

INTERACT

Winter Edition 2010

Mission Statement

Interact's vision is a cohesive society where all faiths are not only tolerated, but where individuals are respected and diversity is valued and celebrated. Through common action for common good, shared beliefs can be discovered and passions furthered.

We aim to combat issues of isolation, disadvantage and social exclusion amongst young people. Interact works to provide opportunities for young people from different faith communities and backgrounds to overcome stereotypes and prejudices to allow individual personalities to shine through and strong and secure relationships to develop. By bringing young people together for face-to-face dialogue and side-by-side action, difference can be valued and similarities appreciated. We run a variety of projects, including a magazine, eco-faith programmes and interfaith leadership initiatives, that all aim to:

- Celebrate Diversity and Share Knowledge
- Develop Skills and Creativity
- Encourage Common Action for Common Good
- Create a Sustainable and Safe World for Future Generations

To get involved or for more information contact Lucy Campion (Project Manager) at lucy@interact-uk.org.uk or phone 020 7482 4020

Dear Readers

Welcome to Interact, an interfaith culture and lifestyle magazine expressing the opinions and creativity of a culturally diverse group of young people from the London area.

The Autumn/Winter edition of Interact Magazine started on 22nd September with an introductory meeting where the team met each other, learnt about the magazine, and started brainstorming for this edition. Since then and until the 28th November 2010, the team has had weekly Tuesday meetings to discuss articles, designs, marketing plans, and the progress of the magazine in general. We have been lucky enough to benefit from the advice of our 'media mentors' throughout the process, who have joined our meetings to share their experiences in journalism, and offer constructive feedback on our work. A huge thanks goes to Duain Lucktang from Ctrl+Alt+Shift, Marcus Dypsch from the Jewish Chronicle, Tom from The Design Conspiracy, Ayman Khwaja from Emel Magazine, Jerome Taylor from The Independent, and Ben Anderson from Staying Active. Their knowledge and guidance has been invaluable to the project.

As Magazine Coordinators, we interviewed candidates, contacted media mentors, organized and ran all meetings, responded to any queries from team members and media mentors, reinforced deadlines and tried to keep the team motivated to complete their tasks. We were fortunate to have Lucy Campion, Project Manager at InterfaithAction, guide us throughout the process and we also consulted our media mentors. These mentors provided our editorial team with industry advice, making the experience with Interact Magazine highly informative and educational.

The team looks forward to the publication of this edition and we hope you enjoy reading about change from an interfaith and youth perspective. Many thanks to our media mentors and editorial volunteers who contributed their time and skills to this magazine!

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INTERACT



**I INTERACT
I CHANGE**

INTERACT

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PAVEMENT POLITICS

Words: **Sofya Shahab** Photography: **Tarvinder Basi** Design: **Iana Khomenko**

It is possibly one of the most famous sites and institutions in the world today, instantly recognisable around the globe, but for almost ten years the Palace of Westminster, consisting of the Houses of Parliament, has been plagued by an 'eyesore'. Not the scaffolding currently encasing Barry's Gothic design, but rather the protesters currently situated on the pavement around Parliament Square.

Whilst the vigils, which have been ongoing since Brian Haw set up his anti-war camp in 2001, have polarised public opinion (with some citing them as 'public menaces' and others 'stakeholders in democracy') this is one line the Conservative party have not appeared divided on. Under the direction of Boris Johnson, Mayor of London, an eviction order was issued on July 20th to clear the site of the protesters and homeless who constituted Democracy Village. However this turned into little more than a farce when demonstrators merely moved a matter of yards from the grass onto the pavement.

Problematically for Conservative MPs who so vociferously opposed the camps, the square comes under at least two different jurisdictions: the garden, part of the Royal Parks and managed by the Greater London Authority (GLA) including the Mayor, and the pavements which are the responsibility of Westminster Council - meaning a new law would be required to completely remove

the protesters. Unfortunately for Boris this means his metal fencing, constructed to ensure the campers do not return to the grass, not only looks far worse than the village ever did, but provides a useful means of hanging banners and propaganda denouncing government policies.

There are numerous causes, with numerous objectives on display around the square and there is even dissent amongst the campaigners themselves. The Parliament Square Peace Campaign (PSPC) led by Brian Haw criticised the village and Peace Strike for bringing him into disrepute. With such varied aims and divisions can any of the groups ever really become effective in influencing government policy?

Lobbyists think not. Rather **the need to demonstrate is a reflection of a failed campaign**. Over one million took to the streets of London to march against the invasion of Iraq, but despite their numbers they wielded very little power.



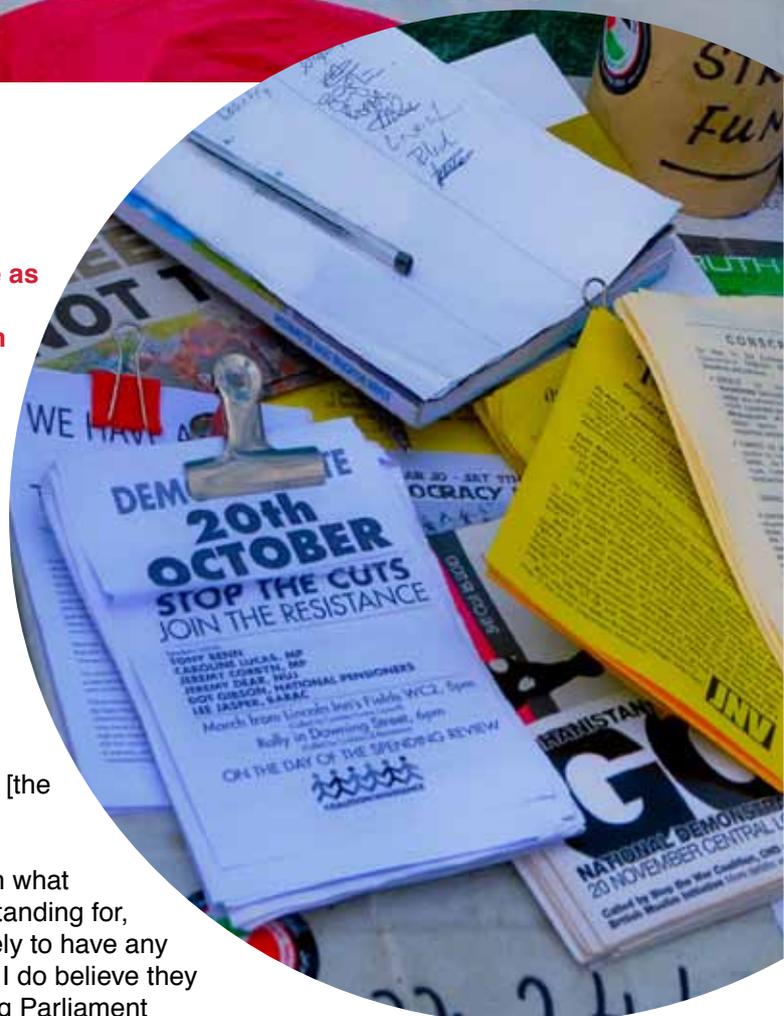
One government minister noted: ***'You become so used to hearing people shouting, you don't even notice what they're saying anymore.'***

Likewise strikes and aggressive action tend to alienate public opinion rather than get it on side so that it is no longer in the government's interest to heed protesters, 'If they really want to make a point, they should use all the time they've been spending camping out there to get other people involved in a campaign that everyone can get behind. It's frustrating because I don't think their arguments are without merit' said Amie Tsang, a student from London.

However in 2007 Brian Haw was chosen as channel 4's Most Inspiring Political Figure, for his role in standing up for free speech and encouraging others to do the same. He was also the subject of Mark Wallinger's Turner Prize winner *State Britain*, which recreated the one-man anti-war protest.

Parliament Square as a new platform for freedom of speech right in the heart of Westminster, stands as a direct challenge to the coalition's pledge to restore civil liberties and seems particularly apt: as Tony Benn put it 'Turning Parliament Square into a Democracy Village . . . exactly sums up my view of [the square's] role'.

I may not agree with what the protesters are standing for, or think they are likely to have any effect on policy, but I do believe they are vital in reminding Parliament that it is there to reflect the will of the people and that for that to be the case free speech is an obligatory requirement. Brian Haw has fought and won against the governments' attempts to remove him under the



Serious Organised Crime and Police Act, to become as much an institution of British democracy as the buildings themselves and I hope he remains for a long time to come.

Home Truths

Words: **Naomi Williams** Photography: **Tarvi Basi** Design: **Sara Sadek**

The growing tidal wave of Islamophobia in recent months has brought the relationship between Islam and the West under an increasing amount of scrutiny. In Britain, it has encouraged us to examine our collective role as a nation in shaping the current situation and how the creation of a rainbow collation of multiculturalism has not gone as smoothly as initially intended. As Trevor Philips (chairman of the Committee for Racial Equality) famously declared, we have been ‘sleepwalking into segregation’ through our blind embrace of a ‘multiculturalism’ which has exacerbated misunderstanding and otherness, and legitimised underlying prejudices. ‘Integration’, for so long considered an ugly concept, has been replaced with a far uglier reality – segregation within a forgiving frame of multiculturalism. Perhaps it can be attributed to the remnants of war and post colonial guilt, or to the liberal elite’s fierce loyalty to blanket terms such as ‘tolerance’, ‘respect’ and ‘equality’, but whatever the cause, it is clear that multiculturalism in its current make up has not worked. It has thrown us into a vacuum, and caused us to lose sight of common direction or focus, and what it is that unites us as Britons. Far from liberals and Islamophobes standing at opposite ends of the spectrum, it would appear that these two groups have one very key component in common: the viewing of Muslims as ‘other’. With such a crisis, viewed in front of the backdrop of New York protests against the proposed Islamic cultural centre, the frenzy over Rev. Terry Jones’ intended burning of the Qu’ran, fresh warnings over impending al Qaeda attacks and right-wing xenophobia infiltrating the politics of even notoriously free thinking Holland and Sweden as well as other

parts of Europe, we have no choice now but to face the question head on. Who is our Muslim neighbour? Britain is having an identity crisis. With liberals running a mile from the concept of ‘Britishness’, in part due to distortion of the concept beyond recognition by the populist right, we have inadvertently begun to erase any kind of meaningful framework within which an effective multi-ethnic society can operate. One outspoken advocate for a renewed focus on national



identity through positive ethno-cultural integration is controversial Dutch campaigner Ayaan Hirsi-Ali, a former Muslim woman of Somali origin.

