

SCIENCE AND ECONOMICS

GENDER AND IDENTITY

ARTS AND CULTURE

LONDON LIFESTYLE

interact

**YOU, ROBOT
BEAUTIFICATION
SUMMER EDITION POSTER
REAL TALK
LGBT TEENAGERS
THE INDIGENE MASK OF FACEBOOK
MURDEROUS MOTHERS
AND COMPASSIONATE DEMONS**

SUMMER 2012

Editor's Letter:

Three months ago, at my first editorial team meeting, I got the opportunity to sit with thirteen young people from different walks of life. They had come from a combination of different continents and communities, and held many opposing points of view. It would have been an ordinary situation one can find strolling along the streets of London if it wasn't for one distinctive feature: our work towards a common end.

The magazine provided a platform that encouraged us to explore the 'coming together' of seemingly faraway realms of life. It compelled us to be aware of what's going on around us from our own perspective, but also to learn from others'.

There were intense discussions on current affairs and the arts, to the page design and layout. Being unique and different, it turns out, was our greatest asset. It gave us the space to express our own identities freely and as the mediator, it was certainly no easy task to avoid the many, many alluring conversational tangents.

The Summertime Edition of Interact Magazine offers a deep insight into a range of subjects we can all relate to. From a look into the latest eco-sustainable technological developments and exploring Hip Hop as a socio-political medium, to an Interact poster and 'what's your biggest fear?' vox-pop. All in all, it has been an exciting and rewarding adventure.

I would like to thank the editorial team for their effort and energy, and Vipul Bhatti who took the time to mentor us.

Hope our voice inspires new thoughts and action.
Have a good read.

Anisha Uppal
Interact Magazine Coordinator



INTERACT MAGAZINE SUMMER 2012

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YOU, ROBOT

Written by Nick Chowdrey
Designed by Muhab Shokat

Nick Chowdrey explores the phenomenon of technological unemployment. Should we be worried about the amount of jobs being lost to machines and is there anything that we could do about it?

Unexpected item in the bagging area – these are the words that any shopper dreads to hear when standing at a self-service checkout machine. What follows is an often embarrassing encounter with whichever dull-eyed robot warden eventually makes their way over to assist us. This involves a performance of beguiling swiping and prodding motions that one can only presume is some form of futuristic sorcery. Magically, this relieves the beleaguered machine from whatever virtual illness our untrained hands had inflicted and we continue scanning our items until it inevitably happens again.

It begs the question – wouldn't you rather just take your shopping over to a human like back in the good old days? In any case, one can't help but notice the gradual invasion of self-service checkouts upon supermarket tills across the nation. Indeed, jobs throughout the whole service sector seem to be progressively automated – from customer service assistants to Post Office workers – we increasingly interact with machines more than humans. How long will it be before all manned services will be replaced? What consequences will this have for our society? And is there anything we can do to halt the perpetual march of the machines?

The phenomenon of human labour being replaced by machines is broadly known as technological unemployment. This isn't a new problem for humanity; we've been creating tools to help us carry out tasks with less manpower since prehistoric times, the invention of the wheel being

the best example. But as time went on, we have gotten better and better at doing this, to the point where human labour today is almost obsolete. The upside is that we can now accomplish things far beyond what our bodies can achieve alone and at a much smaller cost. The downside is that, in a world where we depend upon selling our labour to society in order to survive, this can become a very big problem.

To understand this conundrum, we must look specifically at the development of technology and its effect on the economy so far. 200 years ago, our economy relied on agriculture as its primary driving force. Tools like the scythe and the plough massively decreased the amount of workers needed to tend the fields. But then the industrial revolution created millions of jobs in the manufacturing industry, so employment remained steady. Following this, the invention of the automated service line massively decreased the amount of workers required in industry. But this was also OK, because the digital revolution created millions of jobs in the service industry, working in shops and

offices.

Today, a large amount of service related jobs are being lost, because the augmentation of machines with computer processing chips now enables these jobs to be automated too. But where's the next revolution to create new employment for those who are replaced? Although it's true that the technology industry is ever expanding, the hard facts are that this really isn't enough.

