc. etc. And started saying, well it's all very well going on a march, but shouldn't we be using our actual skills? I'm a storyteller, can I tell a story? You're actors, you should be in a story. Let's make a thing. So it happened entirely spontaneously. And then the BBC saw it and loved it, and said, oh we'll put it on our channel, and then it went nuts. But it's a story that I think was important to tell at the time, and now I think that's the beginning of something, and there's a much bigger debate to continue.

From left to right: Iain Martin, Maajid Nawaz, Damian Le Bas, Douglas Murray

The challenge of identifying

Transcript from panel discussion

Iain Martin in conversation with Damian Le Bas, Douglas Murray and Maajid Nawaz

Iain Martin: For those of you who haven't met me, I'm Iain Martin, I'm a journalist and author from London. I have reached the ripe old age of 47, though having covered the Brexit story for the last couple of years as a political journalist I feel about 87. It has that effect. We've got three fantastic panelists for you. We're going to open it up for questions about halfway through, so please bear your questions in mind. First we have Maajid, who is a writer, an activist, and the founding chair of Quilliam, which is a fantastic think tank countering extremism. And he's a presenter of a show on LBC, there's a show on Sky as well. And on the 14th of August he tweeted, "Argh!!! Please stop banning things just because you're offended!!!!" And then he added, angry face emoji. So that gives you a flavor.

Then, we have Damian Le Bas, who is the author of *The Stopping Places: A Journey Through Gypsy Britain*, was the editor of *Travellers' Times*, and his documentary for the BBC, which is terrific, *A Very British History: Romany Gypsies*, was screened last year, I noticed today it's not still up on the iPlayer so Damian kindly said that if you're interested in seeing the documentary, which I would highly recommend, he's going to post you a DVD I think.

Damian Le Bas: Numbers permitting.

Iain Martin: Numbers permitting. But it's well worth doing. Then, we have Douglas Murray. Now, where to start with Douglas? Political commentator, author of nine books in total including co-authored books, books including *The Strange Death of Europe: Immigration, Identity, Islam*. And his next book is out next month I think, which is not remotely provocatively titled at all, it's called *The Madness of Crowds: Gender, Race, and Identity*. So if I could ask you just initially, please just welcome your panel.

Now, we've been given a really, really broad title contemplating identity or some such. The challenge of identifying. So I've decided we've got to try and hone that down to kick things off. And I'm going to begin by asking each of the panelists, Maajid first, then Damian, then Douglas, to respond to my initial question, which is why do we seem to care so much right now about the question of identity?

Maajid Nawaz: Hi, thank you for that introduction. And just for some context, the tweet was actually referring to the advert that was banned by the Advertising Standards Authority for featuring, it was deemed to feature an image of men that was deemed to judge men negatively because it depicted a comedic moment where a man saw some Philadelphia cheese on a conveyor belt and he was holding a baby, and he left the baby on the conveyor belt to pick up the toast with the cheese on it and forgot the baby and the baby went round the conveyor belt, and the other man did the same thing, and then they realized and they ran to pick their babies up and it was all funny, and was Philadelphia cheese, and it was about how nice Philadelphia cheese was meant to be. And how men can't multitask, and how men can't look after babies, and the Advertising Standards Authority decided to actually ban that advert.

And as a man, which is perhaps one of the many identities you will hear from me this evening, this afternoon, is that I felt that that was meant to be a joke, and to ban it based upon this notion that we men would somehow feel offended by it led to a number of things. And one of them was that I think it was a willful selection of one identity among the many identities you could have read into those men. And another identity you could have read into them was fathers. The fact that they were looking after babies in the first place, out together as two men socializing with each other as two men while taking their babies out with them, not leaving with the mothers at home. And why was that not read into the advert? And so to ban the advert I felt was just absolutely a sign of the times really. Anyway, rant over.

In answer to your question, I think that we care about identity so much because in this day and age, contemporary times, it's nothing new, and it's cyclical, and because we're scared, and because fear makes us retreat to the familiar and the common. And it's why you see populism arising everywhere. And it's something which I succumbed to at the age of fifteen, because I was scared, because I used to be chased by Neo-Nazi's everywhere and stabbed at and many of my friends were stabbed, and I was arrested at gunpoint by six police a year before the murder of Stephen Lawrence, falsely arrested on suspicion of armed robbery. And held overnight and released with an apology. But I feel I was racially profiled and, in Essex in those days especially, it was a very dangerous place for people like me to be. So I became scared.

And the Bosnia genocide was unfolding in Europe. And I became even more scared. And as a result of that fear, I adopted a supremacist identity to fight the white supremacism that I was faced with. So I became an angry Islamist theocrat. And that was my adoption of identity politics at the age of sixteen, which stayed with me until I was imprisoned eventually in Egypt for attempting to overthrow Hosni Mubarak—a different story. But I think fear is what does it to us, and we are scared today, if I were to trace it in a very reductionist way, because of the 2008 economic crash, and before that because of the invasion of Iraq. And I think those two things, though it doesn't begin and end there of course, as I said it's cyclical, and it can go all the way back before we were born from our mother's womb, and we cry because we're scared. And we're not used to not being in our mother's womb. So when you're scared, you react. And I think today we're scared, because of the economy, we're worried after 2008, and of course wars in the Middle East have led to the unknown and the uncertain coming to us, and all of that had led to us to retreat into the familiar, and an expression of that fear is populism. And as long as we understand it like that, I think we can begin to try and address it.

Iain Martin: Thank you. Damian, what's your explanation?

Damian Le Bas: Firstly. I would ask if we really are more obsessed with identity now than people have been at various points in the past. And then, I'd think about if we are, why that perhaps is. I most certainly agree with Maajid to an extent on that. But I think about previous obsessions, for instance in Britain, the identity of the British. The theory that the British were a lost tribe of Israel, or previous to that, that they were descendants of Brutus, the escapee from the city of Troy. So that's an obsession with the identity of a people in the world. A need to justify your belief that you're special.

So there's that, I think that Jordan Peterson was mentioned earlier. He talks about other moments in history where identity has acquired a lethal mass, the obsession with it. In Communism, obviously in Nazism. And his theory is that that's when we forget the idea that the individual is sovereign. That our worth as individuals is subjugated to the idea of who you are as part of a group. So that's the dangerous side of groupthink. And I'd agree that certainly that sometimes grows out of fear, out of being scared. I think it can also result from the need to maintain fear for your own advantage. So aristocracies, and royal families, have often been very obsessed with their lineage, and identity as contrasted to everybody else in order to maintain an entrenched position of power.

So I don't think it's as simple as necessarily resulting only from fear. And I'm not certain that we're in a unique moment in terms of obsession with identity. Perhaps we're intrigued or some of us infuriated by the kinds of people who appear to be taking an interest in their own identity, and where that is in the public consciousness, for instance in the arts or… so I think it's a more ambiguous situation than the question suggests, if it's not impolite of me to say that.

Iain Martin: Thank you very much. Douglas?

Douglas Murray: Well thank you Iain, it's a great pleasure to be back with my friend Maajid, and to meet Damian for the first time, and to meet many of you for the first time. I think the origin of this question is quite straightforward. There's a question about everything to do with identity because there's a sense in the West that the story may have run out. I write about this in a chapter in my last book. There have been echoes of it in the last twenty-four hours, if I can say so without abusing anyone. I'm put in mind of this strange pantheism or tribalism, primitivism, all sorts of other things that people engage in if you lose what Bassam Tibi, the German Muslim theologian, describes as the *Leitkultur*, the core culture. There's a sense I think in countries like this one that the core culture's gone.

So what do you put in its place, what do you do? I'm afraid, I regret this, whilst being part of the problem. I said to somebody last night, there's a very interesting polemical work by a Jewish theologian, called "John Lennon and the Jews", I much recommend, about a man in New York, hearing the Hare Krishna going past, and he recognizes the accent of one of them, and she's handing out leaflets like everyone else, and this Rabbi turns to her and recognizes the accent, and he says, where are you from? And she mentions, and he says why are you giving me this crap? You already have a book. Well, we in the West had a book, and in countries like this, we decided never to refer to it or to refer to things that come from it. And we're left in a strange, limbo, this thing, and we've got to do something. So what do we do?

That's the first part of the struggle. Second thing is the problem of very swift diversity, which we're all struggling with. That's not as badly as some people, it might be said. The third thing is that we're obviously in some kind of unsupportable phase. And the unsupportable phase, maybe I can do it in the swift by this. The unsupportable phase is, I'm so proud to be a woman. Good for you. I'm so proud to be a man. I'm so proud to be Black. Good for you. I'm so proud to be white. Can't see it lasting for very long. And it raises and awful lot of questions which are very painful to go through, but which will get addressed at some point.

Final point, if I may, the thing you do to fill the void is the kind of game that is displayed by intersectionalism, by endless discussions of privilege, and where exactly you are allowed to speak or appear in the hierarchy. Something you do in late modernity and capitalism, when our living standards have never been better but we're bored. And it's something to do. And the one thing that I would warn about this is that all of it is itself unsustainable. All of it runs against itself, all of it is contradictory.

And I just would finish by highlighting one obvious contradiction. The endless discussion of identity exists among other things with the following two statements stated simultaneously. You must understand me. You will never understand me. Thank you.

Iain Martin: Right, well we're off and running now. Maajid, Douglas talked about the core culture being under threat. Do you dispute that, or do you reject his framing?

Maajid Nawaz: Well, let's put aside the word threat. It certainly has been for a long while I believe that what I call liberal values, and universal human rights, I believe we have failed from the 90's years of multiculturalism, to assert them sufficiently, in particular among minority communities in Britain, and specifically Muslim communities. As a result, what's happened is a form of relativism emerged to such an extent that I who, according to the intersectional analysis, is perfectly placed to have this conversation, not only because of my perceived identity, but also because of some of the grievances to use, to continue to use the language, that I've had to endure. And including being a victim in a war on terror as a political prisoner, and a survivor of torture.

So I should be, according to the intersectional theory, perfectly placed as the only Muslim man I think even in this room, to have this conversation. And I'm setting it up like this on purpose. Is there any other Muslim man in this room? So that's good. I'm setting it up like this in purpose because the person you're listening to, with all of that that's happened to them, and with the identity that should be perfectly placed to have the conversation about challenging theocratic extremism from within my own communities of which I played a part, quite seriously played a part in, and despite all of that, the very, very prestigious charity in the United States that monitors hate known as the Southern Poverty Law Center, decided, a bunch of white men by the way, decided to list me as an anti-Muslim extremist. And that, I think epitomizes the problem that we've arrived at today. I did eventually sue them and win 3.4 million dollars for defamation.

Iain Martin: Did they pay?

Maajid Nawaz: Yeah, into my personal bank account, tax free, plus damages. But it took me two years, and two years of being blacklisted, my bank

accounts were shut down in America, HSBC refused to bank with me, I was blacklisted from a bunch of grants that I was seeking to do work with including the State Department, and it was all under the last year of Obama's administration and in a year and a half later after that as well.

And at the same time though, to further the comedic situation we find ourselves in, I was probably the only person who was listed as an anti-Muslim extremist by a very prestigious U.S. civil liberties organization, and while at the same time listed in the United Kingdom by Thomson Reuters World-Check, which journalists will be aware of. It's an organization that does background checks for banks and accountancy firms and border control, and others. So if you go to Heathrow Airport what have you, your name will appear on a list that they subscribe to because of Thomson Reuters World-Check. HSBC Bank, when you open an account with them, they subscribe to Thomson Reuters World-Check database. And it's a security background check to avoid banking with people that are involved in or suspected of terrorism finance. So while I was listed in America as an anti-Muslim extremist by the Southern Poverty Law Center, I was listed by Thomson Reuters World-Check as a Muslim terrorist. Right? And again, I had bank accounts shut down and I had to fight this as well. And the problem with UK defamation lawsuits if ever you've had this experience, or been listed in this way, is they don't pay as well as the Americans. So only 140 thousand pounds from Thomson Reuters. I did get myself de-listed from both of them. And it's quite funny, because many years of struggle later, I ended up in a position where I won both cases. But I think they epitomize the problem of this conversation. It's become so polarized, to the point where somebody who's perfectly placed to have this conversation was listed in two diametrically opposed lists as opposite things at the same time by two very respected and subscribed to organizations. And I think we need to just put the brakes on this a bit. Back away, and try and have conversation without shouting at each other.

Iain Martin: But Damian your interpretation of this is, if I read your work correctly is different in that you regard this interest in identity, whether it's new, or it's a resurgence, or whether it's just something that's always been there, you regard this as a net positive, don't you? Thinking about your own background, which you've written about.

Damian Le Bas: Well the real question is whether I regard it as positive or negative, or of greater or less value than any other form of work or writing. And I'm not sure about that. There have been a couple of suggestions made to me since I wrote that book that autobiographical contemplation or writing is somehow self-indulgent. And so I've thought about this, and the idea that the mind ideally looks outwards more than it looks inwards. But I feel that wherever the mind looks is outwards, if you see what I mean. If you're, even self-contemplation is a contemplation of a thing, the self, and it's a question of how you write about that, and whether the writing's interesting, or structured properly or any good. And I think there's a danger that we get hung up on the idea that the subject defines the quality, or that that's what artistry or work is really about. Whereas actually I think it's about things like structure and redrafting and making something compelling, and ensuring that one sentence follows the previous one and leads onto the next one. So I don't know. I'm

wary of the parameters of the debate. And I hope that it doesn't seem like I'm trying to squirm away from it. I'm trying to engage with it, but whilst questioning some of the assumptions that we are… understood.

Iain Martin: Douglas, now isn't it just possible, because you see this in terms of crisis, a crisis of the West, is it possible that you're exaggerating the dangers?

Douglas Murray: Well I hope I am. But I don't think I am. It's an existential crisis, it's a philosophical crisis, it's got all sorts of precursors, one of which I've written about in the past a lot, is the problem of what I describe as philosophical tiredness, of particularly Europeans exhausting themselves with philosophy and a result becoming incredibly suspicious of all ideas. And if you're incredibly suspicious of all ideas, one of the causes is because you can't trust yourself with ideas. And that's why, some of us were talking about this at dinner last night, that's why philosophy becomes this silly little language game, where you're not really addressing the big questions of life and existence. You're playing hermeneutics of some kind. And by the way that causes an innovation which is I think everywhere. Fields running down on themselves. Or as I sometimes put it, find me a teacher at a University, maybe somebody will be contrary in here and say they are one, but find me a teacher at a University who says, every single year the students just come up knowing more and more. It's a challenge. Because if things were going very, very well, it wouldn't be so recognizable. But as I say, my problem is this thing of, what happens when you don't trust yourself with any of the important things? It means you play these games. Basically unimportant games.

Iain Martin: But if we'd had this conversation in say, 1959 about the state of the culture, and then return to it in 1969, you could have diagnosed through what was happening in terms of the demonstrations, the anti-war movement, the changes in the workplace, enormous shifts in terms of gender, major shift in the shape of the economy and technology, talking about the West, and it was commonplace then to say that Western culture was doomed. Just as much as it's commonplace to say that now. What has changed in the intervening decades?

Douglas Murray: Well by the way, can I just pick up one thing of that, there's a lot in it, but let me just pick up one thing. One of the curiosities it seems to me of recently, and I'd love to know what the others think about this. One of the curiosities to me about the identity questions of recent years is this. People may recognize a form of this, but let me try it out in a couple of ways. Gay rights, for instance. Unimaginably improved in the late 20th century, to its position that's historically unrecognizable, and by this decade you get gay marriage.

And then something happens in the last few years. And the image I always have in my mind is, just as a train appears to be getting into the desired destination, just as you think it's going to dock, it suddenly goes shooting off with a new set of steam, it goes off down the tracks and disappears through a barrier into the distance. Suddenly it's portrayed as if it's never worse. Suddenly everything is about being gay. In a way that more than at any point in the past.

Iain Martin: He's gay. He is. He never mentions this.

Douglas Murray: It's not a secret.

Maajid Nawaz: I mentioned it for him, before anyone calls him a homophobe.

Douglas Murray: And my boyfriend mentions it.

Maajid Nawaz: That's not right.

Douglas Murray: What a rumour to start. But I see something similar in other rights movements. So I know that men talk about women, or women about men, because why would the sexes need to get on? But I see something similar in the women's rights thing. Just as it looks like it's never been better and it's never been better. Just as it looks like it might be coming to some resolution, suddenly everything is about gender. Everything's about sex. Everything is the weaponisation of one sex against another. Zero sum game. If the women are going to do better, the men have to be brought down a bit. We have to squeeze some of that famous power out of them. And drink some of it ourselves.

Iain Martin: Maajid wants to respond.

Maajid Nawaz: I just want to say, iconoclasm is a word I used before coming to the stage here, and I think it has really great advantages and it's important because it forces us to question assumptions, and group think and group dynamics that we always go for the lowest common denominator in group dynamics, and social circles, to try and be safe. But iconoclasm has advantages and I think in advancing an argument it's important to be polemical to drive a point home. But the boring truth is, that there is racism, but also identity politics has gone out of control. And the boring truth is, there is homophobia, but also not everything has to be about how gay rights have advanced. And the boring truth is that there is a bit of truth in all of these things.

So to give an example very quickly because I know others want to come in here, but another advert was banned at the same time as this one I described. And it was an advert for VW Golf. The Advertising Standards Authority decided to ban two adverts for the first time using a new law. This just happened this week.

Iain Martin: Well it was a new regulation. Three people had complained.

Maajid Nawaz: Yeah. Three people had complained about the VW Golf advert, and the reason is that it was to try and demonstrate that you can challenge and you can adapt to change. And so it depicted an astronaut. And it depicted a few scenarios. And one of them was a woman on a bench sitting next to a pram, and she was reading a book. And three people complained that she was depicted as a mother. So the entire advert was banned.

Iain Martin: They shouldn't have depicted the man as starting a war though, should they.

Maajid Nawaz: Well, see, there's other elements to this, right? This is why I say there's truth on both sides of this conversation, and it's why I said we need to put the brakes on and just think things through a bit more. Because part of that advert depicted a disabled athlete who was running on a blade doing a long jump. Now, that's representation because we're very ableist, and there isn't enough representation of disabled people. And yet the advert was banned because three people complained about the woman reading on a bench. And so as a result of those complaints, somebody who probably needs more representation on television didn't get it.

And likewise with those two fathers that I mentioned earlier, imagine I was one of those fathers. So replace: there were two white men, but imagine one of the men was a person of color who had a baby. And imagine, it was the same advert, just one of the men was a man of color, right? So the same complaint would have applied, oh this is stereotyping against men and saying men can't look after babies or multitask. And the advert was pulled down. But at the same time what you've done there is removed representation of a man of color on television who doesn't have that representation.

And the reason I give these examples is that intersectional theory, it has its values, but what we're doing is we're taking a sledgehammer to crack a nut, and we're basically, with this entitlement culture, what we're not realizing is things are always multidimensional and everyone has more than one identity. And I think there's a danger, that because we've become so polarized, either we say there's no such thing as racism at all, or everything becomes racist and everything's a micro-aggression.

I was attacked in January by a racist guy. And he scarred me. It was unfortunately for me a few days after Jussie Smollett did his little thing where he faked it. And as a result, no one believed me. And then the police had to release CCTV footage of the actual guy, and I met with Douglas, and he says, I can't believe shit like this happens today. So there we are. But the problem is that there is racism, but not everything is about racism. And I think that's why I saw we need to take our foot off the pedal a bit, which I believe your book's about. And just try and retreat from this a bit, so we can have time to recuperate.