Rocketing to the headlines following the release of her short film, a graphic take on Islam’s treatment of women called ‘Submission: Part 1’, (‘Part 2’ of which was never made due to director Theo van

Gogh’s murder by Islamic militants), Hirsi-Ali has since dedicated her life to campaigning against abuses of Muslim women’s rights. She points out that the honour killings, forced marriages, and systematic subjugation of Muslim women occurs not only in those forgotten corners of the world that we can safely categorize as ‘other’ but under the watch of

developed-world governments who talk of freedom, equality, and responsibility for its citizens as being central to their ideology. In her controversial autobiography *Infidel*, Hirsi-Ali puts forward a damning critique of Western societies who allow abhorrent practices which so deeply contradict what we claim to be cornerstones of our democracies to occur ‘in our own backyard’, all to avoid being ‘culturally insensitive’.

She claims that this nominal respect is borne from cowardice, and is testament to our failure to acknowledge our Muslim sisters who submit to the goal ‘to become silent inside, so that you never raise your eyes, even inside your mind’, as citizens of the same liberal democracy as ourselves. Our system may be flawed, but if we are to have a sliding scale of what is acceptable from one group to the next, we are effectively denying fellow citizens a public voice, driving the wedge of misunderstanding and separation ever deeper. This not only fails the ignored individual, it fails the state as a whole and is a recipe for further splintering and segregation. More dangerously, it creates ample opportunity for sweeping generalisations and subsequent ignorance-rooted conflict to take hold.

‘Sleepwalking into segregation’

By failing to acknowledge the suffering of women subjected to the most extreme practices in the name of fundamentalist Islam, we fail to acknowledge the difference between those practices, and those of moderate, peace-loving Muslims.

As Tony Blair commented in the *Wall Street Journal* in early November, ‘when we talk about [a specific portion of the non-integrated Muslim community in the UK] in general terms, without precision, for fear of “stigmatizing” Muslims, we alienate public



opinion and isolate the majority of Muslims who are integrating and want to be as much part of our society as any other group...in the interest of “defending” the Muslim community, we actually segregate it by refusing to have an honest debate about what is happening. We do not hesitate in questioning or challenging those whom we consider one of us, and the fact that we consistently fail to, for example, challenge the infliction of suffering on so many Muslim women is arguably because we have yet to consider them as the one of ‘us’. For multiculturalism to be effective, we have to pour our efforts into genuine interaction and engagement in an honest debate with those around us about the existing status quo.

Hirsi-Ali, for all her controversial lashes against Islam, is to be admired in that she saw silent segregation at work and did speak out about it. She spearheaded a radical change in Dutch policy, which previously shied away from recording the number of honour-related killings within Muslim communities. She argued that in order to integrate Muslims more positively into the societal fabric of the country, there must be a robust and definitive standard and rule of law which protects every citizen living under its watch, where every voice is heard, regardless of cultural background. To

this end, Hirsi-Ali successfully saw that honour-related killings were officially recorded and necessary legal procedures carried out accordingly. It is of course important to remember that multiculturalism is not in itself a bad thing. It can and should be a healthy two-way process of learning, sharing, and compromise. But if a complex and potentially divisive mix of strong minority and ethnic identities are ever to live alongside each other and enjoy a healthy two way exchange, it must occur within a broader national narrative framework. How can we appreciate our differences if we don’t first acknowledge what we share? It is therefore necessary for any country to have a moderate and definitive standard, which all can integrate into to find common ground. Therefore we need to look at ‘nation building’, from the bottom up. To make an inclusive and welcoming identity from which we can not only celebrate difference, but celebrate our commonness we must engage with each others’ ideas by examining them head on, and knowing it is our responsibility to ensure that all citizens are granted an equal stake in the country we build together.

We see the dangers that a vacuum in national identity can cause – we helped create it through colonialism, in Afghanistan in the 80s, again now,

and are in the process of so doing in Iraq. Gaps are made to be filled and we continue to suffer the consequences of militant extremism capitalising on the human need for community, belonging and identity; ideals so often overlooked in the pursuit of ‘peace’. Unless we provide a national framework which is inclusive and embraces diversity, but is fundamentally ‘one and whole’ – a sum of the part of all stakeholders who have engaged in frank and honest debate, rather than opposing groups who ‘respect’ but fail to understand and look each other in the eye, there will always be messianic alternatives which seem far more attractive. As more and more segregated British young people turn to extreme factions in order to feel a sense of belonging, the wedge of separation and prejudice will be driven deeper, causing a vicious cycle.

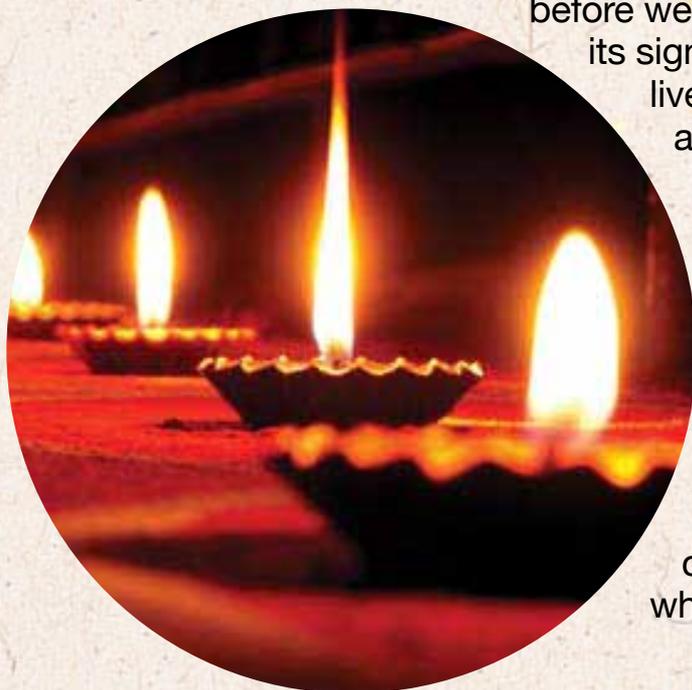
Through a process of productive integration we must therefore begin creating a renewed and contemporary national identity; one which provides a safe space within which people of all faiths feel a sense of belonging through the freedom to speak and to listen.

A space created through the courage of individuals who are not afraid to look their neighbour in the eye.

INTERACT INSIGHTS:

NEW YEAR

As we bid a fond farewell to 2010 and turn our attention to the year ahead, thoughts inevitably turn to reflection. Did we achieve what we wanted to over the past year? Do we have any regrets? What resolutions will we make for the year to come? How long will it be



before we break them?! The New Year, and its significance as a turning point in our lives, is a phenomenon common to all major religions, and one that manifests a variety of celebrations and meanings within different faiths. This article began as an exploration of how New Year is celebrated within different cultures but it soon became clear that a number of themes were integral to more than one religion. Here are some of the most common New Years practices, and why they are considered significant.

WATER

Water takes on an integral role in New Year celebrations across different religions and cultures, often to emphasise the notion of a fresh start. In Judaism, the practice of *Tashlich* is observed on the first day of *Rosh Hashanah*, the Jewish New Year. *Tashlich* is a tradition where prayers are recited next to flowing water to symbolically cast away one's sins. A similar tradition is practised during the Baha'i and Parsi New Years. A week before *Naw Ruz*, the Baha'i New Year, it is common for followers to place lentils in a dish to sprout. On the day of *Naw Ruz* itself, these lentils are then thrown into running river water, with the intention that they carry away bad luck for the year.

Seeds are also thrown into a river at the Parsi New Year, whilst the

Parsi New Year's feast is commenced by the sprinkling of rose water on visitors. Throwing water over each other is also a tradition common to the Thai New Year of *Songkran*. The practice of *Rohd Nam Songkran* ('The Pouring of Songkran Water') is believed to ensure good rain for the year ahead, whilst people roam the streets with water guns and buckets, to wash the bad deeds off each other and renew and refresh the year to come. In the Hindu festival of *Holi*, coloured water is typically thrown over each other, which is believed to remember Krishna, who threw coloured water over the milkmaids. This water, usually red, brings to mind another theme that is central to many religious and cultural New Year celebrations: colour.

COLOUR

One of the strongest associations of the Chinese New Year is the colour red, which permeates many aspects of the celebrations. Houses are adorned with red decorations, red envelopes of money are given to children, and revellers commonly paint their faces with the colour. In Chinese culture, red is the emblem of joy, and symbolises virtue, truth and sincerity, where the sound of the Chinese word for 'red', 'hong', also means 'prosperous'. Clearly, these are all values which are internationally heralded at the start of a new year. In the Sikh festival of *Baisakhi*, celebratory New Year processions are often characterised by brightly coloured clothing worn by participants. Interestingly, New Year is a more solemn occasion in Islam than the colourful dancing processions associated with other Eastern Religions. *Maal Hijra*, the Islamic New Year, takes place on the first day of the month of *Muharram*, which means 'respect'. It is a day of solemn reflection rather than festivities, and it is even common for some Shia Muslims to wear black. The tradition is a stark contrast to other religions, where not only colour, but light, takes a central role in celebratory rituals.

LIGHTS

In the week long Tibetan New Year of *Losar*, the first day involves a feast, where houses are decorated with flour paintings of the sun and the moon and people make offerings to the moon for a happy and prosperous life, illuminating the house with oil lamps at night. Outdoor festive celebrations are typical of the following days of *Losar*, where burning torches are whirled to cast away evil spirits. Likewise in the Chinese New Year, firecrackers are typically exploded to scare away evil spirits, while a lantern procession ends the celebrations, emphasising the significance of light. The Hindu New Year of *Holi* takes place on the day of the last full moon of winter and is a celebration of new life and the seasons, where bonfires are lit to commemorate the story of Holika, the demoness who was burnt to death with the help of Brahma in a triumph of good over evil. In Parsi tradition, candles, the burning of incense and coals, together with a visit to the Holy Fire in the local temple all reflect the significance of light at the New Year, emphasising the recreation of the universe.

