

February 2012

interact

Inter-faith magazine

The eighth issue

The Arab Spring

The best things to do in London this New Year!

Religious Calendar

- includes all major world religions

Death of a Dictator

The Native Sun

Hip-Hop Group





interact

GET ACTIVE, HAVE FUN & VOLUNTEER



As well as the magazine Interact always has fantastic interfaith projects for 16-25 year olds to get involved in.

Interaction Days. Come along and engage in environmental action in an inter-faith environment for one-off days at nature reserves around North London. Part of the Mayor of London's Team London volunteering scheme.

Shared Roots in Faith. Interact is currently helping a group of 10 students are delving into the history of the East end in order to learn more about the three Abrahamic Faiths: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Their interviews with local people will be exhibited in various spaces in the new year.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION ON ALL OF OUR PROJECTS VISIT
OUR WEBSITE INTERACT.BTCK.CO.UK.**



'Youth in Action' Programme



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EDITOR

Harriet Williams: I edited and angsted over this issue. When not doing that I blog at <http://harrietsblogwellington.wordpress.com>. If you like pretty pictures of food, have a look.



CO-EDITOR

Silvia Peneva: I am an LSE MSc International History Graduate.

MAGAZINE

CO-ORDINATORS

Sarraounia Christianson: I am a recent graduate from the University of East Anglia, in English Literature. I have had a great time writing for and co-ordinating the Winter edition of Interact alongside Aviva. Hope you enjoy all of our hard work!



Aviva Woolf: I am a Journalism major attending the University of Maryland. I was the magazine co-coordinator during my semester abroad in England.

WRITERS

Adam Dobrik: I aspire to be a journalist uncovering the truth behind what the world sees.



Nina Schick: I am a German/Nepali recent Cambridge M.Phil. graduate living between London and Kathmandu. Born and bred in Nepal I am a polyglot news junkie and aspiring political journalist. I am currently working in Parliament, and write for politics.co.uk.



Alia Rahman: I am currently studying Media and cultural studies. I was a journalist for Interact as I have always had a passion for writing. I hope you enjoy reading Interact.



Marriam Sattar: I am a writer and contributed articles on HipHop and young people. After groaning up in London and pursuing my MS in New York I developed a passion for writing about cross-cultural issues.

GRAPHIC DESIGNERS

Francesca Vita: Half Italian and half Japanese, I grew up in Italy and came to London 2 years ago. I have just finished my postgraduate diploma in design and I am now ready for a new start in freelancing or collaborations. I have a passion for everything that is creative.



Hannah Musgrave: I am in my first year studying graphic design at Central St. Martin's. I was one of two graphic designers that produced the layout, house style and spreads in the magazine.

hannahbysimone.tumblr.com

cargocollective.com/hannahsimone



Happy New Year*

and welcome to the Winter edition of Interact Magazine!

The team have been working hard for the last couple of months and have produced this beautiful magazine full of exciting content, so we hope you enjoy it.

We are living in difficult times. 2011 had more news than any year in recent memory, with earthquakes, tsunamis, revolutions, and economic crisis upon crisis all making the headlines. Our magazine reflects this with a mix of articles loosely focusing on justice, we've got pieces on the Arab Spring, the death of Gaddafi and racist abuse in football. However, as well as possibly being the most depressing time to be alive, this is also one of the most inspiring, with new innovations appearing every day. One of our writers looks at the best religious apps, a very modern way to keep the faith. Technology can help and harm, as another writer discovers looking at the trend for ever more extreme plastic surgeries.

On a more cheerful note, you'll find this magazine is packed with ideas for places to visit and things to do in London, taking you through the January lull to a more positive and engaged new year. We've been out talking to you about what you'll be changing in the New Year, found the best new films to see, and the top 5 weirdest and most wonderful venues in London, which should get you off to a good start.

Interact is a magazine which engages young people of all faiths and backgrounds to share their unique perspectives on a variety of current issues. Now in its eighth issue Interact showcases the creative skills and collaboration of our young team within this fantastic publication.

Finally, we've really enjoyed writing the magazine this year, and if you've enjoyed reading it, get involved! Interact is always recruiting for writers, graphic designers, photographers and advertisers, so if you would like to see your face here next issue, get in touch via our website: interact.btck.co.uk.

**Harriet
Williams**
Editor



What's your new year's resolution?

Daisy Falconer:
Read War and Peace.

Alia:
Learn to control
my anger

Lemara Lindsay-Prince:
Save some money,
go on holiday and turn
vegetarian for a week!

Carli James-Foster:
To not to try and stay
skinny but just wear
control pants instead.
To be content with what
I've got already.

Kemi Ogunsanwo:
To get out of my
parent's house and get
my own place.

Ann:
It's going to be 2012,
I have to get a job!

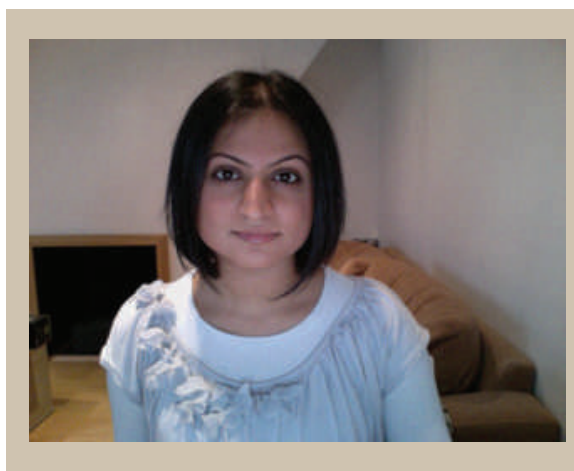
Sam:
I need to learn
to stay positive

Aviva Yehudis Woolf:
To spend less time on
Facebook at work!

**Sarraounia
Christianson:**
Set up a book review
blog I keep meaning
to start.

Entrepreneurs

By Marium Sattar
e: marium.sattar@gmail.com



Zohra Khaku never knows when a good idea will strike next. While she was at a wedding in Germany earlier this year, she found herself consumed by the idea of a new business and spent the weekend in her hotel room researching it online. When she returned home to London the following Monday, she set up her new business; halalgems.Khaku is a 28-year-old entrepreneur who has created two businesses in the past two years. Since graduating from Cambridge where she earned an M.B.A. in 2009, she developed her first website, Justvolunteering.org, and now her most recent venture is halalgems.com. "It's like Groupon but for Muslims," she says. Generally, the role of faith in Britain today may not carry as much significance as

it once did. In 2001, the British Social Attitudes survey found over half the population holding no strong religious views. Yet, Khaku is from a younger generation who are still inspired by their faith. Khaku's faith has led her to launch a new business; one she hopes will unite her community. She has started engaging her fan base in different ways. The halalgems logo was created by one of her Facebook fans and 5% of her donations are given to charities suggested by her supporters every month. While halalgems is similar to Groupon it is also different in several ways. Although Groupon promotes deals for just 24 hours in order to attract quick purchases, halalgems offers deals for up to a month. Khaku hopes this strategy will prevent her customers from

indulging in impulsive buys. "I would rather people not buy stuff they aren't going to use because that's not the point of the website," she said. Halalgems will only provide deals for items and events that are 'Muslim friendly' or halal, which is defined as any object or action that is permissible according to Islamic law. "That means they'll probably go to Lion King instead of dirty dancing," said Khaku. The website offers deals on items or events like a cake decorating class with a Michelin-awarded chef. Beforehand, Khaku often teaches business owners about the meaning of halal to make sure their products are halal. According to Khaku, the Muslim market is a large one. "It's a big market and it's an untapped market... and they make

reliable consumers.” Recent estimates state there are around 800,000 Muslims living in London, where Khaku’s company is based. In the future, Khaku hopes her website will bring her community together. “My aspiration isn’t [just] to create a deal’s website, it’s to sell to the Muslim community and be something they can be proud of.” Like Khaku, Joel Kern knew what he wanted to do from a young age. When he was 14, Kern used £4,000 from his Bar Mitzvah presents towards his first production, paving the way to creating his own drama school. Almost a decade later, at the age of 23, Kern is the director of Make Believe Productions; a company that will have 20 drama schools open by 2012 across the UK.