Iain Martin: Douglas, in your new book, you're writing partly about the "woke" concept, of the "woke" corporation if you like, in the way this is now inside HR departments, it's a fascinating development. The thing that fascinates me about it is, listening to the discussions here, is can it ever really be fixable? It seems to me an impossible set of tests to set for a culture, which implies that there is a destination, there is something achievable.

Douglas Murray: Let me give an example of the impossibility of what's being attempted. When this intersectional B.S. that we thought was going to stick at Berkeley went out, which I think happened after the crash, post-2008 thing. I think when the financial system goes wrong, society becomes highly vulnerable to bad ideas. And things that have been in the ether for a couple of decades suddenly come into the mainstream. And nowhere more so than in corporations. It's been written about, as you say, as "woke" capitalism, "woke" corporations and such.

But let me give you an example of a story I hear everywhere in the corporations and in the workplace. And by the way, the only people who don't think this is coming for them is people who are self-employed, because pretty much everybody who works in institutions, banks, legal firms, all sorts of things, they find versions of this. And here's the story I hear all the time. You try to engineer more of something in the firm, and you get this phenomenon. You decide you want more women at the top level. For instance, perfectly desirable, perfectly good idea. You fast track things. And several things happen. The first, by the way, is that thing that's now provable that if you put more women on selection panels you don't increase the number of women who get employed. Who knew?

But the main thing that's of interest is, the first people you give a small leg up to are the women who are just almost there anyway. And they're very likely to be women who are pretty privileged already, if we're going to play the privilege game. You might increase LGBT representation. Well as it happens, the stats all show that gay men and women earn disproportionately more across their career than their heterosexual counterparts. You might call it gay privilege. Now what do you do about that? Everyone's parked that one for the time being. Because really, we should squeeze some money out of the gays and give it to their straight colleagues, who have the misfortune of bringing up the next generation among other things. But let's get onto that another time.

Iain Martin: It would be quite difficult to legislate for that, I think.

Douglas Murray: Sure. Oh, they'll try. But let me give the third one of that, the third one, the more painful one is the one of, we need to increase ethnic minority representation. Almost nobody I can think of, nobody I can think of would deny that as being a good aspiration. But what's the first thing that happens when you do this thing at a faster speed? You get what the conservative party has got, which is you get an awful lot of Black Old Etonians. Now, what you discover somewhere towards the end of this process is you discover you have no class mobility in your firm. What are you going to do about that? You park it for another day. Now I'm not saying that I have the solution to this. But I know sure as hell this is not the solution to all problems that it presents itself as. In fact, it might be exactly the opposite. It causes far more problems than you'd set out with, because it sets everyone against each other. And before you know it, everyone's eyeing each other up to work out whether the other person got there legitimately or illegitimately.

Iain Martin: Now we're going to come to the audience in a second, Maajid first and then Damian if he wants to respond.

Maajid Nawaz: Thank you for indulging me, because I've just butted in again. But Black Panther was mentioned. I love that film. I've watched all the Marvel films. But as an example of where, just back to my theme of these aren't a panacea for all problems. I'm a critic, with a film critic lens on, of that film, not because it wasn't groundbreaking, it was. Not because it didn't need to be done, it did. But I believe that even when things do need to be done and have to be done, you can still critique them to make them better. And one of my critiques of that film is I can't understand, and maybe someone has the answer. I don't, and I'm just saying I don't understand it, it doesn't mean that it's wrong. I just don't understand it. I can't understand why a film depicting what was meant to be the fictional most advanced nation on the planet, by the way, if anyone's seen the film, right? The city-state that was hidden in the mountains, somewhere in the continent of Africa, was hidden for a reason, because it was meant to be the most advanced, technologically advanced powerful nation on earth. And it was too powerful for the world to handle. And so they were keeping their power secret and just acting as guardians. And yet, their way of succession in politics was fight to the death. Not democracy. And they had to kill the contender to win. And yet there was this really civilized nation. And you get Black actors trying to kill each other to become king. And it's written by Black people, right?

And so I'm wondering what's going on here? Why are we reinforcing stereotypes that the way that we govern within ethnic minority communities is through monarchy or tribes or theocracy, and the way we govern in the West is through democracy and liberalism and human rights. And that's what I meant earlier when I said that we have retreated from having these debates about ideas within, and I'll speak about my experience, within Muslim communities definitely. We've retreated from having these conversations that are difficult that we'd be called racist for. But we need to have those conversations.

Iain Martin: Damian?

Damian Le Bas: I think it's a good time to perhaps open it up to the floor. I don't have sufficient knowledge to respond to the points that Douglas was making about things like altering the balance of employment.

Iain Martin: Sure. Our brilliant audience is now only about half an hour away from a drink. And you're going to be really fired up. So please, ask whatever question you have. Try and have a question in it, but a question for any of the panelists. Jacob?

Jacob: I have a question for Douglas. So is there a sense in which, so the idea that intersectionalism and privilege comes out of, as you put it, a state of boredom. So there's no real story. We've come to the end in some way. And that these debates as a result have nothing really deep or really important in them, they're problems of affluence, as you put it. Things that happen when things are going well. Do you recognize that that might be challenging for someone to hear for whom the problems of intersectionalism or privilege feel extremely real, extremely deep, and that while there's a debate to be had about where that comes from intellectually, that the feelings that these people are having are real? And that you saying that there's nothing really in it clashes with their experience of, hold on, I'm really experiencing this to be something real. And if someone comes along and says, well those are pseudo-problems, those are things that arise when society becomes decadent. Do you recognize that that is challenging on a very basic experiential level?

Douglas Murray: First of all, you can feel all sorts of lacks of privilege, but that doesn't mean that the answer is intersectionality. You might feel it and the answer might be something else. So for instance, let's get back to the idea that the normal way in which it's looked about is a power dynamic. Who holds the power, and how can you get more of it? There's all sorts of things to be said about this. But just two very quickly is, first of all, it doesn't seem that the power game is a very accurate way to honestly depict our lives. That looking at the entire experience of human beings mainly through the lens of power, which has been absorbed by the Foucault and other post-Marxist thinkers of the late twentieth century is a dishonest way to look at our lives. That most people, if you said to them, what is it that's meaningful in your lives? Very few people would say power. They might say love, they might say, it came up earlier, family, and all sorts of other things. But the idea that we experience life primarily through power seems to me at the very least to begin with a perverted way of looking at the whole thing.

The second thing is we're dishonest about the varieties of power that exist. And so we have this incredibly basic analysis that power is something, for instance, that's held by elderly white straight males. And that's the only form of power. And so the power redistribution game consists of finding these people, squeezing them, and getting some more of it for other people. And that seems to me to be as I say, a dishonest representation of the situation. But sure, people do feel all sorts of grievances, we all do. The question is whether or not the solution to them lies in this means, and I think it makes it worse. Infinitely worse.

Iain Martin: Next question. Question right at the very back.

Zoe: Thank you. You talk quite a lot about the idea of taking a step back and that we've pushed too far. And I wanted to ask what that means practically, because I think a lot of people who don't just feel but *are* disenfranchised are quite rightly very angry, and we're getting to a point where that anger is manifesting itself through lots of different ways, and I think that's totally valid. And it's all very well and easy for us to say, sitting in this room, that we need to take a step back and think about things. But then that leaves people in the meantime living lives which, I also slightly disagree, which are incredibly experienced through a lack of power, and even though they might not say that they want power, people being forced to leave countries where their families are. Even if you say life is about family, is about all those things, that is affected by who has power. And then leading on from that, my question is there a practical way, do you think, to take a step back? And also, and this is a big question, do you think that humanity and humans are capable of getting to a point in our civilization where there aren't these struggles? Because it seems to be something that is just endemic and part of who we are as a species.

Iain Martin: Maajid.

Maajid Nawaz: Thank you Zoe. So I try and be very careful when I phrase things to try and caveat and then double caveat. I don't know about Douglas and Damian's perspective. I'm not saying, for example, that I don't value intersectional theory in the way I interpret the world, I actually do. And I also am not saying there's no such thing as privilege. I know Jordan Peterson said that, and I know him and fair enough, and I've had good conversations with him. I actually do think there's such thing as privilege, and I also think power does impact the way that our lives are led. What I'm trying to say is what I tried to say before, which is that the truth is always the boring thing in the middle. And so when I say take a step back I mean things like, and keep in mind, by the way, so it's why I listed all my various grievances in life. Because you're talking to somebody that has experienced these things as well. All of the hurdles, whether in my writing, whether in my broadcasting, and you know I'm the only broadcaster of color on LBC. You know, there isn't anyone else. And all my life has been a fight. Actually it feels like I've been in a war for most of my life.

All I'm saying though is, when I mean take a step back, I mean for example, when Boris Johnson appoints the most diverse cabinet in British history, what I, as a man of color, don't expect is for people to say they're Uncle Toms, and that they are somehow native informants and that they are sellouts because they disagree with their political views. And they're using identity politics there as a weapon to deprive people they claim they're defending from having a voice and agency and thinking for themselves, and it's usually white people that are doing this, white leftists. And I've got my own critique about white right-wingers as well. I'm not party political in that way.

But I think we've got to be very careful that if we value diversity, then diversity of thought is one of them as well. And that these people can think for themselves. And if they choose to adopt conservative political philosophy, that's them exercising their own agency. We shouldn't dictate to them what to think, for example, and somehow question their legitimacy when they think so, and to question their ethnic identities or religious identities as a result. But we do that a lot, and I think it's increasing. And I'm asking people to stop that, and just to think about things a bit more.

You know I disagree with Priti Patel on many things, and I criticize her regularly on my show. For example, she wants to instil terror in what she calls criminals, but they're actually suspects because you're not a criminal until you get convicted. But my critique of her, you can criticize Priti Patel without being racist. And to criticize her by saying that she's actually white, and that she's pretending to be Asian, is a racist critique. It's like criticizing Israel, you can criticize Netanyahu for many things, but don't do it in an anti-Semitic way by portraying him next to whatever like a puppet string. You can criticize Obama, but don't do it in a racist way, which is like questioning whether he's American. You can disagree with his policies.

So I think the left in the UK under Corbyn has fallen prey to a form a racism. And that's the form of racism dictates to people of color what to think. Because they deprive them of having their own agency. And so I do fear we've taken this identity thing too far.

Iain Martin: Now I think we've got John Burnside in the front row I think wants to say something, and then we'll take more questions.

John Burnside: I'm getting a bit worried actually. We're talking about individual instances here, but whether or not the individual people who exercise power are of a certain social background or whatever isn't what matters. What matters is how the system itself works, not individual aberrations. It's how systems work, and *who* they work *for*, and what the effects is that matters. What they uphold and what they perpetuate. to use Douglas' word, what they sustain. When I oppose the power system it's not because I want to squeeze some power out of those who have it for my own use, I want to ensure that the power the most privileged people have is not abused. For example, we haven't mentioned it so far, but the biggest political problem we have is what is happening to our environment, worldwide. And the systems that are currently in place are visibly degrading the environment that we have—for the benefit of those who have enough power to avoid regulation, effectively. So—there is more that could be said, but I wanted to say, in essence, that we should much more concentrate on how the systems that maintain power elites work.

Iain Martin: Okay. Now we have some more questions here.

Damian Le Bas: On a quick point of information, white privilege was an entrenched political system itself, and just to clarify that it's not a felt grievance as Akala demonstrates far better than I can in his book *Natives: Race and Class in the Ruins of Empire*. It's a system with an advanced architecture with demonstrable felt results all over the world. So I'd include it in that rather than separating it in a discussion of systems.

Iman Amrani: So I thought it was quite interesting, Douglas, when you made the point about having a bunch of Black Etonians in the cabinet. And you said that's an issue that people then want to park and not address. But then following on from that, Maajid when you made the point that people don't allow Black and Asian politicians to have conservative politics, and how even you described it as being racist. And I thought it was interesting because I think that that's the problem when it comes to the question of diversity and representation, and if you give it value, what is the value in that? And Douglas, you identified there might be a problem in saying we've got a diverse cabinet, but actually everybody went to Eton so how diverse is it really? If it's built as being diverse and representative, how many Black people in the UK or Asian people in the UK went to Eton? And if it's important because they're now going to make policies that are going to affect people from their communities, then that's an issue. And I think that's an issue that people can point out. But if you say that they don't have to be representative, then it is really a question of diversity of thought, in which case it doesn't matter if you elect Black or Brown people, do you see what I'm saying?

Maajid Nawaz: Just in point of fact, Sajid Javid and Priti Patel didn't go to Eton. Sajid Javid is the son of a bus driver, and I don't know where Priti Patel went to school, but I think it was state school.

Iman Amrani: Conservative values, if you're talking about being conservative, right, and you're talking about the people who are most affected by issues to do with austerity, what I'm saying is they're not representative of most Brown or Black people. So if that's the case, okay fine, then if Brown and Black people say they don't represent me, is that racist to say that Black person doesn't represent me, and it's been sold as Sajid Javid will be the first Muslim or from a Muslim background Prime Minister, what's that supposed to mean to Muslim people if he doesn't actually represent them? What I'm saying is that you can't have your cake and eat it, you can't say it's diversity and representation and then say well they don't actually need to represent the community they're from.

Iain Martin: It's a good question, because democracies only function effectively with consent. Which is one of the things that we seem to have lost in recent years, that those who are on the losing side of a debate, whether it be in the US or elsewhere, broadly accept the result. There used to be an assumption that you would accept that your side was out for a bit, and then it would be back in. And it's obviously a problem if large numbers of people feel that the political system in Britain particularly doesn't represent them. We've got loads of questions. I just want to try and get as many questions in as possible.

Question: Hi, thank you everyone. I had a question for Douglas. You started your talk by mentioning that these days you seem frustrated by the fact that you hear, I'm white, and I'm proud of it, and that's a problematic statement. And it is, if someone made that a headline anyway, it would be problematic. But if someone says I'm Brown and I'm proud, or I'm Black and I'm proud, that's a cheerful and rewarded statement. And I think I understand your frustration, in the sense that, well it seems hypocritical to say on the one hand there is equality, and on the other hand privilege, some forms of race or skin color or gender to the other. And I understand your frustration—

Douglas Murray: It's not frustration, by the way.

Question: No? What is it? What do you want to call it? Like you said—

Douglas Murray: I'm pointing out what I think is an unsustainable…

Question: Unsustainable. Yeah. I think if you're in a political vacuum and thinking only in abstract terms, that concern is meaningful to me. It is unsustainable, and it's sort of hypocritical. But we're not in that political vacuum, and we are in a time and place that people have been degraded and insulted for centuries merely for the bodies that they're inhabiting based on race and gender. So coming from that background, it only makes sense to come out and say I'm proud for what I am, for the body that I am living in, because I have to take this pride myself, and I have to define it myself as a way of getting myself out of that history of being degraded and insulted. So yes, in abstract terms, those statements don't have much value. But to contextualize them is to actually give compassion to the person who needs to say, I'm proud to be, for example, a Brown woman.

So that's one thing I want to hear more about your thinking, like what is the unsustainable part. I think it's going to continue until we will have an egalitarian world, however we imagine it. You also mentioned something about affirmative action and the problem with that. And I agree with that, so especially in NYU which is where I'm studying right now. It has been reduced to providing a diversity statement to college. So if you want to get a job at NYU say as a professor, you have to provide a diversity statement. And all it means is that you have to prove that you're part of some sort of minority, which I think is so essentialist and reductive and I cannot see how it would be productive. But I don't think examples right now, like those examples that you provided and what I just said, those are affirmative action not producing the result that we want. I don't think pointing to them would be enough reason to say okay, because there haven't been enough good examples of affirmative action, efforts by the people in privilege and in power positions to include other people.

The very idea of active efforts for inclusion is under question right now. That to me means we have to find better ways to find ways to give a share of the power that we have, and we love to have, and we hate to let go of it, to other people, exactly for the sustainability that you're mentioning. Because at the end of the day, I think, and I'm very pessimistic about everything, I feel exactly because we love our power and we love ourselves so dearly more than anything else, the only way that we can live together is to have compassion. To have to give a bit of the share of the power that we've gained because of our privileges to someone else.

Question: I want to pursue Zoe's point. I wonder about this decision of when a movement is too much, and when it becomes too much. Douglas, you mentioned, and you as well Maajid, that you guys feel that the identity thing's gone too far. You mentioned about the gay movement. Here's my thought on it, and I guess there's a question wrapped up in it. By the time that people usually feel exhausted by these things is because it's gone so far that it has created some kind of semblance of change, that the media's latched onto it and made it trendy. So first, I think there's that. I want to ask about how you feel about the media's involvement in these movements and if it's good or bad, and if that maybe is what your exhaustion is, rather than the actual good that the actual thing is doing, the movement is doing.

Iain Martin: But isn't there a problem inherent in that, in that, and this (apologies for referring to Britain again) is that there are many examples now, particularly in the BBC, of the BBC seeing itself as joining those campaigns? So if you take, a very famous chef in the UK, Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall, big campaign on plastic, he may be right about plastic, I suspect he probably is. I'm not sure that his precise prescription is right, but that now buys him a three or four hours of peak time television leading the war against plastic, proposing policy solutions which are at best disputed. So that might be part of the resentment that many people feel about being lectured, do you see what I mean? In the media terms.

Question: So that is a question for you—sorry, I'm not dismissing what you just said, but I've got a few questions and I'm not sure how to fully articulate them. So first of all I want to ask about what they feel about the media. Also, do you think that it's a form of privilege to be able to be exhausted by said movement, any movement, because I think it is. Because you may be exhausted by the gay movement, but there's still Black trans women being murdered daily in America for being trans. So maybe it really means something to them, when it's got to the point of exhaustion for you, because maybe you are in a position of privilege as a white gay man, for those Black trans women who are dying daily, it's not exhaustion, it hasn't even reached them yet. That's why I'm interested in when it's too much, and who decides it is. And if there is privilege involved in that and be able to even mutter those words and sit here and talk about it.

Iain Martin: We have an answer from Douglas first.

Douglas Murray: So I completely disagree with you, if I may say so. A typical example of the catastrophizing that Black trans women are being killed daily in America. That's just not the case.

Question: How do you know that?

Douglas Murray: None of the stats suggest that that's the case. Sure. If you can show me that every single day in America a Black trans woman is killed, I look forward to you giving—[crosstalk] because it's just—[crosstalk] another issue—[crosstalk] I just wanted to pick up on the first one because it's the one you did.

When we're doing this, we catastrophize everything. It's to say your fight has to be the fight of x group because they're being killed on a daily basis. I'm suggesting maybe this is not a wise way to among other things bring society together. You could, for instance, have a very plausible argument for how to do trans rights. By the way, it has nothing to do with gay rights, just like it has nothing to do with women's rights. But there's a perfectly plausible argument for doing that. And you can do it, and you can argue for that case without saying that for instance, in order to have any other form of justice in the world, you have to speak on behalf of x group because they're being murdered daily. The causal chain I just don't see. But I'd rather, if I may, address the thing that just came up, which I made a note to myself underneath all this, which is, because you asked the question of when people become tired of an argument or something.

How about there are forms of power that some people wield through being oppressed. Which they're very unwilling to give up on because it's very good for them personally. There are two gay men in America who used to run a gay rights organization, it ran down a bit so they took over an organization called the Anne Frank Center for Mutual Tolerance and Understanding. And they used it as a way to attack president Trump for the first year of his presidency, using a dead Jewish girl who they had no connection to as a way to do this. Why did they do it? It's just an ugly form of politicking. But sure, they had a form of oppression status, and they wanted to hold onto it. And they wanted to run all the way with it. And they did quite well with it. And they kept on bashing the American president on every television program. But as I say, what if that is a form of power?

Iain Martin: Maajid?