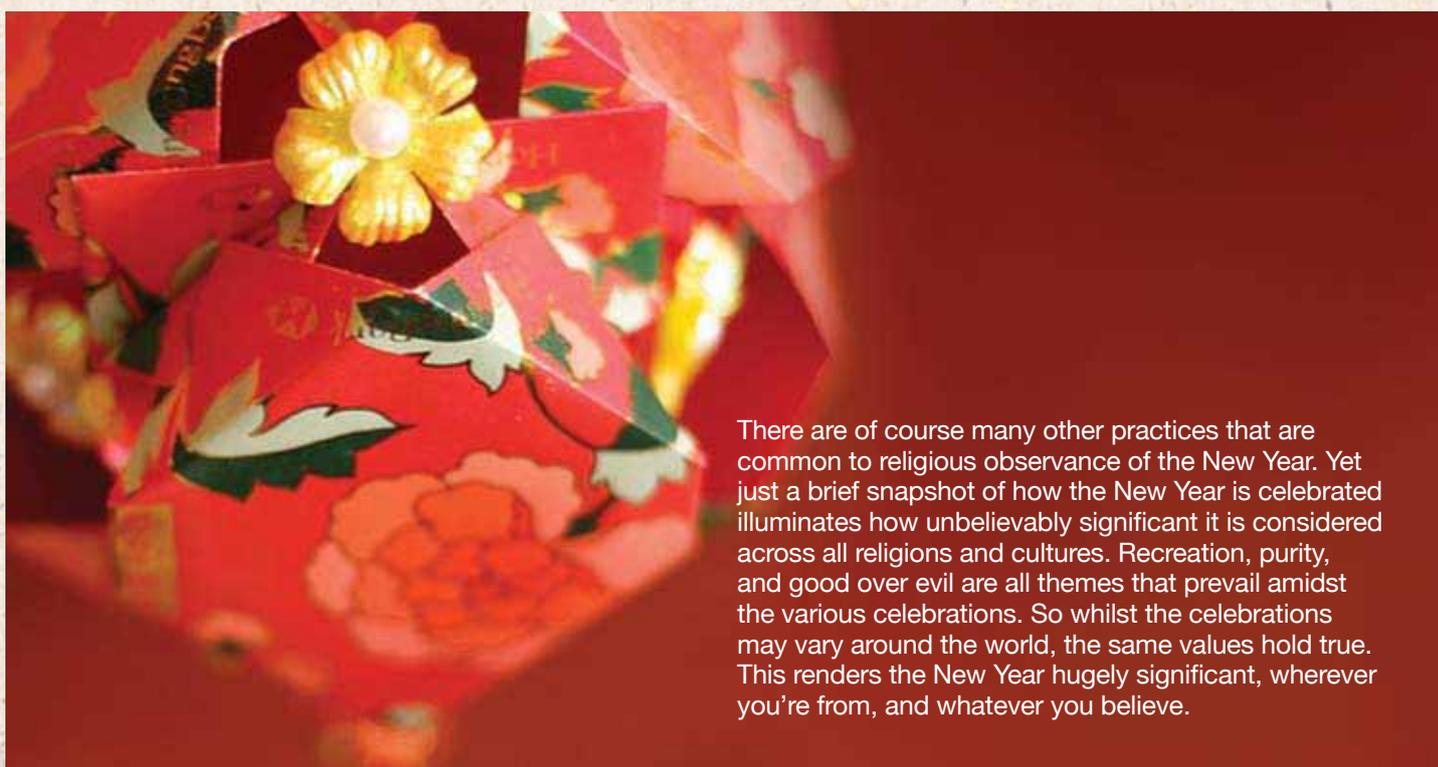
SWEETS

We have seen that feasting is a common New Year phenomenon across different cultures however it is clear that sweet foods hold a particular significance at this time. In Judaism, people wish each other 'Shana Tova', 'a sweet new year', while the eating of apple dipped in honey traditionally reflects this idea. Apples, or 'sib', together with a

sweet pudding 'samanu' form two of the seven objects that must be placed on the table as part of Baha'i New Year tradition, since they are believed to bring happiness and success into one's life.

Sweets are commonly exchanged

as part of the Hindu New Year celebrations, also with the belief that they contribute auspiciously to the year ahead.



There are of course many other practices that are common to religious observance of the New Year. Yet just a brief snapshot of how the New Year is celebrated illuminates how unbelievably significant it is considered across all religions and cultures. Recreation, purity, and good over evil are all themes that prevail amidst the various celebrations. So whilst the celebrations may vary around the world, the same values hold true. This renders the New Year hugely significant, wherever you're from, and whatever you believe.

God's Green Earth:

Eco-Faith Uncovered



Climate change has long been an issue close to the heart of a gradually increasing audience, from environmental scientists to politicians, with millions of climate change protesters in between.

Words: **Zeenat Rahim** Design: **Iana Khomenko**

Media attention towards the subject has increased dramatically over the past decade, with broadsheets and magazine dedicating sections to environmental sustainability and creating an eco-lifestyle. The topic has been broached from every angle, from clothes and beauty products to food and transport. Voluntary organisations, campaign groups and corporate organisations are just some of many manifestations of Britain's attempts to tackle the effects of climate change and guide society into an eco-friendly mentality, but faith groups have not neglected their potential in helping this cause progress further.

Operation Noah, Wisdom in Nature and The Big Green Jewish Website are just a few examples of faith-based environmental activism, abiding by motifs such as "Contemplative Ecological & Community Activism" and "Science informed. Faith motivated. Hope driven." These groups operate from a niche platform in order to combat a mainstream issue. In doing so they demonstrate how ideological differences and political labels should not and in this case, do not obstruct the unity of society in combating threats that affect not only today's generations but those who have yet to come. The relationship between science and religion has always been one surrounded by debate, however the motive for faith groups to focus their efforts on the environment seem clear when we remind ourselves that the basis of belief for the majority of faith groups is that God created the Earth, and that His creations are sacred.

Interestingly, the basis for these groups having been set up, other than to combat climate change and other ecological threats, is to introduce the faith communities in particular to the issues of the environment. The history of Wisdom in Nature, a Muslim environmental group, started

at a time when the environment was not seen to be a top priority for the Islamic community in Britain. Creating a physical forum for Muslims its founder Muzammel Hussain who were passionate about environmentalism in particular meant that there was a visible way for previously invisible Muslims to come together and act on issues important to them. Similarly, The Big Green Jewish Website asks questions such as 'is there a link between Judaism and the environment?' and 'as Jews, what is our role as global citizens?' The need to engage these people as members of their faith groups rather than as mere members of the wider society begs the question: what is it that's different about a person of faith's involvement in environmental activism that sets it apart from that of a non-faith person?

Operation Noah, inspired by the Biblical story of Noah and his arc, encourages its subscribers to take part in its 'Carbon Exodus'. Making steps away from carbon dependence in the way that Moses took the Children of Israel away from Egypt, the C.E project aims towards a Zero Carbon Britain by 2030. Wisdom in Nature also promotes their Fast for the Planet project. An environmentally-slanted take on the traditional Ramadan practise of fasting during daylight hours, they can choose food, transport, spending, or any other activity of choice. The principles behind fasting still apply: it is a chance to reflect on why we use the resources that we do and whether or not we really need them. These activities are by no means limited to those of a religious persuasion despite their faith-based innovation, which perhaps only adds to the appeal of practising them.

More information can be found on each of their websites: www.operationnoah.org, www.wisdominnature.org.uk and www.biggreenjewishwebsite.org

Enviromental Awareness

Words and Design: Sara Sadek Photography: Vicky Saragouda



Born and raised in Egypt, Sara Sadek graduated with a Bachelor of Applied Arts in Advertising in 2008 from Helwan University in Egypt. She worked on various projects in Egypt; then moved to the UK to pursue her academic studies. In December 2010, she got her Masters degree in graphic design from London Metropolitan University. Her main project was on the integration of 2D and 3D graphics to create poster-based campaigns.

Project title: "2D and 3D integrated graphics: Creating a poster based campaign to transform the viewers' attitude towards climate change".

3D Graphics:

An effective tool to raise the awareness of the environment

This poster collection has been designed to increase the awareness and promote action about climate change.

Each Poster has been exhaustively researched, designed, laser cut, vacuum formed and posted in public. Posters should succeed in providing the tool to convey information practically and repeatedly. Using a renovated vacuum forming technique has led the posters to acquire a tangible feeling as they have obtained the 3D effect, while the combination of specific colours has made the message more clear and simple.

The end product is composed of 9 different posters demonstrating various environmental issues which can result in a significant effect on climate change, such as water saving, energy expenditure, recycling & transportation.



What is your name?

Sonia

How old are you?

20

What do you study, and where?

Law at Queen Mary's University.

What is your cultural background?

Bengali.

What inspires your sense of style?

Vibrant and colourful items. I like to stick out in a crowd!

Where do you shop?

I mainly shop in high street stores like Primark and New Look. This scarf is from a market in Green Street.



What is your name?

Iman

How old are you?

21

What do you study, and where?

Trainee Accountant at Ernst and Young

What is your cultural background?

I was born in Iran, but consider myself a citizen of the world!

What inspires your sense of style?

Simplicity and uniqueness.

Where do you shop?

This shirt is from a random market in Iran, where I've found a lot of my clothes. I like to shop everywhere.

FUSION FASHION

East London is famed for being home to some of the trendiest and most diverse people in the city. We headed to Whitechapel to meet the best dressed people out and about, and find out what influences their style...



What is your name?

Seb

How old are you?

18

What do you study, and where?

Fine Arts at London Metropolitan University.

What is your cultural background?

British, but I've spent time living in different countries in Europe.

What inspires your sense of style?

Music

Where do you shop?

I piece together items from charity shops and my boyfriend's wardrobe!



What is your name?

Ching

How old are you?

32

What do you study, and where?

Student Art Teacher at the Institute of Education

What is your cultural background?

I'm British, but my parents are Vietnamese and Chinese.