Kern says his faith has motivated him along the way to creating his own business, “I’m a fundamental believer in everything happens for a reason and it always happens for the best. I really truly believe all of us have a destiny that has been written for us.” Although he is not an actor himself, Kern is passionate about the

performing arts. He set up his acting schools to provide stepping stones for young people who want to become actors, many of them couldn’t afford to pay for private tuitions at other acting schools. Today, his schools have 2,500 students and 35 people work for him. According to Kern, the UK has a lot of undiscovered talent. He states that he plans to charge £3,000 at Make Believe’s academy which will open next year while other colleges charge up to £10,000 annually. “[The schools] will also enable people from around the local area to get involved with the performing arts which is something that is very difficult to do because of funding cuts,” he said. The acting schools will be open to children between the ages of three and 18 around

the UK; most of them are based in Greater London with two in Lincoln and Nottingham. The company’s first academy will be based at King Solomon High School in Essex. His company puts on productions regularly with a share of proceeds going to charities like Great Ormond Street Hospital.

Kern, who never attended University, is a self-made business man. He says acting schools and academies aren’t just for teaching drama but also to help young people develop confidence. “Thank God what we do is really successful and the children under our guidance enjoy what they do,” he said. Whether they are Muslim, Jewish, or any other faith, young entrepreneurs who practice their faith are finding new ways to engage their communities.



A New CULTURAL GENOCIDE



As Tapey, a Tibetan monk in his mid-twenties, walked to a crossroads in Sichuan Province, he doused his body in oil. Then he set himself alight. Burning alive, he shouted slogans about Chinese repression whilst raising a home-made Tibetan flag with an image of the Dalai Lama pasted in its centre.

What happened next is unclear. Witnesses claim that members of China's People's Armed Police stationed nearby shot at him. As the young monk fell to the ground, it is alleged that the PAP extinguished the flames and seized him. Tapey's current whereabouts - or whether he is still alive - are unknown.

This was the first in a series of alarming self-immolations of Tibetan monks and nuns; a desperate form of protest against the policies of the central Chinese state towards the ethnic Tibetan minority population.

Ever since the Chinese invasion of Tibet in 1950, the former has been internationally criticised for its appalling

human rights record and policy constraints in what it has dubbed the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR). Beijing is known to severely restrict Tibetans' freedom of expression, religion and association.

For decades, the international community and the Tibetan government in exile have championed the Tibetan cause, attempting to loosen China's oppressive hold on Tibet.

Both Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have renewed their calls on China to, for example, carry out a comprehensive review of the human rights situation in the TAR, criticising Beijing for 'resort[ing] to heavy-handed tactics that can only deepen and further fuel resentments.'

And whilst protests and clampdowns occur continually in the region, the self-immolations amongst the Tibetan clergy are a deeply disturbing new development. Kate Saunders, the communications director for International Campaign for Tibet, states that this recent 'loss of life is

indicative of the anguish and desperation experienced by Tibetans in the area under the crackdown that leaves them no space for ordinary life, no space to carry out their religious practice.'

For Tibetans, Buddhism is at the heart of identity, the core of what it is to be Tibetan.

The self-immolation of monks and nuns is, therefore, symbolic of their front-line stand in what is perceived to be a life-and-death struggle to protect their culture, their identity and what they see as being 'Tibetan'. It is this conviction, ultimately, that has compelled them to make such an extreme self-sacrifice.

The image of a self-immolating Buddhist monk is of course a potent one, immortalized in a powerful photograph taken by American photographer Malcolm Wilde Brown in 1963, when he captured the moment Thich Quang Duc, a Vietnamese monk, burnt himself to death on a busy Saigon avenue.

The image of a self-immolating Buddhist monk is of course a potent one

one of the best known photographs of the 20th century - eventually winning him the Pulitzer prize.

Duc's last stand marked a pivotal point, not only in the transition of power in his native Vietnam, but also as a universal symbol against oppression.

The force of this history is not lost on the Chinese authorities. Responding to the spate of recent international condemnation in light of the immolations, Dai Wingli, from the Chinese embassy in London, wrote to The Guardian arguing that Tibetan deaths were against the principles of Buddhism.

Whilst acknowledging that the self-immolations were 'tragic', Wingli goes on to assert that they are a 'fatal violation of the spirit of peace and

a Nobel Peace Prize laureate, of being a 'devil', 'terrorist' and 'violent separatist.' It claims that the Tibetan spiritual leader must take responsibility for the 'immoral' self-immolations.

Whilst the Dalai Lama responds to accusations of being a 'devil' in good humour - joking, for example, about his 'horns' in a live video chat with Desmond Tutu last year - he has consistently urged the Chinese authority to reconsider its Tibet policies, calling for regional autonomy (rather than independence) and a non-violent resolution.

Alongside human rights campaigners, he has also called the increasingly desperate situation in Tibet as constituting a cultural genocide.

And so it is. When a people are stripped of their freedom

'clique' fled abroad from Tibet in the 1950s, they had never made any efforts for or contribution to the protection and development of Tibetan culture, even ridiculing the Dalai Lama for his 'absurdity' in claiming to be a protector of Tibetan culture.

'[The Dalai Lama and his clique] have clamoured about the "cultural genocide" in Tibet' it continued, 'for the sole reason that their cultural despotism and cultural system along with their cultural privileges and vested interest have been irretrievably destroyed due to the irresistible development of Tibetan culture.'

Enough. It is time to re-introduce some perspective into this discussion. As long as China continues its repressive policies in the TAR, the spate of self-immolations will continue

Enough. It is time to re-introduce some perspective into this discussion.

tolerance that defines Tibetan Buddhism.' The perpetrators, he continues, 'have fallen victim to the control of an abnormal force' - a radical and unjustified 'separatist agenda' as Tibetans, he claims, 'like all other ethnic groups [in China], enjoy freedom of religious belief and expression.' 'It is time,' he concludes, 'for the lies to be exposed'.

Wingli's denials are representative of the official line from Beijing, which continues to denounce the Dalai Lama,

to practice their religion, cultural beliefs and language, they are denied their basic human rights. Combined with the punitive security measures seen in Tibet, this is emblematic of a systematic stripping-away of commonly-held culture. It is no exaggeration to say that the entire traditional Tibetan way of life is under threat.

In November last year, the Chinese government released a white paper vehemently arguing against claims of cultural genocide. In it, it stated that as the current Dalai Lama and his

As democratic tools of protest are drained and minority groups become increasingly desperate, they will turn to violence (even if it is inflicted only upon themselves) as the ultima ratio of communication.

It is time for global players such as China, to be held to account by the international community for their abysmal human rights records. If not, it is plausible that one of the world's oldest cultures will be exterminated.