Maajid Nawaz: I want to answer Iman's question, and I will try and address your too far point as well, thank you for that. Iman asked about representation. So politically I'm on your side. I've never voted conservative in my life, so they don't represent me, for example. But what I would say is that when we look at the data, and there's recent data that's just come out, from, it was a piece published in July in the New York Times, looking at NBC data on Democrats and voting behavior. And there's now also something YouGov published after that just two days ago in the UK.

When we look at the data, we find that actually, let's take the Democrats example. They split, and this is because the primaries are going on, they needed to understand who to pitch the candidates' messaging to. And they split it into three. They said there was a progressive camp, a liberal camp which is where I put myself really, and a moderate camp. I mean if I were American I'd vote Democrat. So you've got a progressive camp, a liberal camp, and a moderate camp. And they found that the first two, and this is where I'm odd, the first two were two-thirds white, and the moderate camp was majority ethnic minority, people of color.

And then they took those three designations and looked at what they cared about. And they found that the moderate camp was more socially conservative. And then when they asked them specifically about race and identity issues and gender issues, the moderate camp, which is majority Black and ethnic minority, said that they didn't want the campaign to become about those things. When they asked them about immigration, I'll send you the article by the way, I've just tweeted it three, for days ago. When they asked about immigration, the moderate camp said they didn't want the campaign to become about immigration. The reasons they gave is they said this hands Trump a victory. But the two other camps, which were two-thirds white, which was the progressive camp and the liberal camp, wanted the campaign to become about race issues, gender issues, and immigration. Whereas the moderate camp, which was majority Black, wanted it to be about jobs and the economy.

And the New York Times published all this, and I made a point at my radio show and I said, the problem here is that we make assumptions about what people of colour care about, and if you asked my Dad he cares about very different things to me, and he's an immigrant. He's from Pakistan, he's a Muslim man, and he prays five times a day. And I care about, for example, challenging homophobia within Muslim communities. My Dad doesn't. He cares about other things. And he has his own perspective of life because he's an immigrant and he's had his own struggles.

So the same data by the way in the UK reflects similar things, that actually people of color are more conservative that we realize and the best example of that is Baroness Warsi. Because Baroness Warsi, I've asked her, Sayeeda Warsi was appointed by David Cameron as the first woman of color Muslim in the cabinet, she's now in the House of Lords. I disagree with her profoundly on many, many things in life. But one thing I asked her was why did you join the Conservatives? And she said Maajid, because I believe in family, business, and I'm socially conservative.

And I said okay, and I understand that because my Dad had a corner shop, which is a stereotype, right? But he ran a News Agents as well as being an engineer in the deserts of Libya, he happened to also have a corner shop. And this idea that South Asian communities in the UK are pro-business because they have been entrepreneurial as immigrants, that they are socially conservative because they're religious, resonated when she gave me that answer. As I say, I never vote conservative, not because I'm dogmatically opposed to it, it just doesn't speak to me. So I'm on your side of this, sorry for the long answer. There are a whole bunch of people from ethnic minorities who identify with conservative values. And they do represent them.

Iain Martin: And your implication was in your tweet a few days ago was that essentially you think that this is the way in which Trump gets reelected.

Maajid Nawaz: If we make it, if in the Democrat primary, which is what the data demonstrates, I'm not prophesizing, I might be wrong, but I did predict that Trump would win the first time around. If we make it about stuff that Ilhan Omar, a lot of the stuff she said about Israel, if the campaign becomes defined by that, which is what Trump wants, then middle America will vote anything but that because they're scared of the Hijabi. It's just a piece of strategic advice.

As for your question, thank you. I'm not saying you should stop. What I'm saying is these are specific examples where it's gone too far and we need to wonder why. If we end up in a scenario where the leader of Her Majesty's opposition is more interested in defending people that have said anti-Semitic things within his party in the name of defending Palestinians and Muslims rather than actually addressing Brexit, for example. Then he indicates to me he's made identity politics more of a priority to him than the thing that will affect people immediately right now on Halloween.

So it's not that it needs to stop. I don't think it needs to stop, and I want to reemphasize in case anyone's misunderstood me. I subscribe to all of this as a general guide in life. I'm not saying it's wrong. What I'm saying is there's a danger that we are either / or on these things, that we polarize the debate. And what I ask people to do is recognize the value of defending the Black trans woman, while at the same time recognizing that there are examples of where it's gone too far and we need to challenge those examples.

Question: But I think that that is an example of privilege within itself, to be able to say please consider this middle ground. It's not as simple as that.

Maajid Nawaz: It happens to be coming from somebody that hasn't had a privileged life. So if you will take that from me, we can—

Question: You do now though, don't you?

Maajid Nawaz: I don't know. I don't know how you define that, because I was just attacked this year as well. So I don't know how you want to define that. I'm living with scars.

Question: Well I guess that goes back to power then, doesn't it?

Maajid Nawaz: So I don't know how you want to define that, I'm happy to talk. But what I will say. But asking people to consider where it has gone too far isn't telling them to stop. And I am the kind of person where I can be friends with this chap here, and love him to bits, while two days ago I was sitting in London with my other dear friend Charles Blow who only writes about race issues for the *New York Times*, and would vehemently disagree with Douglas. But why I do that is because I try and see stuff that Charles Blow says that is really important. And say yes, I recognize that and I see that, right? While at the same time there's stuff Douglas says that I see as really important. And I will only, just to defend him for a bit because I can sense the room is turning against him.

Question: No, I—

Iain Martin: He's used to it.

Maajid Nawaz: When I first left Hizb ut-Tahrir, I'd just gotten out of prison. I was disoriented, my wife left me because she's still a theocrat, she still believes in Caliphates, and I'm estranged from my son who's now eighteen, I haven't seen him for years, and I was abandoned because I left the groupthink and tried to scrutinize it. And then I gave a public talk in London, and it was a standing room only room packed full of Muslims, like Islamists, Jihadis and everyone because that was my following. And I wanted to try and open up this conversation around sovereignty being for God. Because that's what led to Isis eventually, the notion that only God can rule. Which is what we all believed in. And at the time, I still had a huge pull within Muslim communities.

And so there's this packed hall—I was about to give the punchline away. The only white man that came to listen to me was this man. In a room full of Jihadis he sat there in the front row and gave me a chance when I was a write-off. Imagine a Muslim man coming back from the War on Terror, being a prisoner in Egypt, having not yet graduated from university, didn't have a job, my wife left me and I was sleeping in the car. And yet this man, Etonian, came and sat there and gave me that chance to hear me, right? And I felt heard by him, not by the Muslims in the room who actually shouted at me, how dare you become secular? Which was my sin. So in defense of him, there's stuff that he does in his life that really I believe has value that I—

Question: I'm not attacking him.

Maajid Nawaz: No, I know, I don't mean to say you are. [crosstalk] The truth, I think, is in the middle.

Iain Martin: I must apologize, because I did mean, at the beginning, to flag up a trigger warning that Douglas went to Eton. But I totally forgot, so sorry. One last question, because people need a drink, I think we all need a drink. And it's related to something that John said this morning, I loved his stuff about John Arlott, etc., which was about Churchill. But it seems to me that quite a lot of the discussion here is about complexity. And admitting that things are complex. And that sometimes characters exhibit contrasting traits. And John said that Churchill should not really be regarded as a hero. And Douglas I think you had a thought that it illustrated something very particular about this debate.

Douglas Murray: Yes, if I may say so, I may answer the question you didn't ask. Can I say something on this? I thought it was very interesting. Because there was a straightforward answer to the question posed. Why do the British people vote Churchill as being the greatest living, or the greatest Britain ever? And you said in spite of the, disputed, but in spite of 1910, Tonypandy and so on, some miners in there in 1910 now. How could they have voted for Churchill being the greatest, there are all other versions. He drank too much. There's even the—[crosstalk] I'm glad you agree with me on that. Solidarity on that one. But you know there's endless versions [inaudible]. And you think, so how could they have voted for him being the greatest Britain? The answer is, because he saved civilization, and that ought to count in the plus bit. It ought to count for something in history.

But here's the thing, if I may say so. The attack on Churchill has two things that are interesting to me. The first is local, the other is more general. The local one is this. There is an attempt to do this because there is a sense that at the deep root of British identity is a veneration for Churchill. And that if you can get to Churchill you can get to the patriots. And if you can get the patriots, then we wouldn't vote Brexit, for instance. And I just wanted to say something on that, because I think it's so easy to take that bit for granted. And as Margaret Thatcher said in an interview in Sweden in the 1990's, that if every country had taken Sweden's attitude in the 1940's, then Hitler would have won. And that isn't nothing. And it's got to count as something in the great log of human achievement. To have stood alone and to have saved civilization at that moment.

But the real thing that I wanted to mention about this is something underneath that. There's an extraordinary essay from Hannah Arendt from 1954 on the nature of action in a society. And she says, the thing we've always had a problem with as human beings is we don't know the consequences of acting in the world. It's always been filled with terror for us, because we have no way of undoing action. So what's the one mechanism we've ever come up with as a species? Forgiveness. Fast forward to the 2010's. The impossibility of acting in the world is worse than it's ever been, because a young person can wear the wrong dress, photograph themselves, put it out on twitter thinking they're going to get compliments, and they are destroyed. So we're in a world where acting in the world is worse than ever, and nobody spends any time thinking about forgiveness. None. I can't get anyone interested in the subject.

Damian Le Bas: I'm interested.

Douglas Murray: Right. So why don't we work on mechanisms for getting out of this? But so just to return to it, the reason why the Churchill one is so innovating for society to hear is people think that surely to have been the one leader in the world standing against Hitler at that moment ought to count for something, but it turns out that if he did one thing wrong in 1910 it counts for nothing. And people think in that case, and you can have other criticisms of him. My point is that then people look at this and they think, I just can do nothing in the world in terms of action. Because nothing I will ever do could even remotely get to that, so why bother?

Maajid Nawaz: I do sense there's a bit of a double standard at play here, in that a double standard of reverse racism, back to the point of shying away from conversations when they are about people of color, as opposed to the white male who's easy to attack. So if you're going to criticize Churchill, and by all means, he said racist things, then I do believe we have to recognize that Gandhi slept with underage girls and was also racist against Blacks. And Martin Luther King watched a rape. So, in a hotel room. So as long as we contextualize everybody like that, and not just Churchill, and then say, okay actually these great figures were flawed, then I'm happy with it. But if we're only talking about Churchill, the problem there, the danger I'm warning against is that might stoke even more racism rather than reduce it.

John Burnside: I must acknowledge the old moral equivalence argument here: whether or not Gandhi 'slept with underage girls' clearly has no bearing on Churchill's character, one way or another. My point was that, if you must have a national mythology, make it a good one. I happen to think that appointing a 'leader' as some kind of national avatar is yet another piece of classist propaganda, but as I say, if we must have mythic figures, let's choose somebody better.

Iain Martin: Who? Could you give an example?

John Burnside: Well, I could, in all mischief, suggest someone like Alan Turing, whom Churchill willfully allowed to fall into the horrible situation which led to his death. [crosstalk] One informal letter might well have saved his life.

Iain Martin: One question here, and then that's it, we're going for a drink.

Question: It's a big picture question. I'm responding largely to some of Douglas's comments from the beginning. But what it's provoking for me is a larger question about why the conversation has taken the shape that it has taken. And it seems a shame to me. So where I come from, this is a false binary, this identity politics on the one hand, and then things that matter on the other. Why can't we care about micro-aggressions and intersectionality and the discourse that has emerged over the last twenty years, and actually before that because intersectionality actually goes back to Black feminism from the 80's in the United States. Why can't we care about that and care about big picture issues like war, poverty, the environment, all of these things? So for me, we are feeding that same binary that is controlling, it appears the media and the conversations as Douglas was saying, we are living in better conditions in late modernity than we've—who is this we?

Douglas Murray: Everyone in this room, for one.

Question: Absolutely everyone in this room. And that's something we can talk about. But it seems to me that we have an opportunity to talk about something like identity in a different way than the way that has just been regurgitated over the last few years. And that there is in fact, to say that this is not a time of action is I think incredibly, well you're challenging a lot of people and their work and their labor and their sweat. There has been a lot of action in my lifetime. What do you call Black Lives Matter, what do you call the movements, what do you call Time's Up? That is action in the world that is having an effect, I mean occupy, whatever.

Maajid Dawaz: Some of these, the issue is, I've been advocating that it's not a binary, so I'm with you in the desire to try and reconcile these ideas, which is what I try to do. But some of them, they are opposed. And I'll give you an example. In the United Kingdom at the moment in Birmingham, a bunch of religious Muslims are protesting continuously without any retreat outside of primary schools because they're unhappy that there are children in those schools being taught that gay people are their equals. And they're using their religious Muslim identity to claim racism and Islamophobia against the teachers who are saying no, we're going to continue teaching this.

Now, here's an example where a choice needs to be made. And both of those choices, the problem is we want to be anti-racist, and we want to be against anti-Muslim bigotry while at the same time we want to be anti-homophobia. But what happens when 52% as of last surveyed, again back to the data, what do we do when 52% of British Muslims want to criminalize homosexuality in Britain? Not ban gay marriage, ban being gay. Now the survey before that, this is multiple surveys, you can develop, it's not just one random survey, you can develop attitudinal survey after survey. The one before that found 0%, this one was actually done by *The Guardian*.

Question: Sorry, I'm not disagreeing that there are examples, but why are we focusing on the examples, why don't we focus on the other, I know but we're out of time, so I just want to say, you've given a lot of examples. And I'm not saying that there aren't complex issues that we have to take case by case. But it seems that there is a way to talk about what we can do, because you're catastrophizing on the other end. You're saying it's all fear, and that we're losing the core culture, and it's a different kind of catastrophizing.

Iain Martin: Damian wants to respond next.

Maajid Dawaz: I just want to finish the point that—in those scenarios, the nation is being forced to make a choice. And the choice is between telling people that look like me that we don't have the right to use racism and Islamophobia as a shield to be bigots ourselves. And that isn't a minor issue by the way, it's a big political issue in the UK at the moment. It's massive. And it dominates the headlines because of "rape gangs" and because of homophobia and the Birmingham schools. I think you need some context to that situation. It's not a minor thing, choices need to be made. So what I'm saying is that when making those choices in the discourse, many times we can reconcile them and sometimes we can't. And when we can't reconcile them, the choice that I say we need to make is the choice that comes down firmly on human rights and liberal values, despite whoever the person is that's saying the opposite thing.

Iain Martin: Okay the bar awaits, we're almost there, you can taste that first drink. Damian?

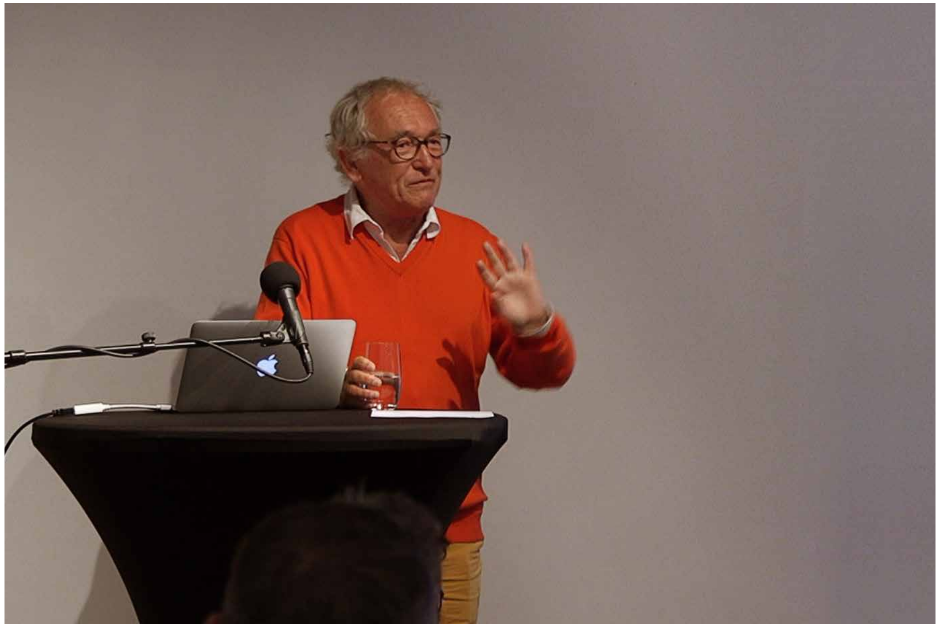
Damian Le Bas: Yes. I think it is very complex. And the most complex thing of all, which has possibly got lost in the mire a bit, which is slightly depressing, seeing as we began yesterday evening with exactly this point, is how complex identity is, and the question of who we actually are, and this debate about the problems around identity and the way it's presented in the media and how we address those issues or choose not to address them. I think it can easily [inaudible] the complexity of that. And we speak about Muslims and intersectional feminists, and in my case it would be the Gypsy community, or someone who's bigoted in this particular way, as if those are simply defined categories.

So I'd like to conclude my relatively small contribution to the panel by referring to an inspirational quote, or at least it is to me, and it's a quote that I identify with from a film from the 1970's called *Penda's Fen* that was written by David Rudkin and directed by Alan Clarke. Please try and see it if you can. But the protagonist concludes, "I am nothing pure. My race is mixed. My sex is mixed. Mixed. I am mud, and flame." And that's the kind of statement that inspires me as a writer. And I find almost physically my blood chilled by the suggestion that we are able to be categorized neatly. I think that's the real enemy. And I also think the internet is to blame for that in ways that we don't have time to discuss.

Iain Martin: Douglas, quick final point.

Douglas Murray: Sorry, I just wanted to return to this issue of history. So I have an editor who says, and it's a very good rule, I encourage people to think about it. Every single age has done things we look back at and it's baffling. How did they not know that was wrong? In the early 20th century, when Beatrice and Sidney Webb and others were playing with eugenics, how did they not know it was wrong? Okay, every age does that. It's my suggestion that this age will be certainly doing it too. So it's worth keeping our eyes open for what they might be. And they might lie in many, many presumptions we make about ourselves. And so the issue about having a fair reading of history isn't just a reasonable thing to do in order to reasonably assess history. It's a plea to posterity to be gentle with us as well, because we know we will be doing things that will look insane in the future. And we ought to be keeping our eyes open for them.

Iain Martin: Okay now, who would have thought that a panel discussion having four Brits would end up with a conversation about Winston Churchill and an argument about who's the greatest Brit ever? Of course, who could have predicted that? But the panelists have been fantastic, and you can meet them up at the bar afterwards, but please show your appreciation. Thank you.

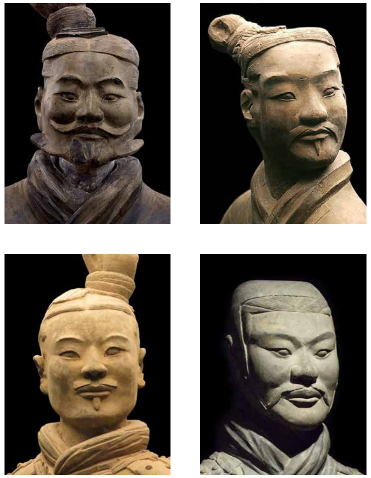


Identity in Art

A brief summary of an impromptu talk given with slides

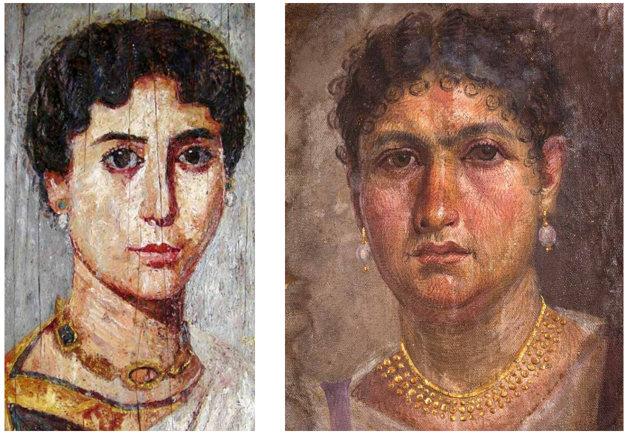
By Julian Spalding

Early ancient civilizations, from Egypt to Peru, China to Rome, were fascinated by the fact that everyone has an individual identity, which could be seen and captured in paintings and sculptures. We immediately recognise the faces of these ancient people with their personal feelings and thoughts, just like ours, facing us across time. All 7,000 soldiers in the First Emperor of China's terracotta army have distinct personalities—not an attribute one might expect of the soldiers of one of the world's earliest dictators. But it appears that individual identity was an essential attribute of every one because this made them real.