What inspires your sense of style?

Patterns, fit, comfort, Eastern sensibilities

Where do you shop?

Everywhere! This coat was a hand-me-down, my jumper is from the men's section at H&M, and my bag is from Japan!



What is your name?

Rejwana

How old are you?

19

What do you study, and where?

Fashion Technology at De Montford University.

What is your cultural background?

My parents live in Bangladesh

What inspires your sense of style?

Making Islam fresh, mixing styles from east and west.

Where do you shop?

This outfit is from Coventry. I shop in high street stores such as Topshop, New Look, and Primark and mix my clothes from there as there are no Islamic shops around where I live.

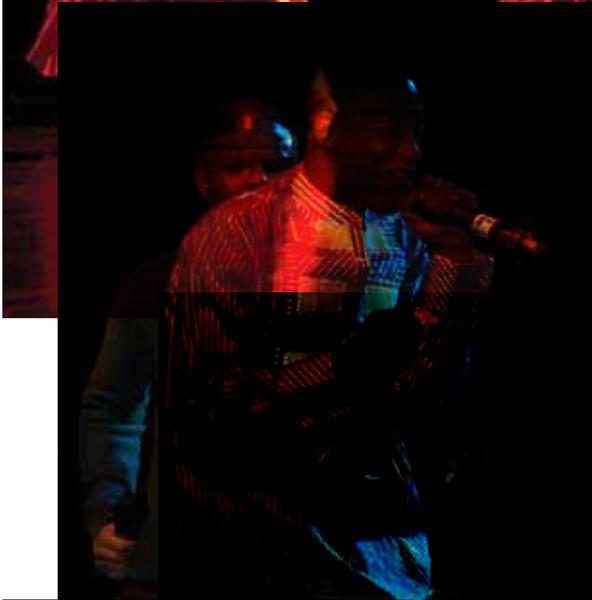
DIWALI

THE KCL SHOW



“The KCL Diwali Show is a showcase of talent spanning students not only from Kings College London but every other student body around London. The aim of the show for 18 years has remained unchanged; to raise the maximum amount of money from ticket sales for various charity organisations. For 2010, there were four charities which the show raised money for. They were *‘The Evelyn Children’s Hospital’*, *‘Castlehaven Community Association’*, *‘Jacob’s Hospice Homes’* and *‘Macmillan: Cancer Support’*.”





Each year the showcase is themed: this year as Good vs Evil. The performances from the show included various forms of dance, singing (both in Hindi and English), comedy and two fashion catwalks. A veritable smorgasbord of entertainment for a worthy range of charities. Interact sent out its resident photographer to capture the best moments of the event.”



As a student interfaith magazine, one of our primary concerns is that there are plenty of interfaith activities taking place across our universities. We decided to get in touch with Ben Whittaker, the Vice President for Welfare at NUS, to find out about the interfaith events that are currently on offer to students:

NUSFLASH

I: How does NUS engage with interfaith activities?

BW: Many students and students' union officers are active in building understanding about different religious communities, and improving relations between different faith groups on campus. NUS' Student Interfaith Project seeks to build on this experience and more broadly aims to improve the experiences of students of faith at further and higher education. We do this by providing students' unions with information, resources and training, opportunities to network and share their experiences of interfaith dialogue and action.

I: What does your role as VP for Welfare entail?

BW: As Vice president for Welfare I am responsible for convening NUS's campaigns on student welfare. I have principle policy responsibility for areas such as housing, student finance, crime, faith, alcohol and health. I also sit as part of the National Executive Council which sets the policy work for NUS. I campaign on many issues that extend students rights both in further and higher education

I: Do you think students' unions are doing enough to facilitate interfaith dialogue at their institutions?

BW: At those institutions where students and students' unions have interfaith forums and activities taking place - they are doing in a wonderful job. However, there is always room for more students and students' unions to be involved. During National Interfaith Week (21st -27th November 2010) students' unions organised over 100 events and activities in partnership with their interfaith and faith societies, for students



to increase understanding and strengthen relations between people of religious and non-religious beliefs.

I: What campaigns and events have NUS got coming up over the academic year?

BW: We are holding National Student Interfaith Forum on Wednesday 15th December at the University of the West of England, Bristol. This is the fourth of its kind and is open to all students and students' union officers to attend.

The agenda of the next forum will include:

- A showcase of students' unions activities during National Interfaith Week
- Skills-based workshops on interfaith dialogue, developing your SU's Inter Faith Forum and creating interfaith volunteer programmes

- Fishbowl dialogue (back by popular demand)
- Various expert workshops on controversial or challenging interfaith issues
- Religious Diversity and Anti-Discrimination Training will be available to staff and officers at students' unions in 2011 (dates and venue to be confirmed)
- A National Student Interfaith Conference will take place in March 2011 as an opportunity to celebrate the achievements of students' unions in building good interfaith relations on campus. The conference will share students' experiences and also include staff and chaplains, alongside students and students' unions to work together in planning sustained approaches to interfaith across their campuses. The conference will also include workshops and training from interfaith organisations and practitioners.

To find out further information about the events above please contact Kat. Luckcock@nus.org.uk

I: What's the best way for students to get more involved with interfaith activities at university?

BW: We would encourage students to contact the Welfare or Activities Officer at their students' union to find out what interfaith activities already take place. Many students' unions now have interfaith forums, societies or campaigns involving the faith societies.

If you do not have an interfaith forum or regular interfaith activities taking place, then NUS can help you and your students' union set something up.

University. Now What?

Words: Sebastian Singh Design: Sara Sadek

After the hard work and stress that surrounds university applications – personal statements and obtaining the grades required – finally arriving at university often feels like ‘Mission Accomplished’. But like George ‘Dubya’ Bush’s similar proclamation in May 2003, to think so is dangerously premature. Even before the economic downturn a degree from a Russell Group university wasn’t enough to land that job you really wanted. Now things are even worse.

To put this into perspective, a Guardian article published in July lays out the following statistics for 2010 graduates: nearly seventy applicants are applying for each job vacancy; the number of available positions is estimated to fall by nearly 7%; competition is so high that nearly 78% of employers are insisting on a 2.1 degree. The mission is therefore patently not accomplished – far from it.

However, this doesn’t have to be all doom and gloom. If approached in the right way university can provide a perfect environment in which to gain the experience and skills necessary to land the job you want. Firstly, no matter what your degree, and no matter what job you’re aiming for, make sure you come out of your degree with a 2.2 minimum, and ideally a 2.1 or a First. Without one of these, finding a job becomes much harder. Of course there are those that gained poor degrees but went on to have hugely successful careers.

Phillip Pullman, Carol Vorderman, and Fiona Shackleton spring to mind, all obtaining Thirds. Maybe don’t bank on this unless you know you have the ability to sell millions of fantasy novels or sell insurance on behalf of water-based financial firms. Applicants often have to start lower down the pecking order, take more risks, or work at smaller, less reputable firms. Essentially, things are likely to become much more difficult than they need be without a decent university qualification.

The second most important thing to do at university, job-wise, is to gain a position, or positions, of responsibility. The beauty of this is that where you gain this responsibility is of little to no importance. If you’re interested in Battle Re-Enactments join the Re-Enactment society and become Secretary/President/Vice-President etc. If you’re interested in something for which there is no society, you’re in luck! You can then ‘found’ such a society, creating positions and drumming up interest. To future employers this demonstrates initiative, motivation, and know-how, all essential skills for the work-place. These positions of responsibility create a wealth of opportunity for competency-based questions (questions asking you to describe situations in which you have shown leadership/empathy/motivation etc.), which have become the norm for most graduate recruiters. Even things that may not seem particularly taxing, such as organising a dinner for your society, is like manna from heaven for

recruiters. If you actually organised a piss-up in a brewery you would most probably be commended for your efforts. On par with taking on these responsibilities is ensuring there are no gaps on your CV. This includes holidays, most notably summer holidays, which are considered sacred in terms of gaining work experience. Of course this doesn’t mean spending the whole summer with your nose to the grindstone, but it does mean ensuring that at least some time is spent on ‘constructive’ activities. Be that a summer job (part or full-time), a voluntary holiday scheme, or an internship. Like positions of responsibility, the field doesn’t really matter; it is simply a way to demonstrate a hunger for work, and the ability to knuckle down. Those applying for hugely competitive careers, such as a career in journalism, are perhaps best suited to applying for roles in these sectors since lots of experience is often necessary to break into these professions.

Finally, meet as many people as possible! University is one of the best places to forge lasting relationships, and without considering the career side of things, a place to make life-long friends. This is arguably the most important thing about university, as it exposes you to new people, new ideas, and new opportunities. Many successful businesses develop through friendships at university, or the rather detestably-termed ‘contacts’ that one makes there. Even if the people you meet provide no ‘career help’, friendships are always essential.



INTERACT CHALLENGE: READY, STEADY, COOK!



Cooking on a student budget can be a struggle if you want to eat something a little more exciting than pasta everyday. Knowing the time and cost constraints of a student lifestyle, the team at Interact Magazine set ourselves a challenge: to cook our favourite culturally inspired meals in just 30 minutes. Here's how we got on...

Words: Claudia Graham Photography: Tarvi Basi Design: Sara Sadek

French Coq au Vin



Ingredients

- Red Wine (half a bottle)
- Chicken stock
- 8-10 pieces of chicken (legs wings and breasts)
- 8 shallots
- 15 button mushrooms
- 2-3 cloves of garlic
- 2 tablespoons of plain flour
- 4 rashers of streaky bacon cut into slices (optional)
- Salt and pepper



Directions

- Mix flour, salt and black pepper in a bag and add the pieces of chicken. Shake to coat chicken in mixture, and brown the chicken in a frying pan.
- Fry the chopped shallots, bacon, garlic and mushrooms until they are slightly brown.
- Place everything into a large pot with the red wine and chicken stock.
- Cover with lid and let cook for one hour.
- Serve with pasta.

Time Taken

1 hour (but worth the wait!)