The Native Sun and Daughter Of British Hip Hop



By Marium Sattar
e:marium.sattar@gmail.com



Sarina Leah and Mohammed Yahya are "Native Sun," a new group on the horizon of the British Hip Hop scene. When Yahya, 30, a solo rapper of Mozambican origin, met Sarina Leah at a party in 2000, he never imagined forming a group with the 30-year-old fashion designer from East London. Ten years later, they joined forces to spread an important message. "Sometimes you're so passionate about something...you can speak about that injustice in your music but it can be out of hatred or out of anger towards people...rather than doing things out of anger towards people, it's better to do it out of love," said Yahya. One year on, it is clear why they created the group last year; the duo wants to spread positivity at a time of global unrest. Both, Leah and Yahya participate in workshops in prisons and schools to underprivileged youth and members of society. Currently, the group is working on their first album, a marriage of meaningful lyrics and playful beats. Although their creative process is spontaneous,

they say they will release their album in early 2012 and are already halfway there. "It's been very organic, like even in the process of recording our first song. We didn't feel rushed or pressured to do it. Whilst that was happening, it went from one song to three songs," said Yahya. At a concert in June, Leah and Yahya made an appearance in their characteristic bright colours and bold prints. That day, Leah's singing betrayed her laid back look. Wearing oversized round glasses and a tie-dye hard rock cafe t-shirt, Leah's soulful singing was reminiscent of some of the greatest RnB preceding our time. Her melodious voice is complimented by Yahya's raps, which are sometimes in Portuguese. Yahya describes their style as a mix, "Hip hop with a blend of afro beats but then it's also like jazz and reggae." When asked about their group name, Sarina says, "with the sunshine, it reminds me of growth and being able to shine. We want people to shine and spread that sunshine and light."

Leah mentions she has gotten more opportunities to perform music since collaborating with Yahya. Currently, she balances her musical career with working at the vegan restaurant, "Vantra," in Soho, London. Although the duo refers to each other as brother and sister, their faith is one way they differ. While Yahya is a devout Muslim, Leah prefers not to ascribe to any one religion. I asked them how it feels to be an interfaith group. "What Sarina lives is peace and love...These are morals that every religion promotes so we don't ever feel we have to compromise or anything," said Yahya. Whilst listening to Native Sun, fans of Yahya will notice he is shifting away from focusing on political change to other topics. In their latest song, "Out of the Box," Native Sun use a Motown-inspired sound while addressing the music industry, "I'm tired of your stereotypes/ expecting me to be another kind on the mic. No diamond chains on my neck/ I'd rather feed you the truth and earn your respect." With Native Sun, Yahya is moving in a



different direction musically but searching for him on YouTube generates dozens of videos, one of which is called 'A World Full of Sin' and has over 20,000 hits. In it, Yahya raps about the involvement of politicians in the Iraq War, "Deep inside, I know they're nothing but vultures/ corrupting our cultures/ invading our lands. Regardless of apologies/ they'll never govern properly." At a time when British hip hop is polarized between commercial artists like Tinie Tempah on one side of the spectrum, and underground hip hop artists like Roots Manuva on the other side, Native Sun are entering largely uncharted territory that will excite some hip hop fans. For more info about Native Sun, visit:<http://nativesunofficial.bandcamp.com/>



The Death of a Dictator

By Nine Schick
e:ninaschick@gmail.com



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Flickr.com

The injured man was dragged from a sewage drain begging and pleading for his life, blows raining on him as the cacophonous mob hauled him through the dust. Moments later he was dead – killed by what appeared to be a gunshot to the head. These were the violent final moments of Muammar Gaddafi's life. As the civil war in Libya reached its climax late last year, the Libyan despot who ruled with an iron fist for over four decades found the noose tightening around his neck. And he died – as he lived – by the sword. It is evident that the circumstances surrounding Gaddafi's death in Sirte on the 20th of October were dubious. The amateur videos that emerged on that day, taken on cell phones and other forms of technology, showed the former dictator and his son alive in the custody of rebel forces, indicating that they were summarily executed after being caught.

The willful killing of a person in custody is a serious violation of the laws of war and can be prosecuted in the International Criminal Court. Although these concerns raised serious questions regarding the tone the National Transitional Council

was setting in the nascent 'new' Libya, the subsequent reaction by the international press raised far broader questions. As the news was breaking, major broadcasters and news agencies in the UK and around the world streamed the grisly amateur footage of Gaddafi's final hours as he was beaten and humiliated. Later, when he



© 2011, Khalid Albaih,
Flickr.com

was dead, we saw his bloodied body and, finally, his decomposing corpse in a meat locker in Misrata. The decision to display these images immediately became mired in controversy. Commentators argued that even

the most heinous dictators deserved a private death and that the broadcasting of the Libyan despot's last moments and remains was ethically unjustifiable. 'All this killing brings triumphalist politicians smirking on our screens', wrote broadcaster and human rights activist Craig Murray on his blog. 'We seem to have become as dehumanized as ancient Rome,' Murray continues; 'little human pity is expressed for the way Gaddafi was killed – indeed there is notably less media reflection of pity or revulsion than there was at the (at least judicial) hanging of Saddam Hussein. Is that measure of the descent into bloodlust barbarism in our society?'

Yet news editors were also commended for broadcasting the contentious footage. It was courageous, it was argued, because the realities of war should not be sugar-coated. 'Nothing in the photographs of Gaddafi wounded, dead, dragged through the streets, and finally on display, rotting in public, has been anything like as disgusting as the thoroughly hypocritical and self-deceiving international reaction to these pictures,' postulated Jonathon



Jones in The Guardian. 'Libyans did what they probably had to do,' continued Jones, 'their western supporters have moaned and groaned at the realities of war with no apparent understanding that through Nato we are participants in this conflict and so share its inevitable moral complexities... To get upset by photographs of the dead Gaddafi is to pretend we did not know we went to war at all. It is to fantasise that our own role is so just and proper and decent that it is not bloody at all.' The international media's reaction to the death of a dictator has, it seems, become polarised on a moral battlefield. As one side argues that the graphic broadcasts represent a desensitised society fascinated by – as one journalist dubbed it – 'death porn', the other, whilst admitting the barbaric nature of the footage, upholds its use primarily to convey to the public the brutal consequences of war. The ethical debate on how war should be reported is not a new phenomenon but what is new here is modern technology. Equipped with mobile phones,

The rise of citizen journalist and modern technology has muddled the question of ethic in war-time reporting.

cameras and the internet, participants or observers can upload footage in seconds onto the web, visible to an audience of billions.

The rise of the citizen journalist and modern technology has muddled the question of ethic in war-time reporting.

The traditional view of 'what is acceptable' is becoming increasingly blurred and, indeed, the balance of power - once dominated by editors and producers - has shifted into the public domain. The fact is that editorial judgment is being squeezed by the ever-increasing necessity for news agencies to 'keep up' with headline events as they unfold and are documented, disseminated and widely accessed through social media. As such, newscasters are caught between a rock and a hard place: damned if they do and damned if they don't. Unfolding before them on that day in October was the climax of

newscasters are caught between a rock and a hard place: damned if they do and damned if the don't.

the Libyan campaign, a truly historic moment in its history. Had they not broadcast the footage – so widely spread across social media platforms – they would have been left behind as viewers turned to online resources or other news agencies. For a news agency to be perceived as lagging behind is tantamount to a death warrant: their entire purpose is to deliver breaking information accurately and quickly. Yet, as we have seen, by broadcasting the

footage they were opening themselves up to profound criticism on ethical grounds. 'Once the public's appetite for blood has been whetted,' wrote one disgusted observer in the wake of the Colonel's death, 'history shows they develop a lust for more... Quick! More War! More Militarism! More Blood! More Executions! More Victory for Democracy! Keep the peasants Happy.'

And indeed, UK national papers splashed the haunting stills of Gaddafi all over their front pages the next day, with many more pictures printed inside. This was supplemented by footage online and on TV. The decision to do so was justified, wrote Mary Hockaday on the BBC's editor's blog, 'to convey the nature of [the] dramatic and gruesome events.' Ultimately, it is undeniable that 'war is hell' and that the ethical debate surrounding war-time coverage will continue to rage. But the difference now is technology.

The macabre footage of Gaddafi being sodomised by a knife prior to his death is clear evidence of that. Imagine if the troops or civilians in World War Two had cell phone cameras and internet connections. How would we have felt about that war if we had images of civilians burned by our incendiaries, let alone pictures of Mussolini as he and his mistress were executed, and then strung up for public display?