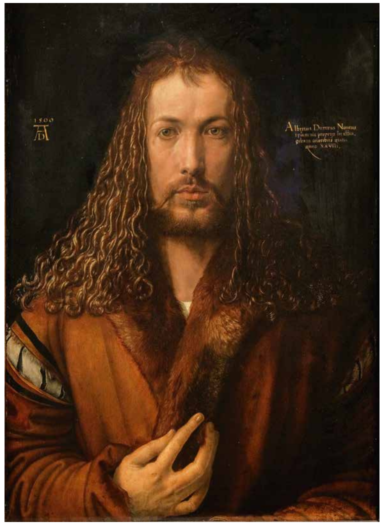


Soldiers in the
First Emperor of China's
terracotta army

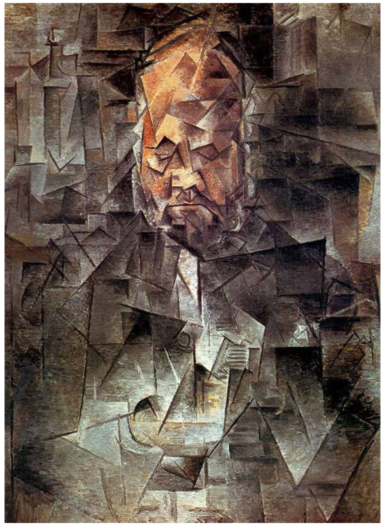
Individuality then largely disappeared from human history. There are no portraits of people, aside from a few half-divine rulers, in the faiths and philosophies of Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Eastern Christianity and Islam. The aspiration of any individual spirit was to be absorbed into the sacred oneness of the universe. The exception—and it was a late development—is Western Christianity. When Christ didn't come back in 1,000 AD, as many believers expected, the Roman church started to commission life-like depictions of Christ to show that he had really existed in time. He lived among the Romans and they discovered portraits of these people and realised that Christ, too, must have had a face. Even more importantly, this face had to be in part the face of God for Christians believed that God had made man in His own image.



Left: Mummy Portrait of an Unknown Woman, ancient Egyptian, about AD160-170. Right: Mummy portrait of Lady Aline, from Hawara, Egypt



Self portrait, 1500
by Albrecht Dürer



Portrait of Ambroise Vollard, 1910
by Pablo Picasso

This belief reached its peak in the Renaissance, which was Christian, not humanist, in inspiration and aspiration. This saw the revival of the art of portraiture and, exceptionally, of self-portraiture. Dürer's self portrait of 1500, painted in the year that many thought Christ would return, is usually seen as an arrogant assertion that man was equal to God in creation. But it is in fact the opposite: an image of profound humility. Dürer faces the Risen Christ facing him and says, 'God made me in His image and with this hand I have done my best to render His creation as faithfully as I can.'

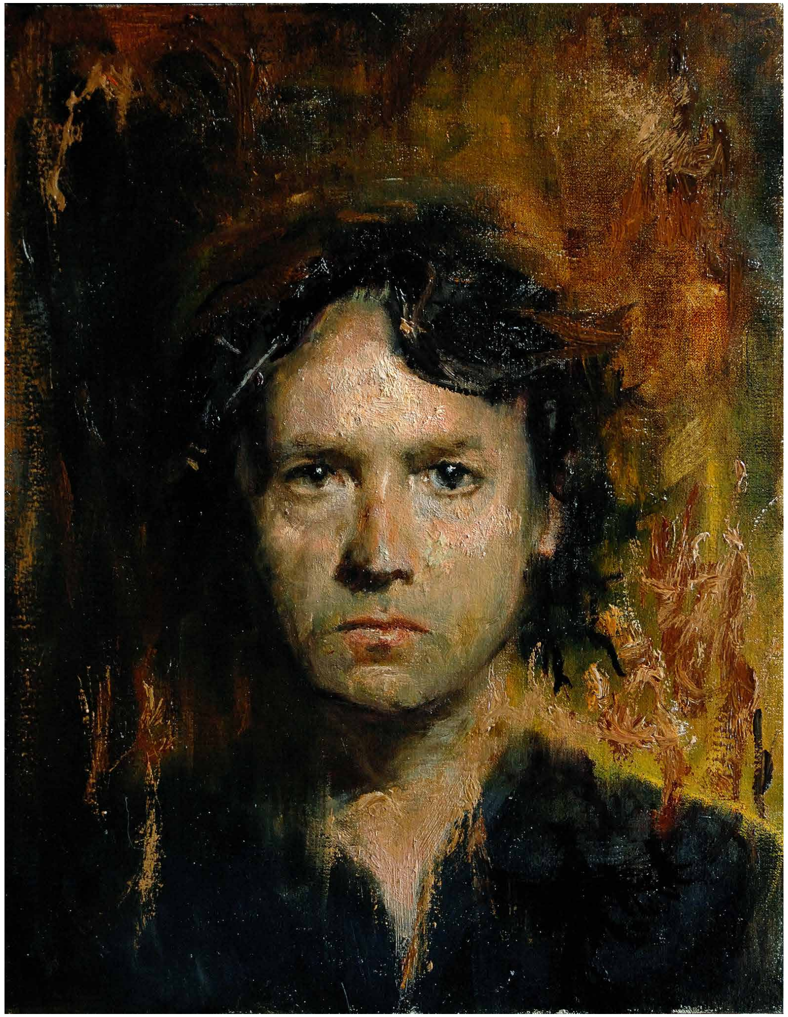
Christians believed you could see God in all of His creation. But more closely their scientists examined appearances, with the help of newly invented telescopes and microscopes, the more they realised that there were realities beyond what they could see. The European Enlightenment gradually stripped away the glow of divinity in appearances and produced, ironically, the darkest art the world has ever seen. Cubism is best understood as a response to the new world picture rapidly emerging from research into the microcosm and macrocosm, into evolution and the human mind. Breaking through the convention of viewing the world from a single unified spatial and temporal perspective—the basis of our perception of individual identity—required considerable bravery. Picasso and Braque sacrificed their own artistic individual identity to build a new language for art. And they painted people with their eyes shut.

The general trajectory of modern art, which started solely as a Western phenomenon, has been towards the disintegration of individual identity. Abstraction, expressionism and surrealism were ways of manifesting human beings' links to hidden forces broader and deeper than appearances. This development became politicised in the mid 20th Century, as the West promoted abstract expressionism as a manifestation of individual freedom, as against the socialist realism advocated by fascism and communism, in which individuality was sacrificed in service of the state. Both led, in different ways, to a restriction in the expression of personal identity in art, and the eclipse of artists, like Edward Hopper, who identified widespread personal feelings in modern times.

Individual identity bounced back in the West after the war, in popular culture, music, fashion and film, and many artists jumped on the bandwagon. Exotic body tattoos crept out from under sleeves and David Bowie turned himself into a work of art on stage. But there were new restraints in the expression of public identity. Soldiers, almost everywhere, began to wear camouflage, not their country's uniforms. National identity was permissible in the safe arena of sport, where a new tribalism flourished. Dress could no longer express rank; even celebrities wore jeans. But among all this egalitarian individualism, wealth re-appeared by stealth, in labels, worn outside, Ray Ban shades and Louis Vuitton bags. And Warhol turned his art into a brand.

A work of art is someone else's feelings and thoughts expressed in sights. Even if it is about the disintegration of identity, it has to be an entity; it has to have form and content, in other words a face and heart. Art looks at you while you look at it. No matter how complex its constituents, art has to have a unity of impact. One of the early challenges in modern art was to rebuild personal artistic identity. This recovery from fragmentation was spearheaded by Picasso and Matisse, and manifested in purely abstract terms by many artists, such as Francis Davison and El Anatsui.

When meeting someone for the first time, you take in their overall 'look', to get a first impression of who they are. The celebration of individual identity was one of the great achievements of early cultures. A new challenge faces artists today—to identify the individual faces of our times, as we come to terms with our numbers and our astonishing diversity. Painters like Alan Lawson, Alice Neel and Peter Angermann are beginning to point the way, depicting looks laced with anxiety.



AJ Lawson
Heterarchy—a self-portrait

From left to right: Dominic Thomas, Cristina Ali Farah, Sukhdev Sandhu

Identity: Post-Colonialism and Post-Truth

Transcript from panel discussion

Dominic Thomas in conversation with Sukhdev Sandhu and Cristina Ali Farah

Dominic Thomas: Okay, so good morning everybody, thank you for joining us for what I hope is going to be an exciting panel, and a continuation from yesterday's events. My name is Dominic Thomas, I'm very happy to be here. I'm a professor at UCLA, where Jacob's been teaching in the department of Germanic Languages for the last year or so, that's how I got to meet him. And I work and write about questions related to immigration, colonialism, race in Europe, and so on. I also work for CNN and cover European politics for them.

I'm going to introduce the panelists in a moment. As I go through the introduction, to outline the ways in which we are going to try and tackle the question of identity through their work, writings, and research. As it's quite obvious as the day went on yesterday, the question of identity of course is riddled with all sorts of ambiguities, fractures, complexities, and actually quite different perspectives on what is arguably the issue of this early part of the 21st century.

What we're interested in looking at today is perhaps another perspective on this through the idea or the prism or the lens of the post-colonial. If indeed for the most part of the 19th century and the early 20th century, the West constructed its relationship as a white man's burden that had to travel and explore and conquer, and civilize, the burden of the post-colonial era lies on those post-colonial subjects who have been given or invested with the responsibility, one could argue the burden even, of having to reckon with that colonial or imperial legacy.

For writers, for those who occupy that very privileged space of literacy, the pen, or one might say the camera, is also a weapon. And it's incredibly interesting to look at the range of post-colonial writers that have been reshaping the landscapes of Italian writing, British writing, French writing. And so, on the panel today, we have to my left here Cristina Ali Farah, who's an Afro-Italian novelist, we can talk and think a little bit more about what that means, born and raised in Somalia, moved to Italy, grew up speaking Italian with her mother, and is going to read a little bit today from one of her works and talk a little bit as well later about the implications of the discourse of someone like [Matteo] Salvini, whose rhetoric has very specific impacts on populations living in Italy who are marked as not being Italian.

To the left, Sukhdev Sandhu, a professor at NYU who works and writes about a whole range of things. Some of his works are focused on the city of London, and I think that's also interesting for us to think about, notions of identity that are localized or restricted to a particular urban space. We think of the way Paris works in that regard, and certainly a city like London. He writes and works around a whole range of issues ranging from the environment, to works about Black and Asian writers and how they've dealt with the city, and specifically also with the question of migration.

I think what's important too in thinking about and looking at these voices is not so much the notion that they give voice to those that have no voice, because that's obviously problematic, everybody has a voice. But the particular way in which their works articulate a narrative that is often lost in the broader national narrative. And you can look at a theoretical work by Paul Gilroy, for example, who many decades ago now, wrote *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, an important work about race and belonging in Great Britain.

And so these narratives, particularly in the case of Cristina, point to an interesting aspect of Italian history and identity that tends to be forgotten in the national narrative, especially in the narrative as it is mythified, mythologized, by political figures like Matteo Salvini, the current minister of the interior. And I think one of the things that's important, both in that writing and some of the discussions that have taken place over the last day or so, is the importance of listening to different people's perspectives and simply listening, not countering them, not always rethinking or challenging them, but just trying to understand and imagine, which is what these creative writers are able to do, how different lives and experiences have been mapped out.

When you look at the work of policy makers, the anonymity, for example, of those that die on Mediterranean crossings, or the anonymity of deportation statistics, the demeaning nature of the discourse of the state, and bolstered as it is by far-right ideologues, in France their names are Zemmour and Finkielkraut, in Germany [inaudible]. Renaud Camus in France has spoken of de-civilization and of the collapse of the West that he attributes to migration, in a context in which poor working-class communities are instrumentalized as the victims of globalization, for whom the greater sphere is that they will then end up being even lower than those newly arrived migrants. Far-right ideology and far-right demagogues who bemoaned a blessed past, a blessed past when the Other knew their place.

And so the question really for us to look at are the ways in which some of these writers have talked about protagonists, and dealt with the question of who are these people? Where did they come from? And what is it that they actually want? And how can you go about, through these works, humanizing these particular narratives? In a week or so, the G7 will gather in Biarritz in France. The optics of that when it comes to thinking about the question of identity, where you all have Trump and Boris Johnson and Conte, who is the representative of the Salvini government essentially, and Putin alongside Shinzo Abe and Macron and Merkel is itself quite disturbing. And every single European election for at least the last decade or so has focused on these three I's: immigration, identity, and Islam. Some, in the introduction the other day, spoke on vitriol coming from both sides. But when we're on things like the discourse of Trump, talking about "bad hombres" and people coming from shithole countries and so on and so forth, we also have to think more carefully about what it does mean to be on the side of the other in the face of this particular discourse.

A couple of other things that I think are interesting for us to think about these works is the way in which they deal with the question of belonging. So we heard a lot yesterday about different micro-identities in Great Britain, that is obviously very different from the French context let's say, where in England, one can be Scottish, English, Welsh, Northern Irish, and Muslim, but also belong to that category that is Britishness. That's not available in France, the colour-blind republic, where a constitution just in the last months removed the word "race" from the constitution, you're either French or you're not. And many have argued that the indifference to race in the constitution is also therefore an indifference to the question of racism.

50, 60 years ago, the Martiniquean poet Aimé Cesaire talked about what it meant to be a part of France, rather than feeling apart from France. And the French word *appartenance* means belonging. And so the question of being an insider and an outsider, of living like Cristina on a hyphen, somewhere between the Afro and the Italian, when one part of that hyphen is always subjected to race and suspicion, to what Salman Rushdie called double unbelonging.

So as we develop this discussion, each participant will speak for five, ten minutes or so, and then we'll have a little bit of a conversation. And our hope is to open it up to you as soon as possible to take your questions and to have them shape the way in which our discussion is going to go. So Cristina is going to start, you will explain what you're doing, and you will also be reading, which is important, in Italian, and we will have up on the screen an English translation of some of the text. Cristina could of course have read it in English, but I think you'll also talk about why it's important to read it in the language in which you wrote it.

Cristina Ali Farah: Thank you, Dominic, for this beautiful introduction. I wanted to tell a little bit how I started writing. So I grew up in Somalia, as Dominic was saying. And my mother is Italian. People often asked me, when I moved to Italy, why do you speak Italian so well, how did you learn the language? And I would say oh, this is my mother tongue, I never learned the language, because I was born speaking Italian. And people in Italy don't know that it is this legacy. It's not a coincidence that I speak Italian, because my father went to Italy as a student, as many people coming from African countries were going to for example to UK or France, he went to Italy.

But the history of colonization was completely erased from the Italian history. And they think that this is also why Italy has never been ready to understand what migration is. Because when I went to Italy it was 1991, and in that year sadly Italians realized it started to be a country of immigration instead of a country of emigration. And so they were not prepared for it. And this is the year when Umberto Bossi with Lega Nord had a lot of consensus from the population. And before there was this division between the Southern Italy that was poorer, and the North, and suddenly the enemy became the migrants, the Black ones who were coming from abroad.

So I felt like it was like language has always been my weapon. Even when I was talking to people, I was trying hard to speak as well as I could because it was my protection, my own way of protecting my identity and to impose my presence, how can I say, in the world, I mean in the Italian population, among Italians. And I always tell this story. I wasn't able to find the language to write for many years because how could I share a story that people were not prepared to receive?

And I always use this metaphor because, after 1991, a huge number of Somalis arrived to Italy, in Rome, and Italians didn't recognize this presence. So they were forced to go away, many of them went to London, went to Canada. And so you have these small communities of Somalis speaking Italian, which is very interesting because Italy would have been the natural place they were expecting to go after the civil war. And Italians were not recognizing them.

So I went to visit some of my family members, and I left very early in the morning, and I didn't use glasses at the time. I'm short-sighted. I wanted to put my contact lenses on and I dropped one of the lenses, I couldn't find it. And I was hurried, and so what I did was I left with one lens on one side. Anyone who is short-sighted knows that you feel as if your gaze somehow you can see other people, but you feel as if you also are protected by this veil of seeing. And not seeing is something that… and so I arrived in this diaspora with this double perception, very neat on one hand, and very confused on the other.

And I use this as a metaphor also of identity, and I found this very beautiful quotation from a French philosopher whose name is Helene Cixous and she says:

'Not-to-see is defect penury thirst, but not-to-see-oneself-seen is virginity strength independence. Not seeing she could not see herself seen, that's what had given her her blindwoman's lightness, the great liberty of self-effacement. Never had she been thrown into the war of faces, she lived in the above without images where big indistinct clouds roll.'

And so this is somehow my relationship also with the Italian world at the very beginning, this kind of distance and proximity at the same time. And in the first book what I tried to do was, for me, there were three characters, and how you define yourself, how you root against, when you have lost all your points of reference. And the characters of my novel look for the answer to relationships. So they tell their story to somebody which is outside his own world and inside at the same time. Somebody is outside and somebody is inside. So I think that identity is always different. It's related to the person you are talking to. So I'm a different person if I talk to Dominic, for example, or if I talk to somebody who has my experience, or who has a completely different experience.

But the piece that I wanted to share with you is from my last novel, the title of the novel is *The Commander of the River*. And I don't know how to say it, but it's like a coming of age story of an eighteen years boy who was raised in Rome. There are a lot of people now that were born in Italy, they are Black, but they are not recognized as Italians. In Italy there is also this kind of problem because citizenship is not a right that is recognized to people who are born in Italy but have parents from different origins.

So in particular in this chapter, he meets a boy who is older than him, his name is Liban. And he doesn't speak Somali anymore, and his mother is in Somalia. But he cannot talk to her, because he forgot the language. And so he asks the protagonist, Yabar, to call the mother with him together. But Yabar thinks that he doesn't remember the language and he doesn't want to translate for him. And so they go in this call center and he tries to speak to the mother of his friend. So I'm going to read this in Italian.

…

Dominic Thomas: Thank you so much, Cristina, we'll come back to that, and I'm sure there will be some questions. Sukhdev Sandhu, over to you.

Sukhdev Sandhu: The word catastrophism came up yesterday. It's a great word. It's quite libidinal, everybody loves a good catastrophe. But I guess one of the things motivating some of my work—actually I was really interested in Caribbean and Asian writers who were interested in Medieval poetry and were making connections, such as people like Wilson Harris between the rainforests and the jungles in Guyana, and the syllabic crunch and what they saw as the poetry and politics that they found in Medieval poetry. They felt that the centuries in between formed a kind of false history. This somehow spoke to me.