Iranian Salad Olivier



Ingredients

- 3/4 poached chicken breasts finely shredded
- 2 pounds Russet potatoes, boiled, peeled and finely diced (1/4- to 1/2-inch for this and all chopped ingredients)
- 2/3 eggs, hard-boiled, finely diced (optional)
- 1 red or white onion, finely diced
- 3/4 cup mayonnaise (a mixture of mayo and sour cream works great here, but make sure its good quality)
- 3 small dill pickles, finely diced
- 1 cup of canned peas and carrots, drained or 1/2 cup cooked peas and 1 carrot, chopped and cooked
- 1/2 a lemon, squeezed
- Tumeric
- Salt and pepper

Directions

- Cook the ingredients as directed above then mix everything together adding more or less to taste.

Time Taken

30 minutes



Jewish Latkes

Ingredients

- 1kg/2lb 4oz old or baking potatoes, peeled, soaked in cold water until needed
- 1 onion, peeled
- 25g/1oz plain flour or fine matzoh meal
- 1 free-range egg, beaten
- salt and freshly ground white pepper
- olive or vegetable oil, for frying

Directions

- Finely grate the potatoes and onion and mix together.
- Place the grated potato and onion into a colander and squeeze out as much moisture as you can. Or roll up the potato and onion in a clean kitchen tea towel and wring well to extract the liquid.
- Mix the potato and onion with the flour, egg and salt and freshly ground white pepper.
- Place heaped tablespoons of the mixture into the frying pan on a low heat.
- Flatten each latke with the back of a spoon and fry for about five minutes on each side, turning over when the edges turn golden-brown.
- Serve with Viennas (Kosher sausages) and pickled cucumber.

Time Taken

30 minutes



Japanese Tuna and Spring Roll Pancakes

Ingredients

- 200 ml flour
- 200 ml water
- 1 egg
- 2 spring onions
- 1 tin of tuna

Directions

- Whisk the mixture together in a bowl.
- Pour into a frying pan and fry until the pancake sets.
- Add mayo (optional) and soy sauce on top for some extra flavour!

Time Taken

15 minutes



Bengali Chicken

Ingredients

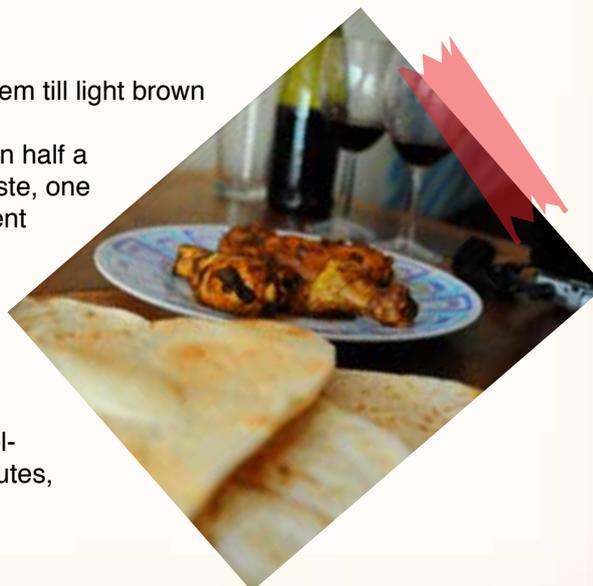
- 1 small onion
- 4 chicken legs
- Turmeric
- Chilli
- Ginger
- Garlic
- Coriander
- Cumin

Directions

- Chop the onions finely and soften them till light brown in 3 tbsp oil.
- Put in 1 tablespoon of water and then half a spoon of chilli, one spoon of garlic paste, one spoon of ginger paste (or the equivalent of the actual herbs) and one spoon of turmeric and one spoon of coriander.
- Mix together on high heat until like gravy.
- Then put down to medium heat, and put the chicken in.
- Mix all together so the onions are colouring the chicken, and fry for 20 minutes, stirring every 5.
- Serve with hot naan bread.

Time Taken

30 minutes



A Cross World United

Words: **Sebastian Singh** Photography: **Tarvi Basi** Design: **Sara Sadek**

US sports commentator Heywood Broun once said that: “sports do not build character...they reveal it.” His words ring true: once on a sports field there is nowhere to hide; each and every movement and action is exposed in the pursuit of victory. Courage, ambition, determination, and work-ethic are there for all to see. Nevertheless, Broun downplays a vital aspect of sport, its role in building the character that it makes so visible, and how this can help the integration of people.

The Olympics has always been the greatest sporting celebration worldwide, and its philosophy advocates using sport not just as a physical activity, but also as a means of educating people. The Olympic Games prioritise sportsmanship, fair play, and respect for fellow athletes amongst its participants, no matter what their race or creed. This philosophy has historically been termed the ‘Olympic Movement’, and aims to transcend sport, promoting peace and a sense of brotherhood around the world.

“ Sports do not build character... they reveal it ”

Whilst it may sound naively utopian, this philosophy is rooted in history – during the ancient Olympics all struggles between Greek city-states were put on hold. In modern times, things haven’t always been so civilised. The 1972 Olympics witnessed the Munich massacre where 11 Israeli athletes were killed by Palestinian gunmen, and the 1980 the games, which were held in Moscow, were boycotted by many countries as a protest against the Soviet Union’s invasion of Afghanistan. Even on an individual level the games have been awash with controversy, with doping becoming an increasing problem.

Despite this, sport has been invaluable integrative tool for millennia. Professional sport provides a culture to which nearly everyone can relate: over the last couple of decades the English Premier League – probably the most popular football league – has been world renowned and home to players of nearly all nationalities. Wherever you go, there will be people who have an opinion or at least a ba-

sic knowledge of the league’s teams and their favourite players. A British traveller could quite easily end up having an in-depth footballing discussion with a Senegalese cabbie about the pros and cons of the phlegmatic El-Hadji Diouf. As remarkable as this is, what’s more impressive is sport’s ability to bring together people from different backgrounds and societies. The “Know Your Neighbour” project, set up in 1997 by the owners of Israeli football team Hapoel Tel-Aviv, uses football to build more cohesive communities in the Middle East. It attempts to bridge the not insignificant social, political, religious and ethnic divides within the Middle East through football gatherings that take place up to five times a year. The scheme has been largely successful, and Ofir, an Israeli youth partaking in the scheme, echoes what is a common feeling amongst its participants: “they are no different from us...I am glad we got to meet like this”.

In the UK, a similar outfit, Crossworld FC, is a community based football club in South London primarily for young people from refugee and



asylum seeker backgrounds. Its aim is to allow newly settled Londoners to partake in a common pursuit, whilst forging connections and acquiring the skills that will help them fit in and benefit their life as a whole. Mutual respect, teamwork, leadership and communication are considered essential by the club, and this is made clear to the players from an early stage. One of the veterans of the team, Ali, is a 22 year-old refugee from Afghanistan. He said: "Crossworld gave me the opportunity to meet people and helped me to sort out some of my problems. When I was ill they called to check up on me, they helped me to apply for college and now they are helping me to get a part-time job." In a society where the mass media

tends to concentrate upon huge wages and sporting (or not so sporting) scandals, sport's image sometimes takes a battering, if not directly, at least by association. This is why it's important to keep in mind the positive side of sport, steering clear of the cynical narrative that is often propagated in the press and embracing noble examples such as the Crossworld and "Know Your Neighbour" projects. They each serve as constant reminders of the constructive power sport has when combined with a small group of committed and thoughtful individuals.

The guiding principle of the modern Olympic Games is summed up by a quote of the founder of the Interna-

tional Olympic Committee, Baron de Coubertin. It cuts to the essence of sport, before the corrupting influences of professionalism and greed make an entrance, and it is in this form that sport acts as an integrative rather than a divisive force: "The most important thing in the Olympic Games is not to win but to take part, just as the most important thing in life is not the triumph but the struggle. The essential thing is not to have conquered but to have fought well." Baron de Coubertin is right, taking part is important, but it is the integration of others that is at the heart of sport – from Crossworld's community team to the Olympics themselves.

If you're interested in donating, participating or coaching, Crossworld FC can be contacted via Matthew at: crossworldlondonfc@googlemail.com

Travel Journal:

India

You only need to visit one of the many bookstores on Oxford Street and the plethora of novels devoted to India attests to what a rich, diverse and inspiring country it is. In fact it was one such novel, I don't even remember which, that provoked my own journey- I do however recall the exact moment when on a rickety, sweat congealed bus between Trinidad and Havana I resolved Delhi would be my next port of call. Britain has long been fascinated with the magic and mysticism of the 'East', from ancient medieval manuscripts, through the East India Shipping Company and Romantic poetry, to Mills & Boon 'Sheikh' series: the eroticism and sensuality drawing us in, acting as a stark contrast to the British stiff upper lip- well now was the time for me to discover this new world.

Words: **Sofya Shahab** Photography: **Sofya Shahab** Design: **Iana Khomenko**

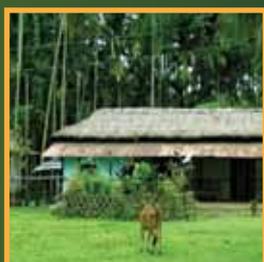
It was 8 months after returning home from Latin America before I was finally able to begin my next adventure, with warnings of the hassle I was sure to encounter and the smells that would assault my senses ringing in my ears, I boarded Etihad flight EY20. There are so many incredible sights to see in India that it is not worth me listing them here, besides, **a guidebook will undoubtedly serve you far more comprehensively than I ever could.** Nor will I regale you with the noise of the markets and colours of the saris; instead I would like to tell you of the people who made my trip.

We'd heard about Ali even before leaving England, as always the best travel advice came from those who had already been, and Anna my friend who I had bullied into coming with me had met a couple in Australia who mentioned going on a camel safari with him. Armed with a scrawled note listing the Hotel Pol Haveli and find Ali, we arrived in Jaisalmer, after a 28 hour train journey, stinking and bursting for the loo. Whilst we toyed with the idea of wandering the town calling 'Ali' we got chatting to the manager who conveniently knew him.

Setting off for the desert in a disco jeep blaring the Venga Boys was a somewhat surreal experience, perhaps my memory is befuddling me, but I'm pretty sure it even had flashing lights going on. Needless to say the journey aboard the camels was about as different as they come. Ali was only 17, and along with Bobby (who I'm pretty sure remained silent throughout the entire 2 days, yet managed to become a legend in his own right), was to be our guide.