Meanwhile, no current job is truly safe from technological unemployment. Here's why: in terms of running a competitive business, machines make better employees in almost every way. They are both cheaper to run, and incredibly more efficient: they can work 24 hours a day, 7 days a week; without ever needing food, or a fag break; with no risk of turning up late or throwing a wobbly and leaving mid-shift. Also, would anyone truly miss interacting with humans in the workplace? At least in the service scenario, I'd much rather deal with a machine than face the sullen, monotonous demeanour of most wage



slave waiters or checkout assistants, for example. At least the machine won't stare at me with masked irritation as I fumble around attempting to open the plastic bags, or utter an admonished groan when I ask to speak to their supervisor.

Technology isn't a limiting factor either. In theory, machines can carry out any function that a human can. Even the jobs that we class as representing the pinnacle of human skill – for example, brain surgery – could be automated; indeed, modern surgery is already being complemented by machines today. If this sounds at all unfounded to you, think about it this way: machines have been automatically building cars for years. Yes, the human body is far more intricate and complex than a car but, when it comes down to it, we're not much more than a sack full of parts that can be repaired and replaced, just like fixing anything else.

So, that's all the jobs that require any manual dexterity out of the way, but what about those that involve the more theoretical regions of the brain? This requires machines to become artificially intelligent. The subject of many a sci-fi story for decades; today, this idea is less science fiction and more science fact. For example, take the emerging utility of voice recognition on mobile phones – for instance, Apple's 'Siri'. Although anyone who has actually used Siri will know that the technology is far from perfect, this is still a form of artificial intelligence, i.e. a machine that mimics the human sense of

hearing to intelligently respond to basic commands.

This kind of technology is developing exponentially. Following Moore's Law – the observation that computer processing power doubles approximately every two years – it is theorised that the creation of a computer with all the power and capabilities of the human mind will be achievable by the year 2020. In theory, this would mean that machines will have the capability to perform 100% of human jobs in just eight years' time.

Why aren't we talking about this more? Inevitably, the current economic recession has brought to fore plenty of dialogue on the topic of unemployment recently; both in parliament and the mainstream media. Immigration, public sector cuts and higher education have been debated and discussed to the bone as potential problems and causes. It is surprising, then, that technological unemployment has received so little attention, when it is clearly accepted as a powerful contributing factor. Perhaps this is because no one really has an answer to this confusing economic conundrum.

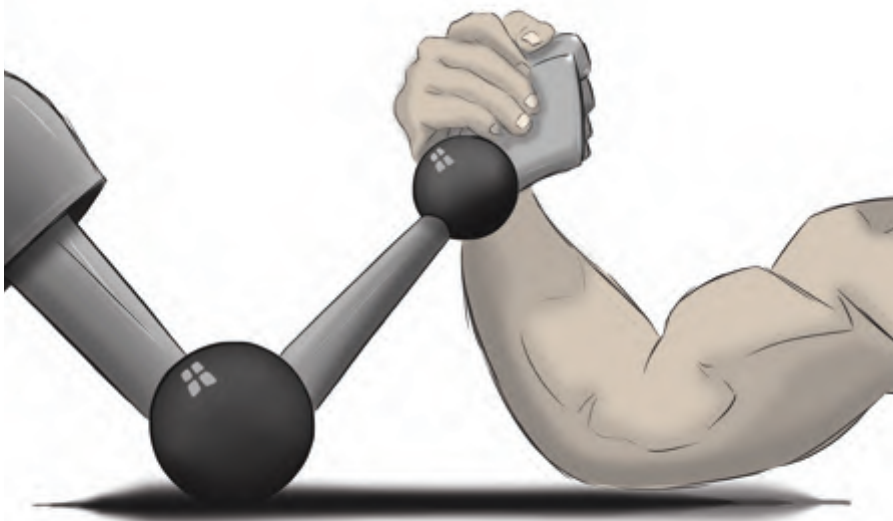
Here's the problem. On the one hand, the world economy is driven by big businesses, who must replace human labour with machines to achieve peak efficiency and profit. On the other hand, this system relies equally on consumption, the capacity for which is greatly reduced by unemployment. Put another way, if people

don't have jobs, then they don't have as much money to buy things, ultimately resulting in a loss for business. Is this the only thing stopping corporations from pushing forward with automation? It's hard to answer this question without having inside knowledge from a big corporate company, but suffice it to say that as jobs become more and more automated we can expect to see this becoming a huge problem – one that someone is going to have to answer.