And I came across a quote from Richard of Devizes, this is almost a thousand years ago, and he's talking about the difficulty of recruiting for the crusades. And it's a problem because apparently people don't fight like they used to. And he says the problem is that especially in the cities, there's too many actors, there's too many effeminates, there's too many strolling players, there's too many girly men, and there's too many Moors. And again, it's almost a St Augustinian approach to the city, the city is a place of mixture, of métissage, of mutability, of weirdos, of conviviality, of pleasure, of licentiousness. And that's dangerous. And in the midst of all this, there's both the reality and the specter of ethnicity.

But already, nearly a thousand years ago, nine hundred years ago, there's too many wonks. And they're not good for the military morale. They're insufficiently patriotic. And the more you look into it, there's always too many. Whether it's in the Elizabethan period, whether it's in the eighteenth century, however many foreigners, outsiders, whatever constitutes the outsiders, it's the gas that is released by your own imagination, your own phobias of them.

In all my writing, I think I was just bored. I was both bored and lonely because I think I was bored by both the indifference to, sometimes the hostility towards migrants, and also the celebration of them as new, as infusers of new vitality or new blood or new rhythms. And I guess I've always been scared of the new myself. And, I mean I'm a very old soul. And so it didn't resonate with me. And a lot of the most resonate experiences I had, I remember doing a project with Zimbabwean refugees in Glasgow. And there was a guy called Abel Miller. He was talking incredibly lyrically, and he said I've got nothing, my family I don't know where they are anymore, I had to flee in the middle of the night, and here I'm not allowed to get a job, I can barely eat, I don't have a past, I don't seem to have much of a future, and all I have are ghosts, and I talk to ghosts in the daytime, I talk to them at nighttime, and sometimes it makes me cry, and sometimes they give me [inaudible], they're the only family that I have.

And I felt very comfortable, thinking about migration and thinking about ghosts, and wanting to construct a narrative about migration, which repudiated the now-ism of a lot of narratives. And I suppose I just did it via a literary historiography going back many hundreds of years. But always I found in retrospect being drawn towards outlier writers. Writers that even if they were being published notionally as representatives of a new migrant group or as community spokespersons, often were either declaring or showing in their eyes that it barely was a community. That they did not feel themselves to be representatives of it, were writing in ways and creating noise-scapes that seemed to be at odds and all elbows from what they were meant to be writing about. So whether you call them outlier writers, avant-garde writers, race traitors, reactionaries in some ways, at the very moment that they are being published or being claimed, or celebrated for giving you a microscope into a terrain, a social demographic terrain, they were trying to wriggle out of that.

And it reminded me of something that's come up in a number of conversations as well, I always feel very equivocal about the word community, something that migrant groups, ethnic people, are meant to have. And oftentimes the word community is used in the absence of a community. It's almost a tribute that you're paying to the absence. And all these categories seem to be very immotile. I remember a lot of the writing that I was doing, I was drawn often to autobiographical accounts of pre-migration. And this is common in pretty much every group in every city in every country.

People come often on their own because they're poor and they're trying to save money, and they end up living on the same bed or in the same space with people of different religions, of different backgrounds. They drink whisky just like we do, they do *haram* things, forbidden things. They go to strip clubs, they sing, they booze, they wench away, and often times their women join them and they have to erase those pasts. But I'm drawn to that moment of the pre-community, where there's a new kind of identity emerging. It's an interim time when people are going to places, hanging out in British contexts, with Irish people, people from Hungary, from Ukraine, in some of the words we use these days about salvation migration, or Windrush migration, I don't really recognize a lot of it. Because having grown up in those areas, what I saw was a lot of admixture, a mutual pollution. A lot of carousing on a Friday night when you get the pay slip, the banter in a works bus. Doing stuff which is about a useful splintering of selfhood.

When I go back these days to my family's house, all of that stuff, it's not even a memory anymore. Because capitalism, entrepreneurs, pump into the living room of my parents' cable TV. And it just gives them a constant loop of stuff that is happening in Punjab. They watch nothing else, they hear nothing else. My sister is trying to get my father to use a phone, and he's basically on a Whatsapp group, and again it's Punjab, Punjab, Punjab. And it's as if decades never really happened. And after all the life, all the creolization, all the noise-scapes, all the interactions sometimes hospitable sometimes less so, actually his life is much more monocultural.

So I look back and I hanker for those periods, in a British context particularly in the 1950s to the 1970s, where there was something a bit more vulgar, a bit awkward, a bit less documented in the literature. Certainly not the kind of stuff that sociologists try to write about, or that is talked about by spokespeople. But it's those layers of conviviality, admixture, strange anecdotes, awkward adventures. I think that's the process of developing new forms of identity. And of course, all of these words seem to me really fuzzy. We're all awkward agglomerations, in my case of religion, of caste, of class, of small-townishness, of nationhood, a nationhood which is always relational and contextual in relation to the commonwealth, or to the European Union, or to the Atlantic, or to wherever.

And every time any label is given to you, it feels both like maybe a homecoming, or a partial shelter. But I squirm and I wriggle from them all. And those are the writers to whom I am drawn. Those awkward buggers, male and female, are the ones that I want, especially in this period where migrant histories are being more and more narrated on screen and on writings. A useable past, a righteous past is being constructed. I want a more vulgar, dissenting migrant past still to be there, available.

Dominic Thomas: I find I remember from school either in England or in France, the time when you have geography classes, they were always teaching you about where things were, and I thought that was really boring, rather than asking why are they there? And in your work, in all your writing, all this language of terrain and boundaries and scapes are there. And you keep coming back to cityscapes, migrant-scapes, sex-scapes, whatever they happen to be. But for you, are those ways of thinking about, like is each 'scape' an identity island?

Sukhdev Sandhu: One thing I'm really not interested in so much is debates around migration and identity which emphasize economics. I'm interested, mostly, in the imagination. And there comes a point in somebody's life, in the middle of the night, or cumulatively building up when they say, enough. I can't be here anymore. I don't want to be here. This thing which has built up, the geologies of settlement, it's not enough. It's not usually the poorest people who migrate. They can be very poor. But the poorest people don't have access to those levers. So it is always a fantasy, a romance, a whisper of a new life, a new rhythm, a new tactility that you're hungering for. And there never was a home. I mean my parents, like many parents, have these fictions about where home lies. Where is the foundation of your being?

But in that village, there's so much beef, there's so much whisky, there's so much fighting. There's so much rollicking and adventuring, and we forget that some of us went off to Mexico at the start of the 20th century. Some of us, in my own family's life, they went to Australia, they went to Hong Kong, they went to China. And we deny even those mobilities to ourselves in order to prop up a narrative of solidity that we then contrast apparently to the dangers and the awkwardness of being in Britain. But at both ends, we were kind of unstable in a way that sort of worked. And we lie to ourselves. And I guess I'm just interested in bad migrants. Not virtuous ones, not ones that need cultural philanthropy, not ones that can be utilized in order to rejuvenate whatever host community that they go to.

Dominic Thomas: For Cristina, especially with the Italian language, and also with the French language, there's this one word to talk about it all, it's immigration. It means both the physical movement from A to B, and it's also the "ethnic and race relations realities." There's no separate term. And the Italian language really struggles with that. So not only do you struggle to find whether it's *immigrato*, or what category is going to designate these particular people, but time flies. From 91 to today is almost 30 years. You have narratives, your work that's dealing with those that arrived, let's say in the 90s, and are dealing with a particular reality.

They've grown up in Italy, born in Italy, have no other point of reference. Somalia is ancient history, Ethiopia, Libya, etc. That colonial past is very much a *past*. And yet at the same time, as they have come of age, have become adults, Italy continues to be positioned on the frontline of this real but also constructed migrant crisis, discourse, with Lampedusa being on the frontlines of new arrivals that look like those that are there in the diasporic communities. And so how do you reconcile those transgenerational questions in your work? And then also I'm obsessed with talking about Salvini. What is the impact of the Lega going global in Italy, relinquishing the notion of the North and becoming this Pan-Italian structure to talk about the question of identity in migration today? And what is the impact then on communities of this discourse?

Cristina Ali Farah: So I think that the most dangerous thing is always the language that Salvini uses. The way he doesn't say nothing, he lies. But you don't have the time, also, but people just absorb what he says, when he talks about numbers of migrants that are arriving. It's not true. And actually, I think that also Salvini was not the most dangerous one. Because before

Salvini there was this treaty with Tunisia that was far more dangerous for migrants than what Salvini is doing. Salvini is very dangerous for his rhetoric and what he is inculcating into the population.

And I think that the only thing to react to this is to find other points of reference in the imagination. I think that writing, for me, it was always important talking about these communities to use different cultural points of references, and mixing them with the Italian culture, and to make them understandable and use also different metaphors. For example, it was very interesting because when I used to live in Italy, there was still a group of Somalis that moved to Italy before the civil war. Many people were arriving in the last years, in the 2000s. And so what was the relationship with the new arrivals, and the people who were there in Italy already?

And it was very interesting, because Somalis are very funny with words, and so the old Somalis, the previous community was called Vecchie Lire, like the old coins in Italy, and the new ones Titanic. Because of the, yeah. But in a way, I thought that if the Somali community, or the previous community, would had been maybe bigger, maybe it will be also a sort of a bridge that would somehow prepare the cities and the country for these new arrivals. So my obsession is always this connection with migration and colonization. That was never linked somehow in Italy. I don't know if I answered well.

Dominic Thomas: No, thank you so much, the both of you. And I'd love to open it up, if we could have a microphone go around the room for as long as Aaron will let us keep going here.

Iman Amrani: I thought it was really interesting the point you made about bad migrants or immigrants because there's definitely something in that. I'm half Algerian and half English. And I was brought up to think that girls didn't have sex, and they didn't go out with guys, and that they definitely didn't smoke, only prostitutes smoke. And I remember going to Algeria as a teenager and going away from my parents and having other friends, and I went to a salon, and obviously all the beauty salons are all hidden from the outside. And when you get inside it's completely different.

So you get the women arriving with a Niqab and everything, they take it off and they'd be like, where's the Marlboro? And it would be like Marlboro Reds, like proper hard cigarettes. And I was like, oh my god, I thought it was just the prostitutes but it's the Niqabis as well. And you'd sit there and then you'd have these conversations in the salon with the girls getting all their treatments done and you'd realize what was really going on. And as an Algerian in the UK, I was so shocked. I was like oh my god you have sex, and you're like you smoke, and you do all of these things. And there was a weird split between being a minority in the UK, where because you're a minority your experience is limited to your family, and therefore it can be controlled much more and then you have a warped image of what your own culture is. And so you start to think that it is something limited to behaving in a certain way.

And so that was really interesting, that point that you made. But I would just add on the thing that I think that, for my dad, it became something that he didn't really think about having kids with a white woman, and suddenly realized that we weren't going to be like him. And that he was going to lose his connection with us. And how could he possibly have his stamp on who we are, and it was enforcing rules in a sense of this is how we speak, this is how we behave, and these are the expectations on you. And I think the hope was at the end, that we wouldn't do what he did, and dilute the culture even more by marrying outside and he wanted us to end up finding somebody potentially who would help grow that community. But yeah. I just wanted to develop on that thing, why do you think there is that, even within the communities, people try and create that image of having a very simplistic culture?

Sukhdev Sandhu: Yeah I mean I relate to feeling incredibly imprisoned as a kid. And being incredibly fearful, being encouraged to be fearful of everything. Anybody, because everybody else is a thief. You can't tell them anything, because they're going to use that information against you, or they'll steal from you, or they'll break into your house. Your relatives, there's always beef with relatives. You can't really share anything with relatives. I found myself just living constantly in a past of icons and symbols and religiosity. Being scared of touch. And I found myself drawn, doing interviews or research, to people talking about the first time I touched somebody else. It works both ways. Sometimes, I was doing a project with older sex workers and they would talk about white and non-white men. Not necessarily wanting to have sex, and not necessarily wanting to talk, but wanting to be touched by somebody.

Simultaneously, I was doing something in fairly rural Scotland, and from about 1920s maybe to about the 1960s, sort of seasonal labor. Onion Johnnies, as they were known, strings of onions selling around. But you had lots of door to door salesman, usually South Asian who would go around. And they didn't speak much English, and would just say silk, cotton, panties. And people who were spending time in nursing homes, people in their 70s, 80s, and they were talking about what an immensity of history lay in that encounter. First of all, you open your door, often in a very rural community. And it really is a big cultural, the liminality is its own. And some of them shuddered and went back indoors, many of them screamed, some of them touched the person. The children often times ran behind the salesman to try and see if they had tails that they could pull. Because a dark person with shiny white teeth had to be part animal.

And at the same time all these other stories came up, and there was quite a few Asian medics in Scotland. And some of the medics were telling me about the first time the patient went in and they saw they had a non-white doctor. And to be both seen by a non-white doctor, and to be touched, or to be naked in front of them, or even partially undressed. Sometimes they just stormed out, or they thought it was a front. That moment of contact was a pathway to some sort of tentative new story.

But yeah. That's part of the control isn't it, of all parents. To create micro regimes of fear anxiety. Which maybe work, and maybe fuck you up, and maybe you run away from and you resist. And it was a very moralistic and religious fear regime, at least in my experience.

Dominic Thomas: And also, Cristina, both of you, to any question if you both want to respond or say something, if not, you say.

Cristina Ali Farah: I just wanted to add something very shortly, that I think that that happens because often outside, you mythologize your culture. You essentialize the culture. Whereas the culture is something that is not stable as identity. How can we talk about culture? So I think that it's very important.

Question: Just following on from that, and also picking up yesterday … I've got four children, so I'm always considering the next generation almost above our own. And I was very interested in what Maajid was saying yesterday about the riots in, riots, I mean protests in Birmingham outside the schools of the, you've got 52% of people, it's basically 'kill the gays,' that's their motto. And these are children in a British school. So we're talking here about parents, but what do you think the role of the state is within these countries, whether it be Italy, France, England, wherever it is, where we have, how can we best integrate those different cultures and help the children, actually, the next generation, to integrate better? And what do you think the role of the state is in that, in the sense, should we say, okay we need to respect that religion, and therefore this is what we should or shouldn't teach? Or do we teach liberalism and try to be open-minded? Which way do you think the state should go on that?

Sukhdev Sandhu: We've talked a lot, obviously the problem is: which state? If you look at the current Italian state, where Salvini strategically chose to be minister of the interior rather than take other political office within the cabinet, as he has very particular notions as to what direction integration is, and what constitutes, and in that subtext, it's very clear who is an Italian and who is not. And so assimilation and integration becomes this hierarchical move towards some kind of conformity that erases any kind of, even possibility of discussion around cultural particularity and so on. And we see that narrative very powerfully in Europe today. That to be a European is to be white, is to be Christian, etc. etc. Which has no correlation with the reality of the geopolitical space and all with the recent experience of many communities.

Certainly, Cristina can speak about the Italian context, but this has been an age old discussion in the French context. I mean the immigration question in France really only starts at 1970, when the borders close, and some are in some are not, some are in with papers and some have no papers. And the whole of the subsequent legislation becomes around integration into a school system that is in theory secular, except a few private Catholic schools and a few other religious denominations that you go to school. There is no religious interference and so on. And yet, when you get to December, there are Christmas celebrations that take place within the confines of the school.

You have seen in France from the late 80s a banning of the headscarf, the veils, the Burqa, and more recently attempts to prevent people from wearing Burqinis. So there is a very specific process through which the state is trying to invisiblize through policy, certain forms of cultural expression and so on. And you could argue that that has rekindled and forced people to reaffirm certain forms of identity belonging. But I think that that question is for the children that are not immigrants, and this is the problem too, particularly in places like France, they are talked about as being second generation, third generation, with different names being granted to them, the combination

I mean, I know the word Beur, the mixture of the word Arab, the reversal of the letters so you become a Beur, you're somehow neither French nor Algerian, or are you both French and Algerian? And then their kids are called the Rebeu, you've taken the word and flipped that around. And it's a designation of an identity to try and categorize these young people. But young people that are born and raised in France.

But what I thought was so interesting was that in 2005 when Sarkozy took over the minister of the interior there were the big riots triggered by these two young kids that jumped into the power station and were electrocuted. Young people from French housing projects, predominantly ethnic minorities, took to the streets to actually do something very French, which was to ask for more integration, more assimilation, and more belonging to the French Republic. Ten years later, some of those young kids were strapping bombs to themselves. So integration failed. Assimilation has failed. And I think that the responsibility is on the state. That was Sarkozy did was completely ineffective, that the socialist government of Hollande was equally ineffective in the ways in which they went about presenting a discourse of who is French and who is not and so on.

Question: Just to push back slightly on that, in Birmingham, using that specific example that we talked about yesterday, what do you think, what does the panel think the answer is there? We have a situation where we have predominantly Muslim children within the school being taught that homosexual relationships are okay. Because that's just an example of a much bigger problem. But it's very specific. What is the answer there? Because clearly we're not doing it right. We've established that. We know right now and what's been happening over the last decades isn't working properly. How do we make sure that the next generation grow up feeling different? And then the next generation after that feeling different?

Sukhdev Sandhu: I don't know that particular instance, and I don't think whatever solution, temporary or permanent in that one is what we're both talking about—I mean I remember, I went to a Christian school that was barely a Christian school, and I mouthed hymns, and I actually sang quite heartily. Of course I was never chosen to be in a choir, so maybe too heartily. I never felt I was being indoctrinated by anything. It didn't feel that it compromised my Sikhism. And at that time, and I don't know what it's like in schools today, it was entirely possible if you, for religious reasons, if you didn't want to take part in religious service, and religious service was more about manners, ethics, possibly versions of liberalism, you're talking about being nice to people. You could just stand by the side, and you don't have to take part.

That seemed for a long time to be standard practice in a lot of British schools. There was no assumption that students, pupils, or their parents would be listened to by teachers or the administrators. So something clearly has changed. We are being asked to participate in the cultures of our schools and be partners. And the blowback from that is when we want more of a say, and it's a say that is antithetical to what the school is trying to or wanted to propose. I also grew up in a period, and again these are useless memories, of where all of us Asians thought of ourselves as Asians rather than our various Hindu, Muslim, Sikh categorizations. And where a lot of us actually thought of ourselves as Black. And that was a political category, an internationalist category, one that was also affiliated with left politics.

And I guess what we're seeing, and I suppose it happened in the late 80s, I guess it dates back to that, is the fragmentation of those categories. Partly according to theology, things get smaller, and smaller, and smaller. We're both in an era, seemingly, when people use phrases like "we're in an era." So sorry about that. But an era where the sincere politics of difference are very much in evidence. But I guess myself, in which I felt almost a bit weird being on this panel, I find myself, maybe I'm just a bit too old, a bit indifferent to all of that. And the languages that I'm most interested in these days, in relation to identity, diversity, politics, are to do with the relationship between humans and water, humans and animals, humans and trees, humans and being alive. Our relationship to the dead and the undead. And to me, the most urgent questions about identity and the future of us as people, and the planet actually are huge and are macro. And I feel reigned back in, shackled to a bunch of important, significant discourses, but that I feel are just frolicking in a bubble land of inconsequentiality. Compared to all the other stuff.

Dominic Thomas: But to be very honest, I don't have an answer. And I think that's part of the problem, is that we're wrestling with these kinds of questions. The real, of course we might agree that the very basic values of a society are to protect different individuals from different orientations, expressions, etc. And that when you identify a problem with that, or an intolerance to that, it has to be addressed if it is genuinely the foundation of that particular society. But

you also in your question brought up the responsibility of the state. So what I see on many political leaders behaving irresponsibly when it comes to that particular, so when Nicolas Sarkozy calls young ethnic minorities, underprivileged kids scum, *racaille*, that's not helpful. When he encourages the police to throw a teargas grenade in a mosque, that wasn't helpful either. When Boris Johnson talks about people walking around with letterboxes on their heads, looking like, when they wear Burqas, it's not helpful. That's not either promoting any kind of space of healthy discussion can take place.