Rumour has it that some couples opt for a camel safari as the ultimate romantic honeymoon, however I wouldn't recommend it - not only have you limited scenery, dirt and sand storms to contend with, but **camels are probably the most uncomfortable mode of transport for any sustained period of time.** This is where Ali came to the fore, regaling us with anecdotes of past trips, a continuously growing collection of riddles to rival Bilbo Baggins, and orchestrating a sing a long, where we were introduced to the soundtrack for our entire trip: 'Pardesi, pardesi, jana nahi', a Bollywood anthem that we were serenaded with wherever we went.

Along with songs and riddles, Anna and I also learnt how to fashion scarves into turbans, make chapatti over an open fire, and fix a broken rubber flip flop using a lighter (this was Bobby's contribution). Ali was reticent to talk about his family and past, but not so of the future- his dream being to buy his own camel so that he can start a safari business and make enough profit so that it can grow. His perpetually optimistic outlook over the short period of time we spent together is something I will always admire. Udaipur was my favourite stop on our travels and this was almost entirely due to the time we spent



with Shashi. *As every shop owner is more than eager to tell you, 'Octopussy' was indeed filmed there and Roger Moore may have purchased numerous items from their stall but the Shiv Niwas Palace Hotel, situated on an island in the middle of the lake was a little out of our price range.* Instead we opted for minimalist marble at only £5 a night.

We had decided a cookery course would be an interesting way to experience Indian culture, as well as making us a little more adventurous with our menu selections (as opposed to the trusty standbys of korma or kofti). The guidebook had a few recommendations but wandering up the main street we came across a house with a sign outside and decided to go in to enquire. There we were met with the beaming white toothed smile of Shashi. She already had 3 people for the following day but we'd be more than welcome to join them, which given her warmth and authenticity we were definitely happy to do. What sold it for us however, was her warning not to have any breakfast but to 'Come hungry, very hungry!'

Shashi's home took up the first floor of a building which also housed a restaurant belonging to her cousins. Consisting of a kitchen, living/dining/bedroom and a small outside terrace where the pet turtle resided, it was fairly intimate. But rather than feeling like we were invading, it seemed incredibly natural. She was strikingly beautiful: long dark hair shot through with silver and pulled back into a bun, character lines on her face placing her in her mid-forties, but all with a perpetually youthful sparkle in her eyes. Wearing a white silk sari adorned with little turquoise flowers, she spoke of quality and taste, **however the frayed hem and darned burn mark told of a genteel poverty and pride.**

Starting the morning with chai the day progressed with a veritable abundance of dishes and stories. Shashi's husband had died a few years ago: stabbed by his business partner. This left Shashi to raise two sons on her own with no income or immediate family to support her. Castes have been made illegal in India, however it is still a large part of the country's social and cultural make-up, **as part of the Brahmin caste Shashi could have been ostracised by her community had they discovered she worked as a cleaner, rising in secret before dawn every day, in order to finance her children's education.** The inspiration to open a cookery school came from a Canadian who had befriended the family and enjoyed Shaahi's meals so much he thought everybody should have the opportunity to learn how to make them. Despite all the difficulties and hardship Shashi had been through she was so full of grace and strength that we couldn't help but be amazed by her - to us she seemed radiant.

BORN IN

THE MOLDOVAN COMMUNITY IN LONDON IS HARDLY LARGER THAN 1000 PEOPLE, MANY OF WHOM CAME HERE IN SEARCH OF A BETTER LIFE. VICTORIA ONOFREICIUC SHEDS SOME LIGHT ON THE STRUGGLES FACED BY MOLDOVANS LIVING IN LONDON, AND THE PROBLEM OF FINDING A PLACE TO BELONG AWAY FROM HOME.



HOW IT ALL BEGAN

I am writing this as a personal “Dear diary” piece, because looking out into the courtyard of the university where one of my biggest dreams started and almost now ends, I do feel a little bit nostalgic and melancholic. A year ago I was standing in the same courtyard, socked after hearing some really bad news about my enrollment, and telling myself: “You can’t do it, it’s impossible, just quit now and move on.” Well, I did do it, and it was pretty much possible. Now I just need to get my Masters diploma. You could ask where is the drama? Thousands of students in London go through the same ordeal daily. Yet there is a difference – I come from Moldova, one of the poorest countries in Europe. Everything for us is ten times

harder- studying here, living here, working here, and why not, praying here. But this article is not about me, it’s about the people like me and how they get along in London.

This city welcomes hundreds of foreigners on a daily basis, who come here to change something about their life. Few of them are willing to change something about themselves as well. But it’s not a problem in London, **the city tends to be so multi-cultural that in the end one might seem lost in this huge pool of faiths and cultures.** Maybe for the Muslim community, or Chinese, or Jewish, it is easier to spot and recognize signs of belonging to something in the city, however for the Moldovan community (which might gather not more than 1000 persons), this might be a challenge. We don’t have take-away

MOLDOVA...

food catered to our background, we can't find traditional places with our music or drinks, and for sure we can't buy the type of clothes we are used to (even if they are cheap imported stuff from the East anyways). Based on pure economic rules, demand generates offer. If there is no demand for such things, the offer will be scarce as well. However we are here and we are trying to make a life. So let me take you through the stories of some Moldovans trying to make London their home.

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cultures. Maybe for the Muslim community, or Chinese, or Jewish, it is easier to spot and recognize signs of belonging to something in the city, however for the Moldovan community (which might gather not more than 1000 persons), this might be a challenge. We don't have take-away food catered to our background, we can't find traditional places with our music or drinks, and for sure we can't buy the type of clothes we are used to (even if they are cheap imported stuff from the East anyways). Based on pure economic rules, demand generates offer. If there is no demand for such things, the offer will be scarce as well. However we are here and we are trying to make a life. So let me take you through the stories of some Moldovans trying to make London their home.

ALONE IN LONDON

I discussed this matter with Mihai in a great Irish pub next to Leicester Square. The place was breathing the joys of being in London: great atmosphere, smiling bartenders, business people and unemployed ones mingling together like there is no tomorrow. With every sip of beer I took from my pint I was more and more convinced that it is worth it to live here (I know what you think, but it was only my first one!). But looking across the table I just saw a pair of bored eyes and lifeless expression- **Mihai, the Moldovan student in London, was not very impressed by the London glamour.** Trying to find the reasons for this, and even more important why he came here and why was he staying, I came to the one issue that rules all of our lives – money. He came here for a job in IT, thinking that this place might offer him better chances. After one year of studies that he says he

doesn't like and trying to apply for a NI number that he was refused due to mysterious reasons, he still thinks in the same way: "I am just studying for the diploma, I know I need it to have a chance in getting a job later on, but as long as I have my computer and can write scripts I am OK here." You might think that he is just a strange and lost teenager who just can't socialize – tempting but not true. I had the same idea at first, but he actually enjoys talking and he has friends at university. He just doesn't integrate in the London life. Why? I believe because he is feeling lost. It is too much for him- the differences, the colors, the faces, the smells and the sounds. He can't find a familiar thing to relate to. And this is why he hides in his computer. The majority of other lost foreign teenagers out there always have something familiar to come to, even if they can't relate to anything else: their faith. They have places, activities and people to meet in the sole context of their religion. Mihai, on the other hand, even if born and baptized in the Christian Orthodox faith, is a declared atheist. He stopped believing in God from early teenage years, and he didn't change. But would the situation have been different for him if he was a believer? Mihai told me with a calm expression: "I am not a believer, so this is why I didn't even try to find a church where I could pray. I know I can, but everything here is so mixed and different, I feel it doesn't matter really if I would go to a Catholic or Protestant church, even if I am Orthodox. I mean who cares anyways?". These words made me think that **the crazy London life has stripped this boy of the last seeds of belief he may have had in him,** because it managed to convince him that in this melting pot of cultures his own culture is small and insignificant.

THERE ARE DIFFERENT TYPES OUT THERE

But there are Moldovans for whom the culture issue is not even an issue. They are here also for the same thing: money. But for them this is not a long term goal, it's an immediate necessity that needs to be taken care of, so that they and their families back home have something to live on. Some of them are not even 23 years old, and even if they have been in London for more than half a year now, they have never seen Trafalgar Square or Big Ben. Why? Because they are too tired and bored of their jobs: cleaning houses or working in the newly built apartments for rich Londoners. Their daily schedule is waking up at 6, work until 6, coming back home to a cooked dinner from the cheapest products they can find at local supermarkets and waiting for Sundays (when they don't do much anyways, just hang around the house and think about the next hard week of work). Going to church on their day off is out of the question: and they do believe in God and their Christian Orthodox religion. I could see it in their eyes when we were talking about this issue - a young Moldovan couple with the girl's brother sharing a house in Zone 3 with a Ukrainian girl. They could be living in any other big city of the world and feel no difference; this is how detached and isolated their life has become. Diana, 24 years old, who spends her days cleaning houses all over London, still thinks that the quality of products we have back home is better: "I can't find here stuff that I like, and it's too expensive anyways. I mean I can't see myself living here. We are just working to save the money to buy a house back in Moldova. Since I came here I feel worse and worse every day. I hope in two years time we can go back." I could see the same longing for home and familiar things in the eyes of her husband and brother. **They can't integrate in the London society, and never considered religion as a pathway to doing so.**

Reading along my own words, I realize how bleak and faceless the picture I drew is. Not trying to make

it nicer, I still have to mention that it's not a general one. There are Moldovans who call London their home, as big, noisy and confusing as it may be. Marcela and Angela both work at a hotel in Trafalgar Square. They are struggling through daily hardships in the hope that one day they might achieve here what they can easily have back home: an acceptable accommodation and financial stability. One of them has been here for 8 years already, and she is a British citizen. Another arrived a year ago, and now is studying for a Masters degree and planning to have a baby here in the near future. **"Of course I feel that I lost so much from my own culture and beliefs since I've been here, because I never had time to stop and think about going to church or finding something from my country I can relate to. But no matter the sacrifices, London is worth it.** This city is like an expensive hotel, which can accommodate anyone who can pay the price: for me it was losing the connection with things back home and a part of my own identity as a Moldovan", said Angela, who managed to reach the



position of housekeeping manager at her workplace. Marcela is only at the beginning of the road, and who knows if she will have the strength to renounce a part of herself just to have a chance in London.