The cruel fate of Gaddafi is typical in war. It always has been. What isn't typical is the way in which we can now see it.

The correlation between plastic surgery and genital cutting

FANCY LABIAPLASTY AT £2,400 (£3,000)? OR EVEN VAGINAPLASTY AT THE EVEN MORE APPEALING £3,200 (£3,600)? WE CAN SPOIL YOU FOR CHOICE! WE CAN OFFER YOU THE POPULAR CLITORAL UNHOODING AT £3,600 (£4,100), OR LABIA MAJORAPLASTY FOR ONLY £2,400? CAN WE TEMPT YOU WITH PERINEOPLASTY? WE ALSO HAVE SOME EXCITING JOINT PACKAGES – FLIGHTS, SPA RESORT AND THE SURGERIES INCLUDED. BRAZIL OR CALIFORNIA? COME BACK HOME WITH AN ALL NEW GLAM LOOK DOWN THERE... LADIES...THIS IS THE ALL NEW AND INCREASINGLY POPULAR 'DESIGNER VAGINA' WAVE. A NEW CHRISTMAS GIFT? OR PERHAPS A BIRTHDAY PRESENT FROM A LOVED ONE? FACE IT. BOOB JOBS ARE A BIT WORN OUT BY NOW.

I hope my readers will not have taken my irony to heart. I mean no offence. Instead I hope to provoke your most intimate thoughts...your insecurities and potential whims...I seek to challenge you and make you think alongside me about 'designer vaginas' and the correlation between them and the demonised Female Genital Cutting (FGC). For those of you who have just crossed the border between indignation over the writer's audacity to confusion about what FGC entails, here is a short description:

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM – the more popular term, officially espoused by international organisations) or Female Genital Cutting (the more neutral term which is preferred in this article) is an umbrella term capturing the different forms of genital cutting found in 28 countries of sub-Saharan Africa, a few countries in the Middle East and Asia and amongst immigrant populations from these countries throughout the world. According to a FRONTIERS study roughly 100-140 million girls and women have undergone FGC in some shape or form. The World Health Organisation has established for classification purposes four 'severity' levels in FGC: Type I entails the removal of the clitoral unhooding; Type II the removal of the clitoris and the inner labia; Type III (Pharaonic circumcision or infibulation) the removal of all of the clitoris and labia minora followed by the stitching together of the labia majora thus leaving only a small opening; Type IV groups together different acts such as symbolic pricking or piercing of the clitoris or labia, tightening and widening of the vagina. The cutting is usually performed on girls before they reach 10 years of age. FGC is predominantly practiced in some African societies and in diasporas of those communities around the world for cultural reasons such as rites of passage, beautification and cleansing of the female body.

While this article seeks in no way to condone FGC, due to the force which is oftentimes used against children to put them through this cultural ceremony, it does seek to think deeper about how differently FGC and genital plastic surgery, two similar things, are perceived simply because they take place in two different cultural frameworks.

The WHO classifies FGM as "all procedures that involve partial or total removal of the external female genitalia, or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons." Following this definition, 'designer vaginas' can fall under that category too. The plastic surgery options listed above can be performed for medical reasons in cases of discomfort; while doing sports for example. However here is how the renowned London practice, Cosmetic Surgery Solutions, justifies labiaplasty: 'Enlarged or hypertrophic labia minora can be functionally or socially bothersome. The enlarged labia can have a protuberant and **abnormal appearance** that **can be distressful**.'

This comes to suggest that there is a 'normal appearance' - a mutually accepted aesthetic. This is of great importance as those alien societies to 'ours' seem to also have a 'common aesthetic' - the one achieved through FGC. Furthermore, connecting the above with the following legal excerpt also points to a further interesting comparison.

The Female Genital Mutilation Act 2003 in the UK states that:

1. A person is guilty of an offence if he excises, infibulates or otherwise mutilates the whole or any part of a girl's labia majora, labia minora or clitoris.

The exception to the first section:

2. But no offence is committed by an approved person who performs—

(a) a surgical operation on a girl which is necessary for her physical or **mental health**.

This exemption clause is meant to cater for plastic surgery cases. The connection with the African cases is that those girls and women, who have not undergone FGC in their communities, are quite often shunned by their own people and ineligible for marriage, as well as a series of other things. Does not becoming a social outcast in your own community lead to stress and angst, thus also to mental health problems - similar (if not more severe) to those of a Western culturally set teenager who has decided that she is not appreciated because of the size of her labia?

And anyways who is to say what a 'designer vagina' should look like? In African cultures there are multiple visions of what the nether areas should look like, and here in the West, we have a whole range of ideas too. Apropos, which one of those roses do you like best? I chose the roses for the design of these pages because Amnesty International uses a stitched rose for their campaign against FGC. Looking at it from a different perspective however, roses come in different shapes and sizes, and when it comes to aesthetics, who is to say which is most appealing to the eye? If anything, we have a common understanding that the fully blossomed rose is the most beautiful - that it - uncut either way. The arguments against FGC are multiple, and the health reasons are most prominent alongside human rights. However, there is no prohibition on young girls undergoing a plastic surgery modification to their nether areas.

What's even more disturbing is that, being a relatively new procedure, it isn't always certain whether the doctors have specific training or licenses - rendering them a suspicious new development in plastic surgery. time of building a relationship and a family, that woman may decide that her best bet is to resort to surgery and other beautification procedures if she has the means to do it. The factors are many, and we do not have the space to delve into them at length, but the main point is the one of whether we perceive ourselves as having a choice and the external factors which shape our thought-framework to make that choice.

For more food for thought please visit the following two websites:

<http://missrepresentation.org/the-film/>

<http://www.desertflower-movie.com/>

Moira Dustin article: *Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting in the UK: Challenging the Inconsistencies*, *European Journal of Women's Studies* 2010 17:7





2012

HAPPY NEW YEAR, FROM
interact

by **Adam Dobrik**
design Petra Zhivkova



ABUSE IN FOOTBALL

In January 2010 Emmanuel Adebayor, now a Spurs striker, was on the Togolese team coach travelling to an international match in Angola. Shortly after they crossed the border rebels ambushed the coach. They proceeded to open fire on the players and coaching staff, killing three and injuring many others.

The event left its mark on Adebayor, who said of the tragedy, "It was horrific. Everybody was crying. I couldn't stay in control of myself and I cried when I saw the injuries to my friends."

In October this year, during the North London derby between Spurs and Arsenal, Arsenal fans sang to Adebayor, "It should have been you. It should have been you. Shot in Angola! It should have been you!"

Harry Redknapp, the Tottenham manager, condemned the singing, "How do you chant something like that at someone? You can't be right mentally. You need help."

While football clubs, newspapers and the F.A. have all been vocal in their disapproval of abusive chanting no one has attempted to answer why so many people do it.

During the same match Spurs fans sang about Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger, "Wenger is a paedophile!"

In his post-match interview Wenger said, "We respect everybody and want to be respected as well."

One Chelsea season ticket holder said of the Wenger chant, "It's hilarious. That's why people sing it." When asked if he would say it to Wenger in person he said, "No. It's funny when you're doing it as a crowd but rude on your own."

Such sentiments suggest that people think differently in a crowd. The normal rules of behaviour disappear during a football match.

The social psychology theory "Deindividuation" may shed some light. It suggests that when placed in a crowd a person's self-evaluation decreases. They no longer behave according to their normal morals because they are not as critical of their own actions. They perform only a part of the crowd's actions and as such their sense of responsibility diminishes.

Such a theory, however, does not explain why abusive chanting exists. It only informs us why so many join in.

Football fans are not the only ones guilty of abuse. England captain John Terry has been accused recently of making a racist remark towards Anton Ferdinand, a Black footballer, in a game against QPR.