If we continue as we are, we will be forced to choose between the certainty of growing unemployment through automation, or the fundamental counter-intuition of repressing technological progress. Could this be the ultimate 'catch 22' in our economy? Some might interpret this phenomenon as evidence that our development as a species has outgrown the system. For me, at least, it seems clear that this choice is one that we shouldn't have to make. Having discussed just how rapidly progress is being made, if we embrace technology and maximise the potential to reduce costs, then we could potentially provide ourselves with the ability to feed, clothe and house the majority of the world's population for little or no price. Critics will say that this would not work in our current free market economy. I think that we will have no choice but to make it work. ■

Did you know?

- It is estimated that around 75% of jobs in the UK today could be automated.
- Baggers, a restaurant in Nuremberg, Germany, has replaced the need for waiters by using a touch screen and track delivery system to service guests at their tables. The owners say the business costs have been cut in half.
- The human brain is capable of handling 400 billion bits of information per second. Computers today are capable of handling 2000 trillion.



THE PURSUIT FOR MORE: IS THAT ALL THERE IS?

Written by Anisha Uppal
Designed by Ali Rashid

If happiness is the end goal, through mathematics can we determine how best to allocate our resources? Interact writer, Anisha Uppal, investigates our emotional bond to money.

In this modern age, what is more important than money? The aeroplane that flies above and the lovely residential park below is a matter of affordability. And it certainly does not stop there: cocaine is for the wealthy; the gambler cries for help once in debt; and a majority of our identity from the clothes we wear to even our mannerisms and language, are defined by socio-economic strata.

Given we are an especially intelligent species; one might logically determine that intelligence is where happiness

lies. All these people hypnotised by material pursuits, surely through great contemplation, they must have judged money to bring infinite happiness. And material happiness, I find, does bring --but it takes away so much more.

In a conversation with Arvind Uppal, the President of Whirlpool, Asia and South Pacific - a man dedicated to profit margins, a wife, and two daughters -- the subject of happiness arose. He asked if I knew of the happiness equation.

"No, I don't" I responded.

"happiness [h] =

resources [r] / needs [n]"

Granted this equation seems overwhelmingly simplistic, I am still in awe by the complexities it captures. As players seated around the high-risk poker table, perhaps the impersonal character of mathematics might ease us into introspection on a topic as sensitive and personal as money. So, I put forth my question: with populations transfixed on gaining more and more money for ever-expanding desires, what are we essentially playing for? Have we bet our lives on the wrong game?

Our obsession with valuing goods and determining its worth, is that it lies somewhere between 'how much there is' and 'how much we want'. The value of a good then, is always greater if a larger number of people demand it and if the number of goods available cannot satisfy the demand. A commodity therefore, is worth most under competitive circumstances; where there is only one good and a global need. With limited resources, it is unfortunate that material needs have no ceiling.

The ideal result of the formula, a positive happiness [h], would require a hefty bank account [r] subtracted by only the bare minimal needs [n]. It is a difficult state to achieve for needs tend to grow exponentially. With a larger salary for

example, one can invest in the latest Beamer, a football aficionado can afford the ticket and trip to Brazil for the World Cup, and a parent can send their kids to private school. Before you even realise, flying cattle class is an unnecessary hassle and adapting to the latest technology, only a matter of convenience.

Money, as it plays out, goes up and down. It may be enough to buy what you wanted, but what about all these new things still beyond reach? So it follows that as resources grow and as we can afford more -- but not all the expensive things! -- our needs increase at an even faster rate leading to negative happiness. In this state we feel deprived of the external goods we value greatly, and at times feel unprotected and like a failure.

"My principle is simple" Mr Uppal continued, "The less you need and the more abundant your resources appear, the happier you feel. And my needs haven't changed drastically over the years."

Certainly, we know the sad tale of the poor, old rich man who found himself alone and unfulfilled at the end of his life. Rather than the dream of what he could be, if only he had remembered the fundamental and inner-need of love and acceptance. Who knows, he may have chosen to settle at the very beginning.

Alternatively, as often happens in London, waiting for a bus led to a conversation with a child abuse practitioner from Gambia. For patient confidentiality purposes, I cannot reveal further details regarding her identity.

Nevertheless, as she disclosed the nature of her job -- the long shifts from 10pm to 9am of listening to one unspeakably horrific case after another of murders, rapes, and domestic violence - I was soon at a loss for words.

"Sure, it's rewarding," she sighed, "but you never do get used to it. If you're smart, you only learn to handle it. Find a way to deal with it for yourself. I've seen these cases all the time, every single day for the past twenty years and it's not my job to breakdown."