As a Moldovan student myself, and more over as a journalist, during my one year stay in London I came across only one event that reminded me of home: the screening of the documentary movie "Where Europe ends?" at the Romanian Cultural Centre in London. Just to clarify the confusion, Romania and Moldova are sister nations coming from the same

roman roots, sharing one language and culture. They were separated by historic borders along time, and now Romania is an EU member country, and Moldova has no feasible chance of becoming one in the near future. However, when a Moldovan sees something Romanian, he will be familiar with this thing. So the Romanian Cultural Centre in London offers events for the persons coming from this background or interested in it. I had the chance to meet people there that have grown old in London, who came here years ago. They were happy and calm, they found their place and they don't want to change it. But I didn't see one single face under 25 - where is the Moldovan youth in London? Hiding under computer screens or in their house, asking themselves daily: 'What am I doing in London'?

"I chose a closed box with many tiny chickens making lots of noise to get some air as a symbol for my movie", explained the director of 'Where Europe Ends?', a Romanian journalist who managed to work for BBC in her lifetime. "You can find these kind of boxes at any traditional market in Moldova, sold by farmers

for some money. For me it looks exactly as the people from Moldova - crammed up in a tiny box trying to get out and make themselves heard".

For me, the majority of Moldovans I saw in London carry the same box with them, as a piece of luggage that you didn't check in and need to drag along the entire airport - it's tough and heavy, but you just need it. They don't ask themselves the question if religion could be an answer for this isolation, maybe because in London the religion they have is actually not an answer - it is just as invisible as they are.

Shazia Mirza: Multiple Choice

Words: Zeenat Rahim Design: Sara Sadek

As a young Muslim woman myself who likes to crack the occasional joke about her demographic, I jumped at the chance to see critically acclaimed writer and stand-up Shazia Mirza doing what she does best on stage.

Occasionally having been pigeon-holed as a Muslim female comedienne, I had certain expectations about her set as I'm sure much of the surprisingly mixed, middle-aged and middle class audience did as well. I am happy to state that many of these were completely torn to shreds.

Sometimes obvious but always hilarious jokes about her cultural background were peppered between outrageous anecdotes about her social life.

Presenting: a woman not so much tied down by her faith or ethnic background, but trapped by her brilliant incapacity to act in line with social customs and consequently, leave anyone around her with a straight face.

The gig started with a typical mauling of the audience, and we were ourselves labelled as either Guardian readers, lesbians or elderly Asian wife-hunters. I, as the sole headscarf in the crowd, was picked out for light mocking, along with my companion, close university friend Raza, of Pakistani Muslim origins. After interrogated as to whether or not he was staying at mine for the night, I elicited easy laughs by giggling 'No, definitely not!' back to an audience ready to laugh at such reinforcing nods to cultural stereotypes.

Mirza's reaction to her chatty audience was a true testament to her strong and confident command of the stage. She would not shy away from potentially embarrassing the crowd with interjections such as 'This isn't all true you know. Some of it is actually made up.'

There were, of course, marriage jokes aplenty throughout her two-part set, amongst the funniest being 'I flew by Virgin Airlines – not because I am one'. The portions of her set dedicated to lambasting Asian or Islamic culture were excellent, starting with the line 'Alcohol is forbidden in my religion – what isn't.' From images of the female members of her family all being able to use the same bus pass (because they cover their faces) to her parents using Rob and Sharon as Western aliases for Mohammed and Sara, there was no faulting her satirical take on how her parents negotiated their own culture clash between East and West before imposing it on her, and it was a series of observations extremely appreciated by the crowd.



One did find at moments however that crudity was a quality in Mirza's writing which she did not shy away from. Whilst jokes referring to sex and sexual language in stand-up can go either way depending the nature and frequency of their usage, it was clear that repeated uses of words such as 'hymen' soon desensitised the audience to the otherwise clever and funny impact they can have. There was no arguing with the fact that the average age of her spectators having been 50-odd may have set Mirza up for failure in that respect from the very beginning. However the fault was on both sides as the first half of the set was relentlessly directed towards sexual imagery, the shock-factor of which distracted from the more intelligent side of her material, or, from a cynical viewpoint, overcompensated for the lack of it.

Regardless of this, the highlights of her set indisputably lay in her recalling tales of social discomfort, from American anecdotes about botox to meeting the Queen. A story about telling strangers at a party of her sexual habits was a particular favourite, whilst being deliciously demonstrative of her sardonic and almost farcical way of looking at the world. I found myself wishing she was my bitchy best friend, and I'm sure the majority of the audience had a secret desire to see her as the unpredictable and offensive dinner guest at their own parties and gatherings. The wide range of material in her set meant that no-one was left completely alienated – no mean feat in the world of comedy.

Intelligent, dark and criminally cutting, Shava Minza (as she was once introduced to a crowd by a nervous stage manager) put on a raucous show for her willing audience, one that saw her not just as a female, Muslim stand-up comic, but someone who's just plain funny.



RESTLESS BEINGS: HUMAN WRITES

Hip-hop has long been a movement associated with expression. Whilst music in general fits that idea, it's hip-hop and spoken word that allows for a performer to truly express how they feel without having to worry about the constraints of melody and dance-ability so much as opposed to whether the words are potent and poetic enough to take hold of the listener and make an impact. This theory was tested and indeed proven during a Saturday evening in Shoreditch, when a mix of Hoxditch trendsetters, East End hijabis and wannabe-MCs descended upon Concrete @ Pizza East to prove a point. Self-expression is a human right – one which should be utilised wherever possible. The performers and activists of this message encapsulated the feel of the evening and the mood of audience, and the event's success was down to the passion, idealism and outreach capability of an aptly named organisation called Restless Beings.

A novice to the hip-hop scene

myself, I was accustomed to the kind of reggae beats of Bob Marley or self-indulgent lyrics of Snoop Dogg. I was not however aware of how powerful a performer can be in terms of voicing the opinions of many that had not been able to express it themselves. The line-up was a range of Muslim artists (well, it is East London) and singers such as 15 year old Sindy Czureja and special guest Lady Ny, and each one was more talented than the last. The range of messages related to the audience mirrored the diversity contained within it; whilst Muslim Belal silenced the room with his tale of conversion to Islam, Mohammad Yahya got everyone jumping with homages to Fela Kuti and Mozambique. Perhaps the most powerful tactic used by many artists on the night was audience interaction – the old school 'when I say this, you say that' which went down an absolute treat with the room. Again, the breadth of slogans was wide, as we found ourselves chanting 'People's/ARMY'

one minute and 'Long Live Palestine/ LONG LIVE GAZA' the next. The most empowering chant came from Poetic Pilgrimage, long-standing friends of Restless Beings who appealed to us to be the change. The chanting of 'I am change' enabled the audience to actively take part in the message that arguably encapsulated the whole evening's message, and didn't so much put words in our mouth as have them gifted to us in a moment of generous humanity.

Most impressive by far however was Restless Being's achievement of having created a live human rights narrative that not only benefitted from its multiple writers, but was richly composed from a plethora of stories and themes. Ryu & Onoe captivated the audience with their tale of a teenager fatally caught up in a crime, whilst Yahya started his set with a tale of African civil war. Corruption was inevitably a commonality amongst the performers' sets but it was deftly covered in ways that left the audience still thinking about



what was said for hours afterwards. Logic's memorable pieces included an acapella with 'they got you' as a chorus, whilst Pugnacious MC, a student from SOAS, arguably stole the show with a rap told solely from the perspective of money personified. 'I fund wars and accumulate after them' contributed to the anti-war message that many were advocating on stage, but the 'FTSE going down'

Silverlink train service and fast food vans in King's Cross. Freedom was an ideal to be reached not only at the expense of external evil but also our own indulgence, a fact that not many public personalities will champion if not brave.

The night however was not simply about enjoying these artists and their music, however much the audience did so. It was also to raise awareness of Restless Beings as an organisation itself, a feat admirably attempted and in many cases I'm sure achieved by hosts Rahima Begum and Mabrur Ahmed. Exercising crowd control for a large portion of the evening, they sprinkled monologues about the organisations and campaigns they are involved in throughout the set, intertwining the entertainment of the evening with the issues at hand. With sympathies reaching from Bangladesh to Burma, women in Kyrgyzstan to gypsies in Eastern Europe, it was no wonder that the event had managed to draw a diverse audience and so many different artists. Having given away free pencils on entry to the event, Restless Beings certainly knew

of the evening that involved the audience even more so than before. Ten excellent novice MCs took to the stage, each with a different message, from pieces about America to lyrics about love. There was an almost explosive end to the competition with the two final acts being soul-searching singer Sunshine and maverick secondary-school teacher Curious, both with different stories to tell but equally endowed with crowd-pleasing talents. After much screeching from the audience it was the educator who reigned victorious, with his clever, witty and impeccably delivered anecdotes on society leaving the audience wishing that they had all sat their GCSEs and A-Levels under the auspices of such an underground talent. The very ability of these young people to have been able to take the stage proved to the full how Restless Beings seek to empower people to be able to speak for themselves about the experiences they go through, and the offer of exposure through both the event's performers social media as well the organisation's meant that Curious had won a chance to express himself to thousands.

The event was a huge success as was visible to anyone who was there, but what concerned me most was whether or not the ideas of this organisation would be carried across. Mabrur, a charismatic stage presence to say the least, at one point relayed a conversation we were to have about our weekends on Monday morning, during which we would mention the event and the organisation itself. He mentioned that they put on events to capture the imagination and bring together creativity that would make a difference. Perhaps to some the night was no more than a thoroughly enjoyable collection of underground hip-hop artists, but as someone who ended up having that conversation on Monday morning, I can safely say that the promotion of self-expression as perhaps the most fundamental human right touched me to the core. Before Saturday, I was another civilian, bombarded with stories of human rights violations that were so far removed from my own sphere of existence it was only apathy that I could exercise in response. Now, with my pencil to write with, social consciousness to think with and ears to listen with, I can proudly say that I too, am a restless being.



being turned into a sexual image proved consistent with the clever humour and twisting of words that many of the performers successfully weaved into their work. Iron Braydz proved popular due to his charisma and the affable yet important nature of his set. He spoke of being free, not only from ideological arrest but the

how to get their message across. As Rahima put it, 'human beings are constantly writing [and] the movement of expression is essential to being a human being'.