We do not know whether Terry was guilty of the alleged offence but the cameras did show a heated exchange between him and Ferdinand. Just as footballers can get carried away in the heat of the moment so can fans. There are also thousands of them, therefore, momentum can build quickly and can be difficult to



arrest. Banter can overspill into abuse without any fan noticing. They are lost in the atmosphere and bubble of the match in front of them.

Yet most fans that I have spoken to did not condemn abusive chanting (except racism) when they were outside the football match environment.

A former Manchester United season ticket holder commented, "It's [abusive chants] about mostly undermining the opposition confidence and bolstering one's own belief in your own team. It's all passion. We do not really believe what we sing most of the time. It is often just a coping mechanism."

In the context of a match footballers and managers alike no longer become human beings but objects. They are tools for fans to vent their frustrations. The desire to win overwhelms all standard beliefs and causes chants to cross that line from banter to abuse.

One fan pointed out, "People would not make these types of jokes during a meal at a restaurant but probably would at home or at the pub."

As everybody is there for the same reason they have a camaraderie that is not too different to mates at a pub. Like in a pub they throw borderline banter at each other.

They forget, however, that while pub conversations between friends are private football chants are there for everyone to hear: from the child watching Sky Sports at home with his dad to

theyoungfootballeronthepitchtryingtoforgeacareer.

While many both inside and outside football circles condemn the abusive chanting they ignore one crucial point. The vast majority of football fans that I have spoken to seem to think at least some abusive chanting is acceptable even when they are outside the heat of the live match and the crowd mentality.

Their opinions have been reinforced by FIFA president Sepp Blatter who commented on the John Terry race row, "There is no racism [on the field], but maybe there is a word or gesture that is not correct. The one affected by this should say this is a game and shake hands."

There was a media outcry following Blatter's statement and he has since apologised. However, there seems to be an attitude among many people that some of what is deemed impermissible in normal life is permissible in the context of a football match.

That attitude pervades the very top of the game, to the players on the pitch and the fans in the stands. It appears football culture has largely accepted a form of behaviour frowned upon outside it.

The hair-raising atmosphere of an exciting football match is a double-edged sword. Just as it makes football the success it is today, it is also what detracts from it. The question is: do we just accept it?



HOW SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCED THE EGYPTIAN REVOLUTION

FACEBOOK, THE WORLD'S LARGEST NETWORKING SITES HAS PLAYED A SIGNIFICANT ROLE DURING THE EGYPTIAN PROTESTS. MANY EGYPTIANS HAVE LOST THEIR FEAR AFTER THEY WERE OPPRESSED BY MUBARAK'S REGIME FOR ALMOST 30 YEARS. TODAY, THE EGYPTIAN REVOLUTION PROVES HOW THE INFLUENCES OF PUBLIC OPINION AND SOCIAL MEDIA HAVE LEAD TO POLITICAL CHANGE.

It all started off from a Facebook page called We Are Khaled Said formed in 2010, after a young Egyptian man was beaten to death by the Egyptian police. 470,000 fans joined this group and were fuelled by this outrageous and brutal act. Since then, the Egyptian public strongly agreed that immediate change was necessary; it was only a matter of time.

Soha, a 28 year old Egyptian Facebook user described social media platforms as "extremely momentous". She disclosed that "social networking sites are not just sites where people can socialise; they also offer the potential to rapidly spread and exchange ideas and political information". Soha agreed that Facebook had some impact during the revolution as activists updated, informed and organised dates for the protests via Facebook. However she also stated that the revolution mainly started off "because the people of Egypt simply

had enough of Ex-President Hosni Mubarak's biased regime".

In addition, mobile phones also had some impact on the revolution. According to Mobithinking.com, 70 percent of Egyptians own mobile phones and were able to capture the moment. They were almost doing the role of journalists as they were able to record and upload videos and photos on the internet. Ali, an Egyptian activist, told Wired.com that social media "*acts like an accelerant to conditions which already exist in the country*".

Twitter and YouTube serve as amplification for what's happening on the ground. And they directly affect Western media coverage." Therefore, through the power of sharing facilities through Facebook and the power of vitality allowed many Egyptians to spread the news globally using these social media.

Even though social media supported the revolution, it was still unclear in the beginning whether

social media such as Facebook was actually going to help the revolution. There was slight fear that Mubarak's regime would uncover group administrators on Facebook and track them down. However on the night of the revolution Richard Allen, Facebook's Director of Policy for Europe, said, "*we have put all the key pages into special protection*", which meant protecting the identity of many Egyptian activists or group administrators.

SOCIAL MEDIA MAY BE SEEN AS CIVIL SOCIETY'S FORUM WHERE THE VOICE OF THE UNHEARD IS HEARD. OR EVEN SO, SOCIAL MEDIA SUCH AS FACEBOOK AND TWITTER MAY BE SEEN AS THE NEW NEWS MEDIUM.



Executions for Votes:

The American Presidents Who Abandoned Their Beliefs for the Sake of Power

Interact Magazine

Barack Obama is openly against capital punishment. However, in September this year he allowed a man go to his death despite mounting evidence showing his innocence.

Obama's appeasement of the death sentence is not the first among recent Presidents. Both Clinton and Bush used capital punishment as a vehicle for their career. It suggests that some of the most powerful men in the world over the last 20 years have been willing to sacrifice their own morals and even someone's life for their own agendas.

Troy Anthony Davis was executed on 21st September 2011 after the Supreme Court ruled that the verdict of guilty for the murder of an off-duty policeman was correct. There was no murder weapon, no DNA evidence and 7 of the 9 crucial prosecution witness statements were either withdrawn or changed. Over one million Americans signed a petition to prevent the execution.

All of the above material was ignored. Obama never intervened. It seems surprising at first but after closer examination Obama behaved exactly as we should have expected.

Bill Clinton was against capital punishment in his early days, however, when governor of Arkansas he oversaw 4 executions between 1982 and 1990. There had not been an execution in Arkansas since 1964.

In 1992 Clinton traveled back to Arkansas to witness the execution of Ricky Ray Rector; a man who suffered significant brain damage after shooting himself in the head following a double murder. Arkansas law stated that a mentally impaired person could not be legally executed. Clinton has been widely accused of attending the execution in order to boost his election hopes. His opposition had portrayed him as soft.

In 1998 George W. Bush Junior ignored the requests for born again Christian, Karla Faye Tucker, to be removed from death row. She was executed by lethal injection and became the first woman to receive the death sentence for 135 years. This was despite Bush's new-found Christian beliefs.

He said of the time he became 'born again', "I was humbled to learn that God sent His Son to die for a sinner like me... through the love of Christ's life, I could understand the life changing powers of faith." Yet he did not understand the life changing powers of Tucker's new Christian faith.

The majority of Americans support the death penalty. Politicians are careful not to upset the majority especially if a presidency is at stake. This makes it all the more worrying for us.

The majority of British support the death penalty according to a poll conducted by Harris Interactive in 2009. In 2008 The Sun ran with a headline claiming 99% of their readership want to bring back capital punishment. Furthermore, we had a close general election in 2010 where a coalition was needed to create a majority government.

Would our politicians be tempted, like their US counterparts, to support capital punishment for votes?



By Harriett Williams
e: williams.harriet@gmail.com

We lived on dried noodles for the next few days, loath to experiment with the food we saw on sale at each stop; whole dried fishes and bottles of unidentified liquid in re-used plastic bottles.

The train arrives two full days later at Irkutsk, a town 2600 miles from Moscow. It's a strange little place, built on the permafrost as a trading post; for years gold, diamonds, and furs came in from nearby China. After the Decembrist revolt, exiles starting coming, banished to Siberia. It was one of the bleakest places in Russia when condemned men were one to every two locals. These days, it's sunny and cold, full of wooden clapperboard houses, with a definite Swiss aura, except for the billboards saying 'Putin, our leader!' A common stopping place for Trans-Siberian travellers; our hostel is full of them, going in either direction, exchanging stories of the rail.