At first, this may sound irrelevant; but the point here is simple. How can we input her figures into the equation (happiness [h] = resources [r] / needs [n])? What are her needs? So, I asked her how she copes with the emotional stress. From regular getaways to clear her mind to ensuring abundant security for her children through private education or the latest technology - consciously or subconsciously, she could have chosen any path.

"I have two homes, one here in London and the other in Gambia. This is how I manage my emotional needs. Shifting from one place to the other every six months keeps me sane." She responded.

There was a sense of relief in her voice. Her simple need of returning to her home country for some peace of mind was easily fulfilled by her resources. There was no endless desire for more. Her happiness was essentially not material - what she essentially needed, she had identified, and her resources were consciously distributed to satisfy those needs and take care of herself.

It is a judgement I cannot prove to anyone but despite the nature of her job and her late work hours, the lady was friendly and lively. She was completely comfortable responding to this strange, inquisitive girl regarding her career and doing this too, with a welcoming smile.

While my intention is only to propose a theory, I cannot help but wonder: is this the solution to happiness? Considering how valuable opportunities often come at a cost, is the pursuit for more in part, a legitimate move?

It seems in today's world, where material needs are hard to constrain, our wellbeing boils down to identifying our emotional requirements and allocating resources appropriately to fulfil them. Happiness then becomes a question of living purposefully, understanding ourselves and using our resources strategically. Well, when you think about it, it would explain the practice of Lent and Ramadan, and the liberation from material life that inspires great spiritual journeys. ■



FUEL FOR THOUGHT

Written by Nick Chowdrey
Designed by Muhab Shokat

Nick Chowdrey discusses the world's dependence on fossil fuels. Why do we still rely so much on this exhaustive, polluting and inefficient source of energy and how could we change the world for the better if this wasn't the case?

Depletion of natural resources. Climate change. Species extinction. Overpriced energy. Pollution. These problems, among others, are all evidence that our current way of living is severely unsustainable. We rely so heavily on exhaustible resources to support our world economy that we are inflicting grave damage upon our planet. Something serious has to be done.

So what's causing the problem? A significant and rarely discussed factor lies in the way we operate our world economy; specifically, the existence of a phenomenon known as forced scarcity. An explanation: simple free market principles denote that the greater the supply of a given product or service, the lower the price. Take supermarket goods as an example: a product like flour is relatively cheap, because it can be grown in vast quantities

and at little cost. However, a product like avocados costs more, because the crop is far less abundant and much more labour-intensive to farm. In short: where profit is the motive, abundance is not desirable, so scarcity is forced wherever possible.

We can see this happening in the energy industry today. If you think about it, energy is all around us: from the wind that rustles through the trees, to the sun shining overhead and the waves lapping at our shores. Indeed, it's actually the most abundant resource this planet has to offer. So why do we still use fossil fuels – a distinctly finite resource that requires millions of years to replenish – when there seem to be so many alternatives? The answer is profit; and seeing as the industry is driven by profit, the environment is treated as a mere externality.

An example of these market forces in play can be seen with the electric car. The recent surge in popularity of hybrid and fully electric cars might have you thinking that this is a developing technology. In reality, electric cars were built and used as far back as the nineteenth century and were actually extremely popular. Alas, these early vehicles were slow and could not travel far, so they were soon replaced by petrol powered vehicles. This being said, the idea was not forgotten, and in the late 1990s General Motors (GM) launched the EV1 – a fully electric car with practically

the same range and speed as models being released today.

What with rising fuel prices, this car started to become quite popular in the USA... but then the manufacturers unexpectedly recalled and crushed every single one. Why? Well, GM's publically stated reason was 'lack of demand', but the 10 yearlong embargo that the whole automobile industry subsequently put on the production of electric vehicles seem too severe a measure to suggest that some other forces might have been at play. Suffice it to say that a car that doesn't require petrol is not particularly profitable. The problem goes deeper. It goes without saying that electric cars are far more energy efficient than their petrol powered cousins; however, they still require charging at a mains supply – a source of energy supplied in most countries predominantly by expensive, polluting and exhaustible fossil fuels. Indeed - from planes and ships to lorries and trains - our entire infrastructure is powered in the same way. Add to this the fact that more and more manufactured products are built with plastic, which is also derived from oil, and it doesn't take a push to see just how addicted we are to these substances. Sadly, like with any other addiction, the consequences will be debilitating and potentially fatal.