This was epitomised by the second portion of the night where the stage was given up to the open-mic competition, a raucous part

Interfaith Elsewhere:

LIVERPOOL

Liverpool Community Spirit Youth Council

The Youth Council has been a part of Liverpool Community Spirit, a multi-faith education initiative, since its conception in 2002. Over the last eight years, the Youth Council has engaged young people from diverse faith, cultural and socio-economic backgrounds in its activities. The Youth Council has grown from involving a small group of young people from Toxteth to engaging over thirty young people from all over Merseyside, as far as Warrington and Ormskirk.

October saw ten of our Youth Council members from diverse faith and cultural backgrounds embark on a weekend residential to the beautiful Ormside Mill set in the lush countryside of Appleby, Westmoreland.

The weekend gave the Youth Council the opportunity to escape the rush of the city, gain new experiences and become better friends through challenging activities and team building exercises.

During the weekend Youth Council members achieved things they never imagined they could...Sulekha, our newest Youth Council member enjoyed her first experience of England's countryside and climbed her first mountain. Hayfa improved her fire making skills and the whole group experienced and excelled at coppicing.

Currently the Youth Council engages young people aged 16-25, from diverse faith, cultural and socio-economic backgrounds.



Activities of the Youth Council include:

- * Cultural Evenings
- * Visits to places of worship and festivals
- * Team building trips and residentials
- * Projects addressing issues and needs within Liverpool's communities
- * Inter-generational projects
- * Film making
- * School education resource development
- * Opportunities to assist in Liverpool Community Spirit's workshop delivery in schools

This was the fourth time, Cressy and Matt had taken the Youth Council away, and as always, they were overwhelmed with the group's co-operation and support for one another throughout the weekend.

A big **THANK YOU** and **WELL DONE** to the Youth Council members who came on the trip! It was a pleasure!



The Youth Council aims to:

- Increase the understanding of the young people's faith and cultural backgrounds
- To improve self-esteem and self-confidence
- To raise aspirations
- To empower young people to become agents of positive change within their communities
- To encourage active citizenship
- To develop valuable friendships

What? When?

What?

The London African Film Festival at The Barbican

A celebration of African cinema takes place around the capital with the annual London African Film Festival, featuring UK premieres, Q&A sessions with filmmakers, screenings of silent films and more.

www.africaatthepictures.co.uk

When?

26.11.10 – 3.12.10



What?

Cologne Christmas Market at The London Southbank Centre

The Cologne Christmas Market evokes a festive German atmosphere when

the area between the London Eye and Royal Festival Hall turns into a promenade for the young and the young-at-heart.

Up to 60 traditionally decorated wooden chalets sell a wide range of unique hand-crafted gifts, unusual Christmas presents, food and drink.

www.southbankcentre.co.uk

When?

Until 22.12.10

What?

ZubopGambia at The London Southbank Centre

A thrilling collaboration between London-based world beat music group Zubop with Gambian master musicians which brings together the musical interests and influences of everyone involved. Their shows include not only traditional West African pieces but elements of jazz, township music, pop, reggae, blues and many other styles.

www.southbankcentre.co.uk

When?

30.12.10 – 6pm

What?

Black Watch at the Barbican

Today, as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan touch us in different ways, Black Watch opens our perception to the complex and uncomfortable reality of war. This is political theatre that is still as

relevant and urgent as ever.

www.barbican.org.uk

When?

27.11.10 – 22.01.11 / 19:45, 14:00

What?

Club Kali's New Year Party at The Dome in Tufnell Park

Bollywood, Bhangra, Arabic, R&B and Dance classics spiced up by DJ Ritu and DJ Dilz at the world's biggest Asian music based LGBT club!

www.clubkali.com

When?

21.01.11

What?

Japanese Fashion at the Barbican



Issey Miyake, Rei Kawakubo and Yohji Yamamoto redefined how fashion worked, looked and was made and they established themselves as permanent favourites in both the fashion and the art industry. At the Barbican Art Gallery you can see key pieces from their collections and how influential their work has become.

www.barbican.org.uk

When?

Until 06.02.11

What?

The Tiger in Asian Art at Asia House

For the people of Asia, the tiger is an enduring and powerful symbol of cultural identity. It has inspired countless legends, beliefs, poems and works of art. From Asian paintings, to sculptures, textiles, photographs and other works of art, both historical to contemporary, the exhibits will cover many Asian countries and regions, including India, China, Japan, Korea and South East Asia.

When?

05.11.10 – 12.02.11

What?

Imperial Chinese Robes Exhibition at the V&A

Among the many garments on show at the Imperial Chinese Robes exhibition are gowns designed for everyday life as well as rituals, banquets, travelling, hunting and official royal visits.

www.vam.ac.uk/exhibitions

When?

07.12.10 – 27.02.11

What?

Tuareg: People of the veil at the Horniman Museum

Tuareg: People of the Veil provides a fascinating insight into the culture of the Tuareg people through the exploration of clothing and jewellery.

www.horniman.ac.uk

When?

Until 27.02.11

What?

Egyptian Book of the Dead Exhibition at the British Museum

Offering prayers, spells, hymns and instructions which would provide the dead with everything they needed to make a safe journey to the afterlife, the books on show will explain their content and much of the enigmatic meanings behind the rituals.

www.britishmuseum.org

When?

Until 06.03.11

What?

Images and Sacred Texts: Buddhism across Asia



Through sacred texts, painted scrolls and sculptures from Sri Lanka to Japan, discover the shared traditions of Buddhism – the 'three gems'.

www.britishmuseum.org

When?

Until 03.04.11

What?

The Road to Kabul at The National Army Museum

This exhibition examines the controversy of the First, Second and Third Afghan Wars. It contains personal accounts, historical information and paintings by the conflict by war artist Mathew Cook.

www.national-army-museum.ac.uk

When?

Ongoing

What?

Indian Armies, Indian Art: Soldiers, collectors and artists 1780–1880 at the National Army Museum

This exhibition focuses on paintings and other works of art created by Indian artists for the British in India. These vibrant and colourful souvenirs from a pre-photographic age provide a fascinating insight into early British and Indian interaction.

www.national-army-museum.ac.uk

When?

Ongoing

December

2nd, Tuesday

Hanukkah (Jewish)

Hanukkah is the Festival of Lights and marks the restoration of the temple by the Maccabees in 164 BCE. Hanukkah lasts for 8 days.

7th, Thursday

Al-Hijira (Muslim)

Islamic New Year. Marks the migration of the Prophet Mohammad and his followers from Mecca to Medina.

8th, Wednesday

Bodhi Day (Buddhist)

On Bodhi day some Buddhists celebrate Gautama's attainment of enlightenment under the Bodhi tree at Bodhgaya, India.

13th, Monday

St Lucy's Day (Christian)

Saint Lucy's Day or the Feast of St. Lucy is marked by Catholics and Orthodox Christians and also celebrated by members of the Lutheran Church.

16th, Thursday

Ashura (Muslim)

Islamic holy day observed on the 10th of the Islamic month of Muharram. Shi'ite Muslims regard it as a major festival marking the martyrdom of the Prophet's grandson, Hussein.

21st, Tuesday

Winter Solstice - Yule (Pagan)

Yule is the time of the winter solstice, when the sun child is reborn, an image of the return of all new life born through the love of the Gods. Within the Northern Tradition Yule is regarded as the New Year.

25th, Saturday

Christmas Day (Christian Catholic)

The day when Christians celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ.

January

5th, Wednesday

Birthday of Guru Gobind Singh

(Nanakshahi calendar) (Sikh)
Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708) was the tenth and last of the Sikh Gurus. He instituted the Five Ks and established the Order of the Khalsa.

14th, Friday

Makar Sankranti (Hindu)

Makar Sankranti is one of the most important festivals of the Hindu calendar and celebrates the sun's journey into the northern hemisphere.

15th, Saturday

Seijin Shiki (Adults' Day) (Shinto)

Japanese who have reached legal adulthood (20 in Japan) in the previous year attend a shrine to give thanks.

20th, Thursday

Tu B'Shevat (Jewish)

The Jewish New Year for trees - For religious accounting purposes all trees have their anniversaries on this festival, regardless of when they were planted.

25th, Tuesday

St Paul's Day (Christian)

Anglicans and Catholics celebrate St Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus.

February

3rd, Thursday

Rissun (Setsubun) (Shinto)

A Spring festival that marks the division between Winter and Spring and is celebrated with beans.

Chinese New Year (Chinese)

8th, Tuesday

Vasant Panchami (Hindu)

Dedicated to Saraswati, the goddess of learning and Brahma's wife. The festival marks the beginning of Spring.

Parinirvana - Nirvana day (Buddhist)

Mahayana Buddhist festival marking the anniversary of Buddha's death. Pure Land Buddhists call the festival "Nirvana Day". Parinirvana is celebrated by some Buddhists on February 8th.

14th, Monday

St Valentine's Day (Christian)

Now more a secular festival than a religious one. There are at least three different saints named Valentine.

15th, Tuesday

Nirvana day (alternative date) (Buddhist)

Nirvana Day is also known as Parinirvana and is celebrated by some Buddhists on February 8th. Nirvana Day is the celebration of Buddha's death when he reached total Nirvana, at the age of 80.

Milad un Nabi (Birthday of the Prophet Muhammad) (Muslim)

Shia Muslims celebrate this 5 days later. Some Muslims do not approve of celebrating the birthday, and regard doing so as a religious innovation.

18th, Friday

Magha Puja (Buddhist)

Fourfold Assembly or Sangha Day. Marks the day Buddha addressed a meeting of 1250 arahants.

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I Market: Use your PR & Marketing skills to propel Interact Magazine, allowing it to reach a wider audience. Please contact us if this position appeals to you.

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