[illegible]



Later on, we wander around, bewildered at the distance travelled and the familiarity of the architecture. With affected cosmopolitan boredom, we opt not to trek out to Lake Baikal in preference for a few more days spent in bed.

Keen for the shock of the new, we get the Ulan Bator train, which is full of Mongolian traders hawking their wares. They go up and down the train, carrying boxes and bags, until it is stuffed full to capacity. At the border, everything disappears, and mischievous tradesmen sit innocently on the fold-out beds and smile at customs officials. It's been hidden behind samovars and under the floorboards, and the usually haughty provenistas collude joyously.

A mere day later, we arrive in the Mongolian capital, Ulan Bator, where we finally get our first taste of the 'Orient', as imagined from afar. The Bogd Khan's palace and the Gadan Monastery with a huge golden Buddha are mind blowing for eyes glutted with Russian architecture. The Palace is decaying, dusty and little visited, but its past magnificence is still pretty obvious. A statue of Genghis Khan, as wide as it is tall, in the main square makes us realise how far we are from home, where he is regarded as a bloodthirsty tyrant. Reindeer meat is in all the restaurants, and pavements are non-existent.

Heading off into the countryside in a tiny ford focus accompanied by an extremely laconic guide is when Mongolia really starts to get good. The yellow-ish, barren landscape stretches out, interrupted here and there by squatting gers; traditional nomadic tents that many Mongolians still live in. One of these is our bed for the night, so we sit by the fire and see more stars than seemed possible in our narrow suburban gardens back at home.

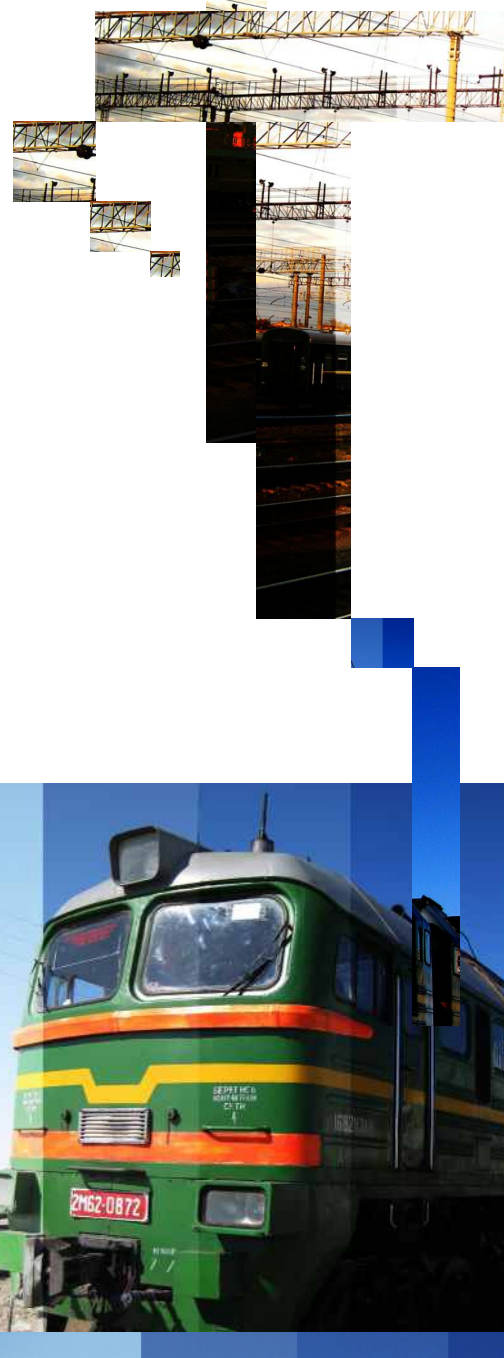
After a night being lulled to sleep

in the womblike atmosphere of the tiny sleeping ger, we are woken up with a jolt by news that we're off horse riding, a skill neither of us have perfected. It's with some trepidation that we set out on our steeds, kept safe only by a small boy, who sings and occasionally pokes our horses, provoking them into a gallop. It is one of the most terrifying experiences of my life, and I gain newfound respect for every jockey I've ever seen riding a horse as if born doing it. The views, when I've got time to look up from the back of my horse's neck, are wonderful.

We only manage three days in Mongolia, getting on a swanky Chinese train heading to Beijing. In the hotel-quality restaurant car we discover that Vikram doesn't know how to use chopsticks, much to our (and other Chinese passengers) hilarity. Slightly jaded by this time, our journey is enlivened by our 'mystery guest' – the fourth person in the compartment – who turns out to be an articulate and polite Swiss man named Gil, who's life ambition has been to go to China. As the train draws closer, his excitement infects us, especially as the scenery gets more and more irresistibly 'oriental', as we pass out of the Gobi desert and into mountainous China.

We bundle off the last train regretful that the Trans-Mongolian experience is over. Pretty much our first sight in China is the cramped and frenetic hutong of 'old Beijing', where a man dressed in a white hanfu shouts about his Peking duck, vendors play hackeeseck with tourists and tea shops beckon with a hint of the oriental we expected to find here.

After 3618 miles, five days on a train and uncountable pots of dried noodles, we have finally arrived in China, and that whole country spreads out before us.



Film & Book Reviews

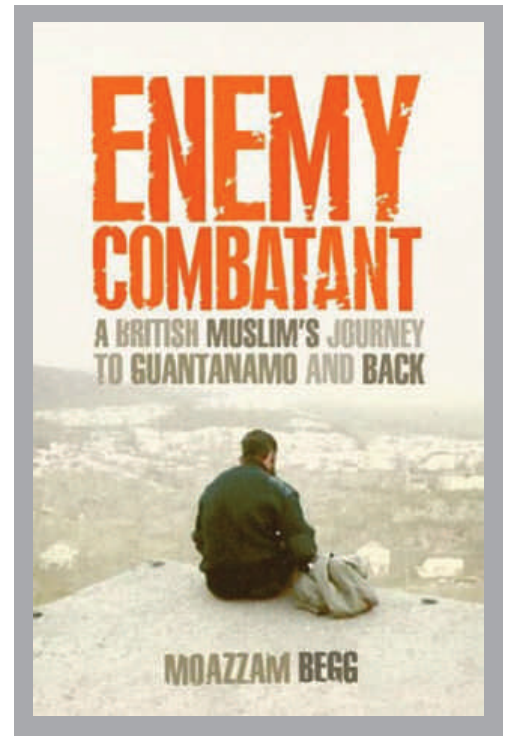


Book Review:

Enemy Combatant By Moazzam Begg

By Marium Sattar

e:marium.sattar@gmail.com



Enemy Combatant is an eye-opening account by Moazzam Begg, who was unjustly held at Guantanamo Bay Prison in Cuba for two years. Begg, who wrote Enemy Combatant with the help of Victoria Brittain in 2006, has written the first account by a Guantanamo detainee of life inside the famous prison thus opening the readers' eyes to see what really happens side the detention camp. The story unfolds as Begg sits in his living room in Islamabad in 2002, while his wife and children are sleeping in one part of their house, and their family friends in another. After hearing a knock on his door at midnight, Begg thought his

he was met by a group of men in Pakistani and Western clothes who pushed him back into his living room, where he was then handcuffed and carried into a car. That was the last night he would see his family for three years. The night he would join hundreds of men caught illegally by people who did so, often in exchange for money. Before he was detained, Begg was a family man and a traveller, but once imprisoned, he became another number, another nameless figure in an orange jumpsuit presented by the cameras to the world. Begg's detailed descriptions of life in prison shows readers the humiliations he encountered by the prison guards.