Question: First of all, thank you very much. A really stimulating discussion, lots of interesting points. I wanted to pick up on Sukhdev, some of the things that you said. I'm particularly interested in the bad migrant, a messier narrative, which I found quite compelling. And I suppose, well I can't remember your exact words because I couldn't write quickly enough. But this sense of a more porous, imprecise narrative of what those things mean. And I was struck by this thought which I haven't really thought through properly, but that there's always this danger that this great liberal project just recolonizes and usurps the migrant narrative, perhaps accidentally as it goes along. Because of a very human desire to classify and organize.

And that even potentially, when those stories are, migrant stories coming from migrant communities, there's the danger that a colonization of the simulacra, because people don't really remember everything, they remember bits of their past, and bits of where they were from. And who chooses those stories? Is it your mother that remakes that story? And I know my Spanish mother came with an entire fantasy land of what Spain was and what it had done for the world. And apparently we invented everything. And so I'm interested in how there's always this danger, there still all this simulacra that's recolonized, and it's almost that you feel that the colonial project hasn't ended. It's reliving itself out in a strange new way, perhaps because migrant people want to be accepted by the host, want to shape themselves in a way they feel is acceptable, not vulgar or crude or messy or awkward, but in a way that is acceptable to the white liberal. And then there's this weird repeating of colonialism, but it's happening in a much more complicated or weird way. I haven't really thought this through, but anyway. I don't think that's a question either, it's more of an observation, sorry.

Question: I was interested in your thoughts on this, because I think it does come from this idea of not necessarily just a messy story, but a story that doesn't fit into what us as immigrants into a country would like to think of ourselves. Because my mother came into the UK speaking five languages, three of which were Indian languages and two European languages. And started to grow me there, and refused to teach me any Indian languages, was very keen on me not really even having a Birmingham accent, was very keen on me, in the kind of way you were just talking about, almost creating, erasing the part of what she felt was problematic when she went out into the world with her Indian accent, and not knowing the right way to talk or to behave at a party. All of these things that she was finding really painful. And her view of how she dealt with it was to make me into a proper English lady, which may or may not have worked.

And you were talking about being the first person. Because I was very much the first Brown person in the place where I grew up. And that was a protection for me, and my language, and being able to speak well was also a protection for me as well. It was before people started feeling under threat because there were lots of us, too many of us. And so I wonder what your thoughts are on that. It's something I don't hear. I don't hear about this kind of shameful, I think, if in terms of what the story we want to tell about ourselves as immigrants, that story doesn't fit really. What do you think of that?

Cristina Ali Farrah: Thank you. So also to come back with what you say on your comment, I think that the migrants want to be accepted. Why your mother forgot her languages, because she didn't think that it was something important. And then we go back to the responsibility of the state, as you were saying before. So if you don't feel that you can share this kind of knowledge that you have, either you refuse it, or you essentialize it, and you just become as if you were never, you were more than what you have been if you were in your own country. So yeah, I think that for me in my case, it was very important because to go back and read songs and to nurture this kind of connection with Somalia, but not in a nostalgic way. Just a way, using these stories and these songs and this kind of knowledge just to interpret reality, and the surrounding reality, which was very different from what those stories were talking about, and the language they use. So it was somehow a way also to feel comfortable in the new environment. But then again, I think that it's also a responsibility of the school, of the education, to make space, make room for this kind of knowledge, and not to erase it, and not to make everything homogenous somehow and equal, not equal but in small boxes as we were talking, saying yesterday.

Dominic Thomas: And I can't help but think, going back to your question, the question about education as well, is that for so many of the young protagonists who ask these questions in France or elsewhere will say that the aspiration or the promise going back to colonialism is that if you learn the language, if you do this, you will be French. And the reality is quite different from that. And that constant multigenerational push against the suspicion of bi-nationalism, of bi-belonging and so on, leads to a creation of what we know in post-colonial theory as this third space, where you create this resistance and identity which of course is a self-reinforcing mechanism, because it excludes you then from the center. You create the periphery as a form of defense. So in France, the 2005 really it takes for the racial identification, [inaudible] movement to come about. It's groups of people coming together with a common experience of discrimination in French society, who come together in order to articulate a greater desire for belonging, precisely not for exclusion and marginalization, but the exclusion and marginalization is the obvious end result of that constant multigenerational pushback against these young people and so on.

Question: Just with reference to that, there was a word that was used that was like what is the answer, and this looking for answers feels like an inherently Western tradition. Whereas what's happening is there is a situation and in a more original context, there is less of a search for an answer, and more individuals who place themselves within situations and then they are the knowledge that works through that situation. And I wonder if there's not the same mechanism in place in the way that we're thinking about identity. Whereas if I listen to how Sukhdev, he's almost describing situations and through living into those situations and the identity emerges. But when there's this desire to apply general category, say, I'm Angolan, which, those are perimeters set up by colonialists anyway, that's fantastical in itself. But this application of a description gets in the way of emergent identities that happen to individuals as they place themselves in situations.

Sukhdev Sandhu: I like that. You're reminding me so much of how pictorially we're represented is just as a set of frozen images, of still images. And that's how identity is reduced to, I know the filmmaker [inaudible] always talks about overused images of a Caribbean woman working in a manufacturing plant. And it's always in a context of migration. She's seen as a menace, or this or that. She's not thinking of herself as a migrant, probably she's not thinking of herself as a Jamaican or a British. She's probably thinking oh, who is going to pick up the kids? A bit late for that. Or I wonder if the guy I'm going to meet under a bridge after work is going to show up. One of my problems with identity is because it seems so lightening. It seems so static. We've become burdened with too much meaning. And something a bit slower, maybe more mundane, kind of accretive, full of drift, ellipses, tragic comedy, mostly comedy, bumbling along. And so much migration is also figured in terms of urban experiences, which obviously I'm very invested in. But I find, actually below all the slogans of antipathy and antagonism, once you get out into a lot of small towns and edge spaces, suburbs, a slightly less apocalyptic vision of many nations in Europe is slowly evolving.

Question: So this is maybe a more personal question that I want to ask, it's not really very political, it's probably not that important but it's something that I've been thinking about a lot. So we've been talking a lot about that second generation and what it means to keep culture, and I'm really interested in the balance between ethnicity and culture and a feeling of belonging and identity. I'm third generation, my grandmother is Japanese. Which, it's weird to be a quarter of something, I think, because you're that one more step removed. And ethnically, in the way that I look and the way that I present. And so to the world, I'm white. But I was brought up culturally with quite a lot of Japanese elements, in what we ate and how we spoke. My mother speaks Japanese, but again didn't teach it to me. Which I'm really annoyed about. And so I personally feel, I don't know how many other people in this room might have the same experience, it's not something you can tell by looking at someone, feel both like I sometimes identify with a Japanese culture, but I feel completely unable to claim it as my own. And sometimes feel like I'm at risk of appropriating something that is actually still a part of me and my own culture. And I think about the choices that my parents made bringing me up, and that they chose Japanese culture and they chose to introduce me, and that feels really a part of me and really important to me. But if I have kids, at what point does it become not a part of you? At what point does that merge and osmose and disappear and become not important? I don't know the answer, and I wanted to know what you thought.

Cristina Ali Farah: Thank you so much for… I am really interested in the concept of post-memory. That was applied for [inaudible], I mean sons and daughters of the survivors of the Holocaust. But I think that this kind of bodily memory that is transmitted not through the language but through flashes of imagery and something that you just feel. And it is passed down to us, even though you are not aware of that. So I think that language and culture are such a complex entities that you cannot reduce them only to language or to specific memories, but something that you receive even though you are not aware of that. So somehow, something it is within you, even though you don't think that you have that.

Sukhdev Sandhu: Can I just add as a minor footnote to that, maybe this is not exactly what you were talking about but I guess it's come up in a number of occasions in the last couple of days. Just as a pet hate of mine, is the use of the word "white" in a reductive way, as if to suggest the same old, the same old, some standardized thing, which is contrasted with apparently more teeming, multitudinous, more interesting non-whiteness. Amongst the many lies that we tell ourselves or the many fake binaries that we have, this idea of a complexity, richness, mystery, mysteriousness, the assemblageness of whiteness, we have to go beyond this lazy implication of whiteness as one without history, one which is not tentacular. And it's just wrong.

Dominic Thomas: And just one last thing that immediately came to mind, so the Martiniquean poet, who was along with Senghor and Damas, who spearheaded the movement of Negritude, and the revaloration of the color and so on, came into an interesting debate with the Nobel prize winning playwright, writer, Wole Soyinka. And Soyinka's position on it, I'm trying to get this right, off the top of my head, was that the tiger doesn't need to talk about his stripes to claim his tigritude, you see. So you have there the two specters of view. So it might be for you, that to claim, or what you see as appropriation, you might not need the "stripes" to be able to claim that Japanese, which is yours, and it's there. Thank you so much to Cristina and Sukhdev.

Sunflower

By Cristina Ali Farah

In the last years many Somalis have been arriving on the Italian costs, after crossing the desert and the sea. I listened to so many stories about the ordeals this people endure. It is not easy to tell these stories. I wrote sunflowers after Xawa, who told me in such a vivid detailed way how she crossed a sunflowers camp. It is also a tribute to the Italian poet Eugenio Montale, whose sunflower poems all Italians know.

Mi hai vista correre tra i girasoli stanotte
il volto raccolto a coppa e le braccia arse
Corolle e gambi come guardie a presidio
dondolano schiaffeggiandomi d'ogni lato
Trovami una radura ch'io possa riposare
le ginocchia gonfie e distendere il ventre molle
nell'humus. La via lattea mi restituisca
memoria di cinque figli lasciati in ostaggio.
Sento la tua voce e mi ridesto, ghiaccio
e sale nei panni umidi, rugiada sulla pelle
Svapora smarrito il terrore notturno
e salto la frontiera, impazzita di luce

You saw me running through the sunflowers last night
face held in hands and arms burnt black
Petals and stems like guards standing watch
they sway, slapping me on every side.
Find me a clearing where I may rest
my swollen knees and sink my soft belly
in the rich soil. May the Milky Way return
the memory of my five children left in hostage.
I hear your voice and wake up again, ice
and salt on my wet clothes, dew on my skin
My night terror evaporates away
and I bound over the border, crazy with light.

We are what we eat

Transcript from panel discussion

Josh Tetrick in conversation with Jacob Burda

Jacob Burda: Okay, so welcome to the second session today. It's a real honor and privilege and it feels very meaningful to me to have someone with us today who is somewhat of a personal hero of mine. Because for me, Josh Tetrick over here, the founder of financing of Just Foods, is someone who I think is a deep philosopher and a deep thinker and who has really tried hard to apply that philosophy in the real word and make a really meaningful difference. I think John Burnside was talking yesterday about the identity of systems, and particularly the environment and what we're doing to the environment. And so Josh is an absolute, potentially for me, unique example of someone who comes from a real conviction about saving that, and really has a unique way of conflating that into business. So welcome, Josh Tetrick.

Josh Tetrick: Thanks, Jacob.

Jacob Burda: I thought what we'd do is to give everyone a little bit of a sense of what you guys do at Just, which is quite difficult because they do a lot. And then maybe move into a more personal sense, potentially of what drives you and what the ideas are behind the company. So from my limited understanding of what you guys are doing, it can be separated into two categories. One is the egg product that you have been developing, so plant-based egg solutions, of which I think some of you tried some this morning. And then the second is also super interesting, cultured meat or clean meat. And I'm not sure if you guys have heard of this, but we'll talk about what that is in a bit as well. So I thought maybe we'll start, because we've had it this morning, we'll start with what you guys have been doing with eggs. And maybe if you can give us a little sense of the scale of what you've been up to, and the kind of impact it's been having.

Josh Tetrick: Good deal. Good to be here, thank you for trying it earlier, I hope it was alright. Well underneath the whole thing, before we get to the products, is I think an acknowledgement that the food system today, whether it's what we have for breakfast here, what I had for breakfast growing up in Birmingham Alabama, what someone's eating in Monrovia, Liberia today, the food system does not, in total, represent our values. For any number of different reasons. The environmental reasons are pretty obvious, the dominance of animals in our food system makes it so that over 40% of the climate change emissions, even more than all of the transportation sources combined, come from the animals we eat. Most of the animals we eat are not free range reindeer, that I saw last night, but a much more intensive kind.

But it's not just an animal thing, it's not just a climate change thing. About a billion people tonight are going to bed hungry. And I think often when we think about the food system and how we might want to change the food system, it's important to understand that too. About 2.1 billion people are not going to bed hungry, but they suffer from something called micronutrient deficiency, which is called hidden hunger. You can't really see it in their face, but you can see it in their lack of brain development. You get the rise of chronic disease, heart disease and cancer. All this stuff is in the food system that we don't really think about every day, and I grew up in a pretty ugly food system in Birmingham Alabama, it was tasty sometimes. I grew up relatively poor, and I grew on cinnamon rolls out of vending machines, and nachos and cheese from a 7-Eleven right up the street from me, and chicken sandwiches from Burger King. We didn't have a whole lot of money, and my mom did what she could and that's how I ate. But I was eating away, and it wasn't really serving my body, certainly not serving the planet. But it's what we could afford.

So after going to college, I spent a little bit of time in Africa, I decided that maybe we should do something about it. I started this company called Just, and the purpose of it is to create a more just food system. A food system where the food that tastes really good is also the food that's good for you, is also the food that's good for the planet, and is also the food you can actually afford. And we decided, Jacob, to start with breakfast, and see if we could figure out a way to create the most ubiquitous animal protein on the planet, the egg, and see if we could find a plant that would actually do some of the things the egg would do, but use a lot less land, a lot less water, and maybe we wouldn't need the animal.

I hired a big research and development team, it took about four and half years to find this bean called the mung bean, finally found it and it turns out even though the mung bean has been in the food system since 2600 B.C., the damn thing actually scrambles like an egg. And it's still extraordinary to say that. We went through thousands and thousands of different species of plants to see if one could figure a way to do it, and the mung bean did, and we're fortunate to have that product called Just Egg all across the United States. We just launched with a big fast food chain called Tim Horton's in Canada, we're on JD.com and TeeMall in China, we've sold about the equivalent of 10 million chicken eggs as of today, and this is our first full year selling it. You can find it at all the major retailers in the US, you can find it right in the egg section.

Now one thing that I'm most proud about though, is over 70% of the people who buy it are not vegan or vegetarian. And it's a point that I want to emphasize that perfection I think is talked about often in the food system. You get, let's be vegan, or let's eat meat. But we have a different perspective. And the perspective is about being a little bit better. So I love when people who are not just strict vegans or vegetarians decide to eat a little bit of it. That's an important thing.

And then the second big thing that we're working on is around meat. And for meat, we decided not to find a plant that would scramble like an egg, but instead to find cells in animals, and we'll show you a little video of this, that without needing the animal, without needing a cow to consume all this soy and corn, and to grow muscle and fat on the cow's bones for two years and consume a lot of resources, that we could figure out a way, starting with beef, to make it in a much more sustainable way, and a way that I think aligns much more with our values. And that, as Jacob said, that's the cultured, clean meat deal. So we do those two things. But again, undergirding this whole thing is, how do you figure out a way through a different approach, a values-based approach, a technology-driven approach, to just make this food system a little bit better?

Jacob Burda: Great. That's pretty impressive, by the way. I guess maybe because you've just talked about it, let's maybe show people something of what you're doing with the meat.

Josh Tetrick: Let's do it.

…

Jacob Burda: I guess that what I find so fascinating is that, especially with the meat product, it combines three things which are probably amongst the most pressing problems to be solved in the world. As you were saying, malnutrition, people being, well one starving, but also the people who do eat meat often eating rubbish meat, meat stuffed with antibiotics. And that's obviously something that we'll see in a second, but you want to be addressing with clean meat. The second being a huge deal for me, which is why I have, although I do eat meat, I find it very challenging sometimes, is animal ethics, and knowing what we do to animals and how horrific their lives are. And thirdly the environment. I'm not sure if it's in this clip, but if you could give us a sense of the scale of the difference that you could be achieving. So take these three huge things, animal ethics, welfare of people eating meat, and the environment, and boil it down into one concrete product that's actually tangible. And I've always found that fascinating, because it's a real thing that all these more abstract loose things we'll often be doing to better ourselves or help the environment, somehow it's all possible with that product.

Josh Tetrick: The thing is, just factually, what are the facts of meat production that everyone can agree on, about a billion animals are killed every single year. About 40% of emission, more than transportation, come from the animals we eat, again not the cars we drive, but the animals we eat. 99% of animals again aren't like those reindeers, they're cooped up in tiny little cages. We feed more food to the animals we eat than the billion people that are going to bed hungry every single night. It's not a good system. It's hard to argue. It's not a good system. And the question is what does one do about it? Now, what one can do is just eat plants, whole plants, and that's an incredibly effective way I think to live. I think it's maybe the healthiest way to live. The problem is, it's really hard to convince human beings living in the developed or the developing world just to do that. Now, are there more people becoming vegan and vegetarian? Certainly. But we live in a world where even good people are not perfect. It's better to walk than to get an electric car, but we still might get an electric car.

So the question is, you convince a whole lot of people to become vegan or vegetarian. Do you encourage people just to eat "sustainable" meat? The problem with sustainable is it's really expensive, and it's hard to commercialize that for most people in the world. So for us, this doesn't mean it's the perfect option. But we think potentially one of the options to solve this thing is let's figure out a way to get people the meat they want. As you said, non-rubbish meat, meat in a way that's free of antibiotics, it could taste good, it could be a part, maybe not in the entire deal, but a part of solving this big challenge.

And this was actually mentioned by Churchill back in the day as a long term solution even before the technology was out there. But the technologists were all about taking a cell from an animal, it could be the root of a feather, it could be a biopsy, it could be a fresh piece of meat, it could be from a high end cow in Japan, or a chicken in northern California like the one you're going to see, separating it from the animal's body and then identifying nutrients for that cell to grow it. And the technology exists long term to be able to feed the planet in that way.

Now the problem is, it just sounds weird. It sounds weird, right? No matter how many times I say it, it just is weird, right? So how do you deal with, man, it's just weird? Our way of dealing with this, I'm not sure what another option is, we just deal with the weirdness head on. Another way is we decided to partner with farmers in Japan, or Patagonia, for example who raise their animals in particular sustainable ways, bring them a part into the process, show the world eventually that that's where we're getting the cells from, have these farmers talk about it themselves. Separate it from the lab environment, and explain that the cell actually starts on the farm. And then ultimately make it taste so good and be so affordable that that counterbalances the weirdness that naturally comes with it.

Jacob Burda: What are the latest names that you have for it?

Josh Tetrick: Oh I hate the names for it, Jacob. The names, so people call this lab-grown meat, people call it cultured meat, people call it clean meat, people call it overly engineered meat, people call it meat I never want to eat. People call it all different stuff. What I think in the future is I think we're going to have a world where the vast majority of the meat that people consume will be this. And there will be a smaller percentage for folks who can afford it, of the high-end reindeer meat. That'll be a part of it, but I think the vast majority of the world needs to be able to afford something that's cleaner and afford something that actually supports the environmental systems that we have. So that's my bet, and hopefully in the future it'll just be called meat.

Jacob Burda: And if I understand correctly, even though, a lot of us in this room I think are vegan or vegetarian, and we sense that we're doing something good for the planet. Overall, meat consumption is still rising.