He writes, "The most humiliating thing was witnessing the abuse of others, and knowing how utterly dishonoured they felt," (112). For some, the vivid details of life at Guantanamo are difficult to read; the type of questions prisoners were interrogated with, the way detainees had their letters read by soldiers, or the way prisoners were beaten by guards. These are images that the reader will never forget. For others, this story of an innocent man held at Guantanamo and the people he met there will shake their belief in the criminal justice system and everything they have heard about the War on Terror.

Film Review: *The Debt*

By Sarraounia Christianson
e: sarraunia@hotmail.co.uk

The Debt is a dark espionage thriller which opens with two retired Mossad agents Rachel (Helen Mirren) and Stefan (Tom Wilkinson) hearing alarming news about an ex-colleague David (Ciaran Hinds.) All three have been idolised in their field since an assignment years previous. Set across time-frames the film opens in 1997 but jumps back to 1966 to follow the fateful mission. The three young agents (played by Jessica Chastain, Marton Csokas and Sam Worthington)

are confined to a squalid flat and attempting to capture the Nazi war criminal Vogel, known as 'The Surgeon of Birkenau' in East Berlin (Jesper Christensen) Madden shoots in heavy hues of shadowy colour adding to the film's suffocating overtones. The dank stained greens and browns of the flat in Berlin add to the suffocation felt by the female agent, Rachel Singer. Chastain's portrayal of the naïve agent caught between her colleagues and the mission is the stand-out

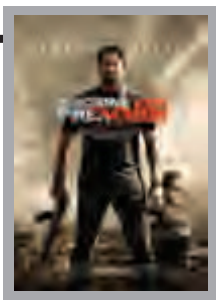


performance, with Mirren as the older Rachel not far behind. The film is grisly in parts with the unexpected twists, turns and startling revelations which make for gripping viewing.

A taut and disturbing thriller, *The Debt* successfully explores the complexities of human guilt, perceived duty and questions justice as a personal or a public concept. To whom does *The Debt* truly belong? Available now on DVD and Blu Ray.

Film Review: *The Machine Gun Preacher*

By Silvia Peneva
e: silvia.l.peneva@gmail.com



The Machine Gun Preacher - The true story of a 'Preacher Missionary, Soldier Mercenary' (please include the official photos from the movie website)

We all know how difficult it is for ex-offenders and drug addicts to stay clear of crime and drugs, especially when coming out of prison with sleek prospects and the lack of motivation for a better life. Biker and drug addict Sam Childers (Gerard Butler) is all of those things as he walks out of prison and goes straight into 'get me a single ticket back to prison' mode.

But life holds some unforeseen circumstances for Sam. While serving time, his stripper wife (Lynn, played by Michelle Monaghan) has stripped off the bad girl facade and left the pole for the local Church.

In refusing to give in to Sam's old habits she demonstrates immense strength and persistence in showing Sam the straight path. Coming close to committing murder, Sam finds faith through his wife. What follows is a riveting transformation of his aggression into constructive self-sacrifice as Sam takes on a battle for justice against the dark perversions of the Second Sudanese War. Guided by his faith and bond to God, Sam challenges the brutal and unforgiving Lord's Resistance Army by confiscating their most valuable resource: their child soldiers.

A continuing real life struggle for Sam and Lynn, and a thought-provoking tour de force of acclaimed director Marc Forster, this is the true story

of religion's power to positively metamorphose human beings. A timely and sophisticated challenge of the widespread notion that 'Western Modernity must exclude religion' and one of those rare films nowadays which make you ponder life for days and question your own willpower, devotion and strength. In our world of movie downloads and piracy I say this is a movie to pay for at a cinema. Warning: you will be intellectually challenged, inspired and quite possibly brought to tears. For more information, and to meet the real Sam and Lynn Childers, visit <http://www.machinegunpreacher.org/>





CALENDAR

JANUARY

1	Mary, Mother of God (Catholic Christian)
	Feast of St Basil (Orthodox Christian)
	Gantan Sai (New Years)
5	Twelfth Night (Christian)
9	Guru Gobindh Singh birthday (Sikh)
	Mahayana New Year (Buddhist)
15	World Religion Day (Bahá'i)
23	Chinese New Year
25	Year (Buddhist, Confucian, Daoist)
28	St. Paul (Christian)
	Vasant Pachami

FEBURARY

2	Candlemas (Christian)
	Tridion (Orthodox Christian)
3	Maha Shravatri (Hindu)
4	Setsubun-Sai (Shinto)
	Mawlid an Nabi (Islam)
8	Tu Bshavt (Judaism)
14	St. Valentine's Day
15	Nirvana Day (Buddhist, Jain)
27	Clean Monday, Great Lent begins (Orthodox Christian)

MARCH

1	St David's day (Christian)
8	Purim (Jewish)
17	St. Patrick's day (Christian)
18	Mothering Sunday (Christian)
21	Naw Ruz-New Year (Bahá'i)

APRIL

1	Birthday of Lord Rama (Hindu)
	First day of Passover (Jewish)
13	Vaisakhi-New Year (Sikh)
15	Easter (Christian)



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By Alia Rahman
e: zanetagalal@aol.com

IS THE WORLD REALLY COMING TO AN END?

It started off as some sort of joke; retrospectively 2011 has been quite a frantic year. So much has happened and there is very little explanation as to why everything is happening now, which leaves me wondering could it really be the end of the world?

So maybe it is just an exaggeration; however if we go back and have a flashback of 2011, so much turmoil has happened across the world.

11TH JANUARY 2011

It was only the 11th day of the year and already chaos began in the State of Rio De Janeiro in Brazil. A flood hit the state. Sadly 903 people died.

14TH JANUARY 2011

3 days after the flood that happened in Brazil, the Tunisian government fell after a month of bloody protests, which led to Ex-President Ben Ali's escape to Saudi Arabia.

24TH JANUARY 2011

37 people killed and more than 180 injured after a bomb exploded at the international airport in Moscow, Russia.

25TH JANUARY 2011

Thousands of Egyptians protested against X-president Hosni Mubarak asking for his resignation.

22ND JULY 2011

76 people were killed in a terrorist attack in Norway.

This list is very brief and captures some of the incidents which took place this year. But do you notice something here? They all have one thing in common. Yes, they all took place in the year 2011.

Some scientists believe that the world coming to an end seems to be a myth, while other scientists predict the world will end in the year 2012. According to Lawrence Joseph, author of a book called *Apocalypse 2012*, energy forces may be acting on the centre of the Milky Way and if interrupts it will throw our body and planet creating a catastrophe.

In addition, the Mayan calendar which is a system of calendars that indicates time periods predicts that the world will end 2012 and only a few people will survive the catastrophe. The Mayan calendar it is divided into seven ages of man. The forth age of man ended in August 1987.

In the fifth age humanity will notice its spiritual destiny and in the sixth age we will notice god within ourselves. Finally in the seventh age we will become spiritual to an extent where we will become telepathic. However, in Islam the last judgement is known as Qiyamah.

It is not confirmed in the Quran when the end of the world is coming, therefore, no one can really predict the exact date.

However, there are many signs which may disclose or indicate that the world is coming to an end.

According to Islam there will be signs of increasing catastrophe, natural disasters, war, conflict and death, which seem to capture the current state of our societies. Some of these acts mean fools will be seen as rulers, ministers of governments will be seen as liars, a liar will be seen as an acceptable witness. But, there will also be more extreme acts such as the sun coming out from the west which is still to happen and other similar unusual acts.

Likewise Christianity shares a similar approach to Islam. In Christianity the belief is that signs such as war, violence, moral decline, natural disasters such as earthquakes, global and environmental crises will become more apparent.

In contrast to Judaism there is no belief that there is an end to the world. In Judaism people believe that when the Jewish Maschiach (Messiah) arrives he will bring peace to the world by defeating all enemies. Therefore the belief is that a time of peace will come instead of turmoil or an end to the world.