Josh Tetrick: Yeah, that's the thing that is both startling, there's an optimistic side whereas it feels like on one hand there's a rise of people getting it, on one hand. We see more companies like ours popping up, and I hope there will be more and more. We see more vegan and vegetarian restaurants, we see more e-plants at this restaurant or that, that's a fact. But as you said, at the same time, more people will eat meat today than will have eaten meat yesterday. More people will eat tomorrow than will have eaten today. And that's because of one simple fact. People rising up out of poverty.

And I spent some time in Africa, when you get a little bit more of your paycheck, you're going to get some meat. The poorest folks in the world are not eating a lot of meat. When you get a little bit more money, you eat more meat. It turns out when you reach a certain income level, it plateaus and then dips, probably like some of the folks in this room. That's part of the dawning challenge of it. We need to figure out a way not to solve the meat problem just for the folks in this room. But how do you solve the meat problem when China's rising, when sub-Saharan Africa's rising, when Latin America's rising? We've got to figure out a way to feed those folks something that makes sense long term.

Another part of the challenge of it, and this is a struggle that I have. Probably my biggest motivator, this is personally, and everyone at my company has a different motivator. Is why cause pain when you don't need to? It's simple as that. It's actually non-environmental things for me personally. I'm passionate about the environment, I think climate change needs to be addressed, but personally, if you don't need to cause pain, why do it? That is not a good selling point though. And I haven't resisted saying it. I'm saying it here, but if you went on our website, you wouldn't see that anywhere. You wouldn't see that in our marketing materials for Just Egg.

And it's a struggle that I have, because it's something I want to, I was asking whether this thing is filmed or not, but it's all good. It's something I, it can alienate people when you say that. Eating is a very sensitive subject. And eating animals is I think the most sensitive of the subjects of eating. And it can feel very much like, don't tell me how to eat, man. Don't get into my business in that way. But listen for me, the root of this is, why cause pain if you don't need to?

Jacob Burda: Can you talk a bit maybe about the pattern of identity that you've been coming up against? You started to touch on it. But I know that at one point I was concerned about you, I was about to call you because I saw when you did the egg thing first, all these chicken farmers were not having it and were going to come after you for taking their business. So that's obviously one sort of person. But what's the deeper underlying identity that you're really trying to challenge?

Josh Tetrick: So there are a few things. I think a lot about how I grew up. When I was growing up in Birmingham Alabama, if someone said, you should think about being a vegan, that is the antithesis of the identity that I wanted to have growing up. The word vegan, and all of the things that comes along with that in my head growing up, is exactly the opposite of the man that I wanted to be. And I think that word is a big problem. Again, especially, not necessary for this room, but especially for the vast majority of people that we're trying to figure out a way to feed a little bit better. So our thoughts on that is, forget about the word vegan. Talk about food that tastes really good, that's good for you, that ultimately is really affordable. Don't call this lab grown meat, call it meat. And I think trying to figure out a way to get the people who are repelled by the idea of vegan to eat in a way that reflects the underlying values of veganism is what I want to do.

The second thing though is you're right, we used to have egg companies come after us, we had a big campaign by the American Egg Board, which is a [inaudible] organization for the egg industry in the United States come at us, some dude from the American Egg Board threatened to put a hit out on me, it was fucking crazy, all the stuff that happened. But when I first started the company, I thought these big egg and meat and milk companies were a bunch of bastards who didn't care at all, and we should do everything we can to put them out of business. That's what I thought. It turns out that as I've gotten to know some executives at big egg and meat and dairy companies, we share a common interest. And that interest is they want to make a lot of money selling protein. Their dogma is not, I want to cram animals in tiny little cages and I want to make money selling those animals. Their dogma is, I want to be a big business, I want to be around for a long time, I want to go public or stay public, I want my quarterly earnings to increase, I want to get a bigger house, I want to get more, that's their dogma. And what we've been able to do is to figure out a way to work with them.

So our best partners now are egg companies. So we're going to be launching in Europe with a big company called Eurovo, they're the biggest egg processor here in Europe. And they're taking the core protein that makes up Just Egg, adding oil and water to it, and pushing it out under Just Egg. So the theory change there, Jacob, is that the current food system, as awful as I think it is, as horrendous for the environment and our bodies as I think it is, it's actually really, really good at getting the food to you. It's good at mixing and processing and warehousing and distribution. And that infrastructure that brings a lot of pain to the world is still bringing things to the world. So our theory here is, figure out a different approach and plug it into that existing infrastructure. Help these folks make a little bit of money, and maybe that's a better way of getting that something.

Jacob Burda: I think maybe one last question before we'll open it up to the floor. You started this in 2011, right? And I'm sure you had a certain set of ideas and ideals about what you're doing and why you're doing. Can you tell us what they were? And also now that we're in 2019 eight years later, how has it changed? And how has it changed you?

Josh Tetrick: Well personally, I had this thought growing up in Alabama. A guy in Alabama, if he's halfway athletic, he thinks he's going to be a professional football player, so that was my deal growing up. And I realized pretty quickly when I got to college I wasn't good enough to do that. And I didn't know where to put all my energy. And the direction I had for my life suddenly wasn't there, and I needed something to focus on. It took me to Africa, I was doing a little bit of work with kids, and what is very sustaining for me when we first started and is sustaining for me today is waking up and knowing that I'm throwing my energy into something that is creating meaningful change in a way that is real. In a way that you can touch, in a way that you can smell, in a way that's alleviating suffering, that's alleviating pain, and in a way that sometimes people that buy it don't even know it. So it's one thing that I think is the same from the moment I started until now, that it's good not to feel directionless. It's good to try to find one or two things you might be decent at and throw it at something that's really worthwhile.

The mission of the company is still the same. It's, try to figure out a way to build a better food system. Try to make it easy for people to eat well. Don't assume people are bad. If we can try to figure out a way to make it a little bit easy for good people to do the right thing, then they'll probably do it. If we make it hard for good people to do the right thing, they probably won't. I just think that's a fact of life. And that stays with us. And it's been hard. It has been a challenge. We've had a lot of crazy stuff happen to us. But through it all, we've got 120 people all around the world that wake up every day, different motivations to try to do something. So it's been something I'm pretty grateful for.

Jacob Burda: Great. Well I think if we've got some questions from the audience, I think we have a few. Maybe start with the front and move backwards.

Charity Wakefield: So, two questions. One—

Josh Tetrick: Did you like the egg, Charity?

Charity Wakefield: I liked the egg.

Josh Tetrick: Did it taste like an egg? Be honest, what was different between that and a conventional egg?

Charity Wakefield: It didn't taste exactly like an egg, but it was pretty near. And I really enjoyed it, and I really enjoyed that it was made of mung beans, and the history of that. I would make a distinction, quite obviously, between the two different products, and one is, it is pretending to be egg but it's just not made of egg. The other thing is pretending to be meat, but it is in some part made of meat. So my first question is what exactly is the new product? My second question is related to my anxiety around a completely different product, which is robotics, or robots. Particularly the use of a servant in one's house, like Alexa, Siri. It's a robot, but we humanize it. And in one way, I wonder why you want to animalify the new product if it isn't really an animal. My reservation would be, in eating that product, is that it doesn't have a natural life. And although I don't like the idea of killing an animal, there's something in the value of the animal growing up within the environment that I also share. And what that might give me. So I question what the actual product is, and what the repercussions of commodifying that. And what our relationship to then real meat might be.

Josh Tetrick: I never heard that term. You said animalify. I think that's right. That's a good way of expressing it. We are trying to animalify a mung bean. I think the reason that we do it and the reason we call it Just Egg, I think it is rooted in what will increase the probability for non-vegans and vegetarians to eat it. Because the eating of it, to me, is the most relevant metric. How do I get more human beings to eat it? Eat it in a restaurant, buy it and eat it at home. And I think that the vast majority of human beings on the planet are probably not thinking about the world in the way that you're thinking about the world. I think you're thinking about the world much more through a sustainability prism than I think most are.

So that's the primary reason we're doing it. If you told me right now not animalifying it could actually increase the probability that more people would buy it, I'd call my team right after this and let's say to switch it up. So that's really what it gets at. Now with that said, I do think there's an opportunity to even make it better. So a good example would be eggs don't have a lot of antioxidants. And there's a lot of evidence around antioxidants, and breaking up free radicals, and mitigating oxidation, and how that ultimately helps to mitigate chronic disease. We want to put some antioxidants in that. Eggs are not necessarily low with micronutrients. We want to put micronutrients in ours. So I'd like to ultimately make it better in important respects, but have it close enough to the animal that even people that don't necessarily care about the environment want to eat it.

Now on the cultured meat piece, what is the product? We have multiple sell lines. So we have a chicken sell line, we have a beef sell line. And I'll focus on the beef because we might watch the chicken film. We got cells from Wagyu cows in Japan. We then brought those cells back to our headquarters. We then identified nutrients and plants to feed those cells, in the same way those cows would consume soy or corn or grass and the nutrients would go into their body and muscle and fat would grow on their bones for two years. We're trying to do that without the animal. And the end product that we'll release sometime in the near future will be a Wagyu hamburger that didn't require the killing of a single animal. I totally hear your point of, but the animal didn't go through the whole process that we're used to. And I do think there will be a certain subset of people who will always want an animal that goes through that process that we're used to. So as long as we all realize that the process that we're all used to, if we actually really saw into it, is pretty appalling. So ultimately I think the future is, I think most of meat will be meat made in this way, simply because it's the most efficient way to eat meat. And I think there will be a smaller percentage of meat made in a more traditional sense.

Question: I'm really interested in the idea of how close meat eating is to people's national identity.

Josh Tetrick: That's a big one.

Question: A really good example of this is in the UK we have a chain of shops called Greggs, and it's kind of a, I don't know how to describe it. It's a sandwich shop which sells meat pies, sausage rolls. Kind of like every day working people's food. You pop in, you get… and they recently produced a vegan sausage roll. And the outrage among the more conservative press was like it had sent a knife into the Britishness of the population.

Josh Tetrick: What did they say?

Question: It was just the idea that it was a threat. I think British people will remember this. It was such a threat to Britishness, the vegan sausage roll. As it is, Greggs probably did get very much the last laugh because it sold out, you couldn't buy one after 10:00 in the morning because people were loving it. But what was really interesting, when we're talking about identity here, is the vegan sausage roll became a sign of what was happening to British culture. The un-Britishing of British culture was in this vegan sausage roll. So I wonder if you have come across a lot of these really close cultural ties to meat, which is really nothing to do with anything practical.

Josh Tetrick: Well, you're making me scared to launch Just Egg in the UK before the end of the year. Have to work that out. Stay away, conservative press from that. There are a handful of differences between food and other industries. And one is exactly what you said. Food is a very personal thing. Food, unlike software on a phone, or unlike electric cars, are very much a part of the stories that we tell about ourselves, about our ethnicity, about our nationality, about who we are. I remember in Alabama, getting off, I was going to this middle school called Chelsea Middle School, I'd get off the bus and my mom would have a plate of grits, chicken wings, butter, collard greens, and broken up bacon. And when I think about those things, I think about loving my mom. It's connected to that. So I think one is not acknowledging that identity is a big deal. And if you don't deal with it in a meaningful way, I don't think you're going to solve it. That's one thing.

Now the question is, how then do you deal with it? What does that mean? And I think there are two ways to think about it. I think the first way to think about it is you can create new stories. You don't just have to rely on the old stories. You can create new stories around plant-based eggs, or that vegan sausage roll, and how my mom got me that. So the stories don't always have to be the same damn stories. You can create new stories. And then the second way to think about it is how do you figure out a way to have this new approach also sit within the identity of the past?

So an example of what we're thinking around the meat is the premier product that we're working on is this Wagyu beef. And this farm that we work with has been making Wagyu beef for three generations. So we're trying to figure out a way, and we're a long way from doing this right. We're trying to figure out a way to tap into that generational history around that. The generational mastery around that. The love of beef. The connection to the land of beef, just in a completely new format. Now, we still might get taken on by the conservative press in Britain. But it's the best way we know how to do it.

But I do think if that's not acknowledged and not thought through, I think you end up having a tiny little impact. And that's a really good question.

Jacob Burda: There are hardly any conservatives in the room, by the way, just so you know.

Josh Tetrick: That's alright, that's alright.

Question: And the sausage rolls were very popular, so do take heart. People will eat it.

Josh Tetrick: Iman, and then Nell.

Iman Amrani: Thanks, this is so interesting. I work at the Guardian, so the core Guardian values, they're always talking about these stories, it's massive. But it's really interesting because you were talking about how people look at vegans, and the associations that people have around vegans. And I've had a look at your website, and I find it really interesting that it's super stripped back. It's all black and white, even the short video, the mission statement video, it's a bit like, I don't want to say like an Apple video, more like a Samsung video. It's very focused on technology. And so that video's really interesting to me, because it doesn't go anywhere near those kinds of things that people think about when they think of the word vegan. So I did want to know a bit more about the branding and how you approached that, and what role you think you have in terms of branding meat-free options. Because I think that you obviously play a massive part in making people see it as something actually quite aspirational.

Just looking at the way that it's all been done on your website. So I just wanted to ask you to develop a bit more on branding and your role in that space.

Josh Tetrick: When we started the company seven years ago, the idea of even using the term plant-based, I would have been against. I might have said we use a bean, and then the bean does this thing, but I would avoid phrases like made from plants, or plant-based, or vegan, thinking that that's going to turn off most people. Now what's really interesting, and maybe we should change our website to reflect this, is over the last couple of years, it's actually become more acceptable and I think less offensive. So much so that we found sometimes, and we do little experiments on this, if we emphasize the fact that Just Egg is made from plants, we really crank up the volume on the made from plants stuff, we actually sell more.

Now, what is also interesting is part of our theory of change here is we don't just want to sell to vegans and vegetarians. In fact, we want that to be a very small percentage of the people that we sell to. When we do demos in the store or have events to give people our product, even when we did it for you, we'll often mix it with animal products. Our chef Michael, I don't know if you know this, but he was putting some cheese in an omelet. And that's intentional. Now sometimes, we take a lot of hell from the vegans out there because we do that, because it's not "pure," but we would rather be effective than be pure.

But the aspirational piece is a big deal. I think right now the majority of our consumers are women between 21 and 50 who care about health and wellness, who when you dig deep into the psychology and the psychographic traits of how they're living their life, they're like, I just want to eat a little bit better. And attempting to speak to them in a more aspirational way is what we try to tap into. Now part of the frustration that I have with that, I want to sell to everyone right now. I don't want to just sell to women between 20 and 50 who care about health and wellness and sustainability. But there's a sequence of things you've got to do before you do everything.

But we do try to avoid the word vegan. We do try to focus on aspirational elements. And we do very much try to sell to people who eat animal products. And try to find that line around just eat a little bit better, not around eating perfect. But we need to work on our Samsung-centric video though.

Iman Amrani: I thought it was great.

Jacob Burda: Nell, and then Dominique.

Nell Leyshon: Thank you. God, I've got almost too much to say. The first thing, I grew up in the countryside. Learned how to milk a cow. Knew everything about farming and bringing up animals in an old fashioned way. I've had chickens myself. I think there's a huge polarization between town and country. And I think it's worldwide, and I think it taps into class as well. And I think using language like "good" is a very interesting choice that you've said "good" I think three times so far this morning, maybe two. The people who are good, it's not that you eat well, we are good. And I think that that's a judgment which I'm deeply uncomfortable with. Coming from that background, and thinking that those people therefore are not good. Because if these are the good eaters, the rest of the eaters are bad. And I think that's pretty problematic, for me. It's alienation, all those people. It's just an observation.

Josh Tetrick: Just to clarify that, I might have misspoken. My perspective on this sit that people are inherently good. That human beings out there, including myself that might trip up when it comes to not being as sustainable as I want to be, or my friends in Alabama who might not be eating in a way that I consider the most sustainable. I think people are inherently good. And I think the problem that the food system presents is we make it really easy for good people, again, 99% of people on the planet, to eat in a way that doesn't represent their intrinsic values. Their intrinsic values of kindness, of compassion, of integrity. I think those are intrinsic values. And part of the reason I think it's intrinsic is I think, my brother just had a little girl named June. And I'm not sure how he's going to raise her, plant-based or not, but I can tell you June loves animals. And when June becomes three, four, five, and she sees a chicken nugget, or she sees one of those conventional sausages at Greggs, you said, she's not, there's going to be a disassociation, there's a disconnect.

Nell Leyshon: That's always been the case.

Josh Tetrick: But I guess my point is, people are inherently good. We just make it damn hard for them to do the right thing.

Nell Leyshon: But that's a huge assumption. That's just an observation about language and assumptions around language. And that polarization that interests me around town and country. So for me—

Josh Tetrick: I'm saying the country folks are good though too. I'm not saying—

Nell Leyshon: But there's an ancient relationship between us and natural food. So it's really interesting that this morning, the egg was delicious. It's not egg, it's mung bean, and it's delicious, I really liked it. But there's something interesting for me to eat a product which is branded, and says "Just Egg" on it. It isn't egg. And it's saying just egg. And it was in a plastic bottle. And when I asked about the plastic bottle, I mean an egg has always been an organic product which is naturally biodegradable. But it's a technical question I wanted to ask, it's, I'm not berating you for that. But when I said, well why is it in a plastic bottle? I was told, oh no, we're developing a Tetra Pak. But a Tetra Pak, is also, so. So my question, actually it's technical, is about biodegradable packaging, and how long can you have a liquid in biodegradable packaging, how much does that cut into the profits, and therefore are you a profit only company, or are you actually, is it a profit only company which you don't need to answer I can find out, but how, it's not just the morality around good food. It's the morality around the is idea that is idea that we're going to be able to feed more poor people, because there's a lot of talk about branding. Anyway, so many, so many things in there. Far too much to say today.

Josh Tetrick: I want to make sure I got to your point on feeding poor people. What's the question around that?

Nell Leyshon: Whether it's a profit only company, or whether there is a big humanitarian thinking behind it.

Josh Tetrick: I got it. I'll start with that one first. So I make sure, we've been fortunate enough to raise a lot of capital, about 250 million dollars from some very well-known investors. I make it a practice before I take any capital to tell investors exactly what I believe in and what the company's about. And what that is, is we want to do things and increase the probability that more people are eating in a way that reflects our values. To build a food system, we want to make our small contribution to our food system, that is healthier, tastes a little bit better, is not so painful to animals, and isn't so degrading to the planet. That is the focus.

Now, focusing on that, and building that, unequivocally requires making money. There's no doubt about it. I used to work in the world of non-profits, and I think there are an incredible array of non-profits. I personally felt it was ineffective for me. So I got into business not because I studied business, or my dad's in business. I only got into business because I thought it'd be the most effective way for me to do something meaningful. So that's what we're about. We shouldn't be in plastic. It has to do with, I'd give you a bunch of silly excuses, about this is the first four years that we're doing it, but mostly they're bullshit excuses. We're moving to paper globally. There is some issues around shelf life related to it but again.

Nell Leyshon: That's what I was going to ask. And it is tied into profit, because what I can't understand, I mean I know there's biodegradable packaging, but it's how much we're stopping using it because of profit. But I was really interested technical question about liquids, because—

Josh Tetrick: It can be in paper. It has to do with the manufacturing facility we started out on, and we wanted to get it out sooner rather than—

Nell Leyshon: Because Tetra Pak has plastic lining, doesn't it, and metallic lining. It's not totally biodegradable. I wouldn't put it in my compost frankly.

Josh Tetrick: Michael might not be aware of all of the operational elements behind what we're doing. But yeah, we're moving globally to a purer paper option to get away from it. I will say about the egg, now. I think it's really important when we think, it's interesting language, even the word "the egg", there is a, one of my scientists named Camilla, she has backyard chickens. And her backyard chickens lay eggs. Okay, that's an egg. And then those eggs actually taste really good. And then there is the 1.3 trillion eggs that are laid every single year, 99.8% of them of which are laid by chickens in cages so small they can't flap their wings. 7, 8, crammed in. That's a different deal, you know? And again what I realized is that those egg companies doing all that, if they can make more money by getting those chickens out of the cages, they're going to get the chickens out of the cages. If they can make more money selling plants, they're going to make more money selling plants. Those chickens are only in the cages and that pollution is only going in the river because it's helping them make more money. If they can figure out a different way to make more money, they're going to do it, and if we can help them, we're going to do it. Even if we might not agree on everything.

Question: Hello. Okay, I'm going to try and articulate this well. The only thing, I think this is wonderful, for a start. I think this is a solution on many levels. But I do bump at the point of nutrition. Because I went on my own food research thing for quite a while because I wasn't sure whether I wanted to become a vegan or not. And it wasn't ethical for me, it was from a purely nutritional point of view. I actually didn't know if meat was good for me or not. I realized I just actually didn't know that. And I'm fed a lot of things, but I wanted to know for myself. So I went on a research thing with literature, and from different people, and read about it all, and also trial and error. And from what I found I feel like I found the best way to eat for me is whole foods, whole vegetables, organic, wild meat if I can find it, that has not been injected with antibiotics, whatever, wild fish, wild caught fish, and from eating it, I know that it's optimal for me. I also know that things like bone broth contributes to my system in a way that is incredible, and like liver for instance, is a superfood, so I try and occasionally have that in my diet.

So for me, I feel like I know that that kind of chicken, and the shit meat that you're talking about, and the shit eggs, are terrible. But I also know that there's a premium level of what I can actually afford, which I never used to be able to, is probably what's best for me. I wonder where this falls into it. I wonder if, because for me with how stubborn I am and with what I've learned about how I like to eat, there is no way I don't think anyone could break down, even if you put antioxidants in the eggs, or extra vitamins, that you could tell me that my body's going to process that better than the real thing. Because to me, I compare that to almost like the contraceptive pill. Where I think it's there to almost do good, but it's still a synthetic hormone. It still sent me crazy no matter which one I was on.

Because it's mimicking, it's like putting a square on a circle. It's not the real thing. But ultimately it serves a much bigger purpose that I feel we should all have access to. Anyway.

So I just wonder where you feel, honestly, this falls on the nutritional spectrum with what kind of meat this is going to be. Because for me, I'd rather go out to a restaurant, when I do want to have a burger, and eat that. But I know at home, I want to buy my meat that's been grass fed and organic, I want to have my wild fish, and I want to eat eggs that I know are organic, and chickens who've eaten grass. And I want that because I know I feel fantastic when I eat that way.

Josh Tetrick: All of that sounds good, by the way. It's making me hungry. I'm a strange kind of person. The only meat I eat actually is that meat. But I really miss meat. I'm not one of these, I won't even use the V word to describe myself. Even now, I refuse to use that word. But hearing you talk about all those meats, it actually taps into that identity back being raised in Alabama. But let me start a few questions by challenging the egg thing for a second.

So the egg is made from a mung bean. The mung bean has been in the food system since 2600 B.C. Mung beans are grown in Tanzania, in China, in Australia, in New Zealand, and now North Dakota and Canada. It's about 20% protein, 15% fiber, eaten every day in large quantities, in traditional dishes like dhal in India. What we do is take that mung bean, we mill it into a flour, so now you have mung bean flour. And then we take that flour and we spin it down, and then the protein, a liquid version of it, is separated from the fat and the fiber and the starch. That, more or less, is the egg. So first I want to ask you, and I'm not offended if your answer is the opposite of what I'm thinking. What do you think when you hear that?

Question: So my issue with, the thing I think of straight away, is I know that with beans and pulses, the best way to eat them is for them to be so they sprout. So my first thing is like, that's going to cause an issue for my digestive system because they're not soaked beans. It's something that you've ground, and you know this is part of the research I've done. I've now learned that I need to soak all my grains and pulses and beans before I eat them, because my body can absorb it better and get the nutrients from it better than if I don't. And often that's a huge issue for people. They don't even know they're supposed to do that. So that would be what I would say.

Josh Tetrick: I gotcha. Fair enough. I guess more the question of natural vs. unnatural.

Question: The issue for me is not natural—

Josh Tetrick: I want to make sure I understand your nutritional question. So in a lot of ways, I shouldn't be doing this job. Because I think the most effective thing for people to eat is just whole plant food. In a lot of ways, it's crazy that I had to spend well over 100 million dollars in developing this technology or a bean to make an egg, and my god. Just eat beans. Just eat kale. Just eat whole foods, right? I believe factually that that is a healthier way to eat. There's no question. Just like, by the way, I believe that walking to work is better than getting your Tesla model 3. But I think the world is imperfect. And we require solutions for most people. Now nutritionally, this kind of meat, the big difference between this and call it conventional meat, is it's free of a lot of garbage antibiotics and all that. From a health perspective, it's more or less the same as, and again the meat is still in a lab, we haven't commercialized that whereas we've commercialized the egg. But at least in what we're seeing right now, it's not better. I don't think meat is the best for you. I even think that the meat you're eating right now is not the best for you, honestly. But this meat, again this is the irony of what we're doing, isn't any better for you than that meat that you're eating necessarily. I just think that the world requires for most people a different, a better solution that is still inherently imperfect.

Question: Right. So it's a solution, but potentially at the risk of it not being an optimal nutritional solution.

Josh Tetrick: Well honestly I think the nutritional thing are whole plants. That's what I think.

Question: I guess that's where we disagree.

Alan Lawson: Hi Josh. Thank you, I've really enjoyed this. And this isn't really a question, it's an observation. And since we're here to talk about identity, I'm going to begin by tearing apart the fact that you're American, and this is science, and what I'm really doing, I want you to take it in the best way possible, this is to help you with your branding, because I'm actually really interested in what you're doing. I think here, it reminds me of Peter Singer's philosophical arguments of speciesism and the idea of, I mean if it had been left to him, he'd have covered the planet in soy beans and we'd all be eating soya. This, to me, seems a much more efficient way of feeding people and cutting out the cruelty and cutting out all the horrors that happen, something I feel very strongly about. So I cannot argue with the logic at all. I think it's a fantastic idea. I think a possible difficulty—

Josh Tetrick: Here comes the hammer.

Alan Lawson: Well I don't know if you'll agree with me at all. I think a difficulty you may run into in Europe is that you present this in a lovely, and don't get offended, it reminded me of George W., the way you're like, there's a problem, here's a solution. And I think in Europe—

Josh Tetrick: I'm not a compassionate conservative.

Alan Lawson: I think in Europe there's a great mistrust of science and American solutions to global problems. Probably some historical reasons for that. So I think in terms of that, one thing to think about is that in Europe, France, and again I'm going to cause offense to French people now. But in France they can be quite comfortable with cruelty. And in lots of parts of Europe, they could see the solution that you're offering, they might actually prefer to resist the solution, and actually live with the awkwardness of whatever contradictions or difficulties, ethical or whatever exist there. Which is why people still eat foie gras and things, even if it's cruel, that's an example.

Josh Tetrick: What do you think's underlying that?

Alan Lawson: I'm not entirely sure. But I think in Europe there's still quite a lot of folk tradition, and allegiances to what we might call folk psychologies, magic. Now I don't mean that in a ridiculous sense, but perhaps a fear of big science, big American science maybe.

Josh Tetrick: I mean more what do you think is underlying the comfort, not the willful blindness to cruelty, but the comfort with it.

Alan Lawson: I think sometimes in Europe, well in Britain I think we can see it with things like Brexit. People can actually live with an awful outcome, because it somehow still fits with a particular allegiance. So even if somebody says to them, this is going to be bad economically, they'll say that's fine, we're very stoic, we can take that. So there are conflicting allegiances. Allegiances to logic, which is really what you're offering, which is, this is purely logical, this is clearly a solution. But I think actually people will turn their backs on that, and they'll align themselves with something which may even be illogical or conflicting for all sorts of complication reasons. I'm not sure I've thought them all through. I just wanted to suggest some of the difficulties here. And it's a shame in many ways, because I actually think it's a fantastic idea. I think if, again people talking about how they eat. I don't imagine I'm going to probably eat loads of your product. However, if I'm flying somewhere, or if I'm eating fast food because it's difficult for me to do anything else, I'd much prefer that there was the cruelty being cut out of the system. Of course I would. And I would much prefer if 10 million people also cut that cruelty out of the system.

Josh Tetrick: Do you eat eggs?

Alan Lawson: Yes.

Josh Tetrick: If it was, let's say in two years, if I gave you a blind taste test and you thought the one with the plant tasted better, however you define better, just go with me on it. Whether better would mean creamy, richer, more umami, however you define it, if you thought it tasted better. If you knew, and you just believed the substance of it, that it was using less land, less water, all that good stuff. And it was more affordable, let's just throw that in, with what you're currently eating. Would that be sufficient? Or would it still be missing something?

Alan Lawson: Well, first of all I don't think I'd be your target market.

Josh Tetrick: No I know, I mean I'm just going with you on that.

Alan Lawson: I think it would be problematic, well basically I'm a problematic person. So conflicted person. Tying in with what Nell suggested, the connection to landscape is something very important to me. So I don't eat very much protein ordinarily. I mainly eat plant-based. We're not vegans though, we go Monday to Friday vegans and then feast on some swan or something at the weekend. So the idea is, I like the association with landscape, and I like the idea of chickens laying eggs and things like that. But I'm very privileged to maybe be able to A, afford to live like that, what I would absolutely agree with you is that if I'm in a situation where I'm eating packaged food which I haven't prepared myself, which I very rarely do, it's usually only at airports and travelling, then you can replace all of it with your product. I'd be delighted.

Josh Tetrick: I want to try to get at it, you're saying the resistance would be, is it accurate to say, just imagine it tastes 20% better, however you define it—

Alan Lawson: I don't think it's the taste. That's irrelevant. I think it's the sense that it's come from a factory. I think it's more the industrialized process of it. And I think when things come from industrialized, however great they are, I know whenever you make the comparison with what the food chain is currently doing, that's why I support what you're doing, I absolutely support it. But if you're not in that system anyway, if you've removed yourself by and large from that system, then why would you opt into buying something that's been created in a lab, wherever it was, and then it's packaged and sent to you, if you don't need to? So I see it as a solution for packaged food, processed food, and all of that. I don't see it as a replacement for—

Josh Tetrick: I got it. What if we pull the curtain back a little bit more, and you got a chance to in some way know the farmers, get a sense of their stories, who before were growing something that maybe wasn't getting them a lot of income, and now they're growing something in a field, in a landscape, that you can see you can smell you can visit, you can understand. And you can see that, and you see the core process, really just milling it into a flour, does that change it at all? Or does simply the fact that you're making a plant into an egg, that is enough to create a processed box for you that no matter how many times we highlight the farmers and take you onto that landscape, it can never be enough to get out of the processed box.

Alan Lawson: I'm not sure I have an answer for you. I think probably you might have to hire a French actor to talk about your product. And it would have to somehow find its way into local allegiances and traditions.

Josh Tetrick: Got it, yeah. That's the identity piece though. That's what you're talking about.

Alan Lawson: I think probably I should be taking a fee for this now, because I'm going to be solving an issue that I think—

Josh Tetrick: That's interesting though. But that's why food is really interesting to me. Because there's all these layers going on. And I'm asking these questions to try and understand a little bit more. But I mean I think that that is an interesting insight. To be able to, I'm sure we could figure out a way to reach more people if we figured a way to fit into that. I don't know if that's possible, to fit into what you're describing. But I think it would be compelling.

Alan Lawson: I mean, I wonder whether you don't even need to. There are so many people that don't question the food system. I wonder whether it's even relevant. I mean people go into fast food chains and they will eat tortured chickens that have been wrapped in batter every day because it's cheap. I think frankly you could just change that product, I don't think anybody will ever really ask the question. So I don't even know if you need to spend the money on it. It's maybe just going to be at a different societal level that you will have objections. I don't see it, in the fast food industry, I don't notice that level of scrutiny. So it probably isn't really an issue.

Jacob Burda: So, moving on to slightly less problematic [inaudible]. We have a lot of questions, but we'll let our chef for tonight ask the last one. So, Helena.

Helena: Yes, so I'm curious about the fact that, in 2050 the world needs to produce more food than it had to produce in the last hundred years. That's a fact. And considering the fact that we don't know where this food is going to come from, we creating, we're so obsessed about the food. It is our privilege to be obsessed about food, considering the population that don't have nutrition, the food to eat in the whole globe. And I think the fact that we have to create things like you have created, which I tasted this morning and I thought it was probably the first ever product that I've tasted that I wonder if that product would, that omelet would be served to a guest who didn't know that it wasn't egg. They would eat it happily being an egg. And I think that is a progress toward something that we need to find a solution to produce food. But what interests me is the fact that what happens in that process when it's actually done? You make it sound so simple that it's just the mung beans are milled into a flour and that's it.

Josh Tetrick: And separating the protein, don't forget that piece.

Helena: And then it's separated. So what happens to the rest of it? Is there a by-product? Is there something that comes out of that? And what happens to that, and what is it?

Josh Tetrick: It relates a little bit to the question you asked earlier about, I know we gotta run, but I'll break it apart quickly in 30 seconds, I won't make it quite so simple. So there's a lot of research and development, screening through the hundreds of thousands of species of plants, looking at molecular and functional and building models to more effectively find the plants that we want. That's step one. Then we found that bean that's been around for a long time. And then we grow that bean, and then we mill it into a flour. But we have to mill it in a particular way. And then, once we have the flour, we spin it down. The thing we spin it down in is called a centrifuge. I wish it wasn't called a centrifuge, that sounds weird. I know. That sounds very processed. It's called a centrifuge. Specifically, 'decanting centrifuge'. And that spins it down, and the protein is separated, the liquid protein, from the fat and the fiber and the starch. And then you're left with the liquid protein. And then we put that liquid protein in something called a spray dryer. And it removes the liquid from it and we're left with about 93.5% protein. Then we take that and we add oil and water and turmeric, primarily, to it and then we mix it up and then hopefully in the future we put it in a paper bottle. That's it.

Now part of the challenge is for consumers. I actually think there's a case to be made to go really deep and to break all the pieces out. Because sometimes if you don't, you get the skepticism that you just honestly expressed, right?

However with some consumers, should I show the centrifuge? Should I literally show a video of the centrifuge? Maybe, right? On the other hand, I'm a little worried that if you see the centrifuge you're going to be like, I don't want to eat food that just came out of a centrifuge. And that's a challenge, and I don't know the right way necessarily to address the challenge. We put out this thing called the ten steps to make it, where we actually did get into all of that. I showed it to a person at Pret and I could tell they had a negative reaction to seeing some of it. And I said tell me what you're thinking. And they said man, that looks a little bit processed, and I said well I just wanted to show you what it is. Anyway, I struggle with how deep to go into it or not.

Helena: If you think this is the way forward, and this is matter of fact that we have to be able to produce food in this manner for the future to feed all the people on the globe. And there will be always a half of it, there will be always in that process that by-product. And that is something that we don't know what's going to happen with that. And when we are, what happens to that by-product? Who is going to eat it? Is it going to be a waste? Rather than looking into ourselves in the countries that we are living in, smaller countries like in Nordic countries I think we should be able to produce all the food for ourselves rather than bringing the cabbage from Holland, or Holland vegetable market is feeding all the countries in Europe these days.

So in a balance of living good life, like many of us here today said, looking into ourselves, at the same time creating good products. And your product is probably very good. But in sense of marketing it and creating a correct name for it and making people understand that it is a good product to eat, it ticks the box. There might be a bird flu one day and there will be no eggs anymore available for years and years to come. And therefore you will make millions with this product. But what's left with it after it becomes a protein, that's my issue.

Josh Tetrick: So I don't think I answered that. So what's left after the centrifuge deal is fiber and starch. Those are the co-products. And that fiber and starch can be used in a number of different ways. It could be filler in food, it could be—mung bean starch is actually used for glass noodles as an example in Asia. And along with the need to move to paper, Michael you know we're moving to paper, man. Okay, alright. He's an amazing guy. We need to figure out a way to get them out so it's not a waste.

Nell Leyshon: You should make the packaging from the by-product. Because [inaudible] you're using 28% of it.

Josh Tetrick: Well there's only about 28% protein in the mung bean.

Jacob Burda: Two more things, so first of all, we're working really hard to get you some Just Chicken, hopefully in time for tonight. So the brave among you, I've already tried it, I thought it was wonderful. The brave among you can hopefully try it tonight. And secondly, just very, very last question. By 2050, what percentage of meat that we'll be eating is cultured meat, clean meat, whatever?

Josh Tetrick: I think that, in the next two decades, the majority of the meat made on the planet will not require a single animal to die. And as a consequence of not requiring a single animal to die, we'll have restored the soil, we'll have mitigated emissions, and I think we'll have lived a little bit closer to our values. So I think by 2050 you're going to have a world in which 80-90% of the meat on menus didn't require killing an animal, but would be cultured meat. And I think you'll have 10-15% that will be a combination of plant-based, or some of those high end cows and swans, eaten by Alan.

Jacob Burda: I think that's a wonderful vision and hope for the future. Thank you so much, Josh.

Postscript

By John Burnside

It is the end of our stay here at Fjällnäs, and people are assembling in front of the main building in the clear Northern sunlight, dragging suitcases out from their rooms, smiling and waving, exchanging token remarks and passing observations—and it seems to me that this is also a time that ought to be acknowledged, the time between one story and the next, between here and there, between the remembered and the still unforeseen. If this were a Chekhov play—*The Cherry Orchard*, say—we would stop to sit for a while in the hallway, ready to go, yet still not quite willing to leave. Detained, as it were, (a word whose etymological suggestion of being *kept or held back*, captures perfectly that sensation we sometimes have, of wanting to be on our way and, at the same time, impossibly, hoping to leave something of ourselves behind, a resonance, a shadow, *in situ* forever, even as we travel on). We can seem, for long moments at a time, a little mysterious to ourselves, passing through such points in the narrative of identity, in those interim states where Eliot (channelling Mary, Queen of Scots) senses that "In my end is my beginning"—only to qualify that tragic queen's observation with the elaboration:

> We shall not cease from exploration
> And the end of all our exploring
> Will be to arrive where we started
> And know the place for the first time.

Should this not have been obvious, all along, however? Should we not have known from the first that *who* we are matters less than *that* we are just, truthful, enquiring, kind? What matters most: identity or virtue? Should one come into conflict with the other—as seems to have happened so often and perhaps grievously in recent politics—can we be forgiven for elevating the who over the what? Triumphalist rhetoric over vulnerability to the inconclusive and the unknowable? Party membership, or national myth, over *la vie commun?*

We could argue, of course, that we must live in the age to which we belong, as members of the society into which we were born, and not try to conduct ourselves according to some outmoded code of honour or chivalry. This being so, we must find our identity amidst our peers, and not according to some larger history. But as I take my turn to board the coach for the airport, some mischief in me calls back a poem of Emily Dickinson's, a brief annotation to the process of self-searching that, in itself, undermines the whole notion of a social identity as some final, or particularly desirable thing. It's a short poem, one I can still pull up intact from the archives of an ageing memory system, but it seems to offer, for the moment at least—this moment that is all there is—a fair assessment of selfhood, and its possible variants:

I'm Nobody! Who are you?
Are you—Nobody—too?
Then there's a pair of us!
Don't tell! they'd advertise—you know!

How dreary—to be—Somebody!
How public—like a Frog—
To tell one's name—the livelong June—
To an admiring Bog!

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