So, is the world coming to an end, or is it just some kind of illusion? With all the evidence from the Mayan calendar, it predicts the world will end on December 21, 2012.

In the past it predicted that the solar tropical year is approximately 365.2422 days which is still valid today. But, will it really be the end of the world? A lot of questions remain unanswered, and some answers are indefinite.

We will just have to wait and see.

11TH MARCH 2011

Things got a lot more chaotic following a 9.1 magnitude earthquake which resulted in a tsunami hitting the east of Japan; killing 15,822 and leaving 3,926 people missing.

17TH MARCH 2011

Arab up rise continued and the Libyan civil wars.

2ND MAY 2011

A day with a lot of unanswered questions, a day that will not be forgotten. Osama Bin Laden killed.

4TH JUNE 2011

A volcano erupted in Chile which over 3000 people evacuating.

22ND JULY 2011

76 people were killed in a terrorist attack in Norway.

5TH AUGUST 2011

NASA disclosed evidence that there is water on planet Mars.

6TH-10TH AUGUST 2011

London Riots.

4TH OCTOBER 2011

100 people killed in car bombing in Somalia.

4TH OCTOBER 2011

More floods happened! Leaving 283 people killed in Thailand.

20TH OCTOBER 2011

Certainly a bloody day after Muammar Gaddafi killed in Sirte and many Libyans celebrating this unforgettable day.



By Sarraounia Christianson
e: sarraounia@hotmail.co.uk

The mobile phone application, or app is exploding in popularity. The app brings a world into your pocket and allows you to have everything you need (and don't need) at your fingertips. The swift rise of the smartphone to 'must-have technology' status has been replicated in the app.

There is an application for everyone and everything and the market is bursting with apps for believers of all faiths. There are the educational apps with encyclopaedias of religions, apps which give the demographic of world religious populations and apps making sure the busiest of the faithful never miss an important date in their religious calendar. Games such as Granny's Bible Dojo teach users about the books of the bible in a light hearted manner.

iGevalt is just one of many Dreidel-based games which allow you to play the traditional Hanukkah pastime without having the actual wooden spinning-top.

There are some which attempt to squash a complex belief system into an app. The Islam Kit for example is a package of 12 apps of Islamic texts in one download. iSamadhi includes all things needed for the practising Buddhist such as a

a multi-mode timer, chimes, a meditation journal and even offers the ability to customise your own meditation session. Does this go too far, isn't religion about introspection and can a connection with the self or a God be achieved through a piece of technology is getting in the way?

The religious app is not without its controversy. In September 2011 Apple dropped the app 'Jew or Not Jew' from its French online store amid complaints that the application was not in line with French privacy law; it allowed users to discover if public figures were Jewish or not. Although created by a Jew the app could suggest an anti-Semitic undertone, for example why is the religion of a celebrity relevant, is their work not of more potency?

Paradoxically the app is still available for download in America, so confusingly French Jews are more entitled to their privacy than American Jews.

Stuart Dredge, a freelance journalist who writes The Guardian apps blog and industry newsletter The Appside' says 'existing laws on hate speech should be applied- if it is illegal to print something in a pamphlet, why should an app be

any different?'

Another banned app is 'Me So Holy,' which until pulled allowed users to pick a religious figure and transpose a chosen picture of a face onto it. Depictions of figures central to religions have been a controversial subject across faiths in recent years so the banning of 'Me So Holy' comes of no surprise. Yet a similar app Pro Jew Booth stills exist. This app invites users to 'add Jewish Culture to your photos' and accompanying screenshots of various families, their pets and celebrities decked out in orthodox regalia illustrate this. Perhaps this app is more of a celebration of a religion as opposed to an attempt to reinvent it, but as Dredge points out 'censorship is a very sensitive area... there is a fine line.'

The app allows religion to keep up with and play a part in the fast-paced lives of young modern believers as through this technology devotees can always keep in touch with their faith on the go. The banning of certain apps reflects the fact that religion is a matter of personal choice, so if you prefer to keep your religion and technology separate- simply don't download.

T*Apple* P3

APPS FOR MODERN BELIEVERS



Confession

At a little pricier £1.49, Confession: A Roman Catholic App seeks to offer something extra to the user. It contains a variety of aspects to aid confession such as custom examination of conscience, ability to add sins not listed and a choice of seven different acts of contrition. But as is carefully pointed out the app 'is not a substitute for a valid confession' but is a form of guidance, so therefore perhaps not quite so useful for those who cannot get to a church.



Zabihah

This free app which bills itself as 'the world's largest guide to Halal restaurants and mosques,' is powered by the international Muslim listings forum, zabihah.com.

A must-have for Muslims out and about, the app is easy to use and acts like a directory in your pocket. Although not entirely comprehensive wherever you are if you want to eat, pray or shop Zabihah will have a suggestion or two.



Shofar Hero

The Shofar is an ancient Jewish horn, traditionally made of Ram, which is blown at certain times in the Jewish calendar. This simple yet handy little app includes high-quality sound recordings of the Shofar in both studio and synagogue settings, which can be toggled to sound at the correct times. Priced at a low 69p Shofar Hero does the work so you don't have to.

1

The Nightjar One: for the vintage lovers among you, this bar will take you right back to 30s America, when prohibition was in full force. Except that this isn't a gimmick, it's a modern twist on a classic. They host regular jazz and blues evenings which are very atmospheric, added to by their wooden panelled ceiling and Belle Époque cocktail menu. You have to book for music evenings because it's table service only, which if you've ended more than a few evenings with aching legs, you'll appreciate. Be warned, it's in Old Street, and it's a bit trendy. www.barnightjar.co.uk

2

Bloomsbury Lanes: Not a music venue, but a bowling alley. If you have to ask what's so special about that, you clearly haven't been yet. The alley in question has an attached 50s style cocktail bar, which is done out in pink and red, with booths and mirrors and associated kitsch. It has a huge range of beers and spirits, and, for a bar right in the centre of Bloomsbury, is secret enough to be blessedly quiet even on a Friday. Bloomsbury Lanes also means Lucky's Diner, the kind of diner you'd see in Grease, right here in pedestrian north London. There's so much good stuff here, you might not even get around to bowling. www.bloomsburybowling.co.uk



5

3

Union chapel: This functioning church is a very grown up venue; gig attendees sit on desperately uncomfortable pews holding (real) mugs of tea which you can buy from the friendly bar staff. Tea lights add to the general mellow atmosphere, the band playing comments several times on how beautiful the audience looks: 'I'm not sure if it's the lights or if you're all just really attractive, you're glowing!' The band in question is almost embarrassingly what you might expect to find playing in a church; of three, two members are wearing hats, and one accompanies his with a beard, tight jeans and braces. It's all good fun, and the atmosphere is unbeatable. The pews do take their toll on your bottom though. www.union-chapel.org.uk

4

King's Head Theatre and Pub: One of many fine pub-theatre venues in London; this one's a bit special because it puts on huge operatic masterpieces in a tiny theatre space. Using recycled red velvet theatre curtains and lamps from venues as august as the Theatre Royal Haymarket and the Scala theatre which adds to the high quality of the productions – they often transfer plays to the West End. www.thekingshhead.co.uk

Wilton's Music Hall: Wilton's is the kind of place whose fame is spread by word of mouth alone; it is proud of being 'the city's hidden stage'. This is a big part of its appeal, admittedly, but it's beautiful and deserves to be known better. Built in 1858, it has been through various incarnations, music hall, obviously, Methodist mission and bomb shelter, and now gloriously re-imagined in its original context. They do a big variety of different artsy things, from puppetry to comedy to cinema clubs, all of which are slightly off the wall. If none appeals, they also do weekly tours, a good opportunity to see the city's brilliant vestige of Victoriana up close. www.wiltons.co.uk



Quirky London Venues

By Harriet Williams
e: williams.harriet@gmail.com

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