The main barrier to progress in the fields of energy and infrastructure is investment.



Incredible technology exists today to vastly improve our energy efficiency, quality of life and success as a species altogether. Like with the electric car, the ideas have either been around for years, or simply require the time and capital to be properly developed. There's just one problem – where's all the money going to come from?

That's a good question. As discussed above, we can't look to multinational corporations, because profit is their overarching motive and an abundance of energy would create astonishingly low prices. We can't look to governments, because most of the world's countries are in billions of dollars of debt, so there simply isn't enough readily available capital.

So what can we do? Well, as long as we allow fossil fuels to dominate the energy industry, there really isn't much. Small inroads are being made both in the UK and abroad to promote clean energy – but it simply isn't enough. The only option is for the governments of the world to agree together to implement a programme that will phase out the use of non-renewable energy forever. This might be entirely counter-intuitive to our global system of a profit-driven economy, but it's fast becoming our only hope for truly positive progress.

Below are some examples of what we could achieve, were we not so stunted by this exhausting dependence on fossil fuels and careless strife for profit.

Solar Roadways

This multi-faceted renewable energy solution is the brainchild of partners Julie and Scott Brusaw. The idea is simple, but ingenious: replace the entire road system with computer controlled solar panels. The main benefit of this would be the huge exposure created for collecting solar energy, but many other positives come in to play as well; for example, inbuilt Light Emitting Diodes (LEDs) powered by the

panels would eliminate the need for street lights, road markings and most road signs. These would be controlled by prefabricated micro-processing chips, allowing for further benefits, such as pinpoint tracking, inbuilt intelligent motion sensors that alter the road's LED display when an upcoming obstacle is detected and thermo sensors that turn on prefabricated heating elements to melt away surface snow and ice.

All this technology would be encased in a material specifically designed to withstand the huge loads. It would also be possible to house other infrastructure in this casing, such as communication and electrical lines, removing the need for overhead pylons. The project has been taken very seriously: thus far, the US Federal government has awarded the company \$850,000 for research. Unfortunately, this is but a tiny dent into the investment required for true progress.



Maglev Trains

Instead of wheels and tracks, these trains use magnetic levitation to propel the vehicle forwards, achieving super-fast speeds unrivalled by conventional methods. This is not science fiction: the Japanese 'Bullet Train' uses maglev technology today, and the science behind it is actually very simple. Ever played around with a couple of fridge magnets, sticking them together and pushing them apart, as if by magic? Well, that's basically it. Firstly, the undercarriage of the train and the guidelines of the

track are electromagnetically charged to the same pole, resulting in repulsion. This means that the two do not actually touch – instead, the carriage levitates a couple of inches above the rails. Secondly, propulsion is then achieved by charging a secondary rail just ahead of the carriage to the opposite pole, hence attracting the train forwards.

Because this system is frictionless and requires no moving parts, reliability and energy efficiency are high; indeed, the only factor that increases energy consumption is air resistance as the train moves forward. This hurdle can also be overcome: patents exist today for a system of running maglev trains through an evacuated tube, hence eliminating the slow-down factor of air resistance, enabling phenomenal energy efficiency, and speeds of over 1000mph. This kind of transport would reduce the journey time between London and Tokyo to under four hours.

Geothermal Energy

Using a process known as 'heat mining', this form of energy is derived from the natural heat present in the earth's outer core. Beneath the crust, natural water deposits are heated by the planet's molten core to temperatures in excess of 200°C. A shaft is drilled down hundreds of meters to where these deposits exist, and the water is pumped to the surface, where it converts into steam and is used to power turbines to produce energy. Finally, the steam is condensed again into water, and returned to the earth's core to be heated once more and eventually reused. Utilising the right technology, this process emits but a fraction of the emissions created by burning fossil fuels, and it's also practically inexhaustible.

A study conducted by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 2006 concluded that around 2000 zettajoules (two trillion quadrillion joules) of energy is easily available using this process of heat mining. To put this into perspective, the whole world uses just one half of a zetta joule per year, meaning that geothermal energy alone could satisfy the world's current requirements for approximately 4000 years. Regrettably, a meagre 20 countries around the world currently utilise geothermal energy, of which Iceland is the current champion, deriving 30% of their national energy production from this source. ■

REAL TALK

Should being homosexual interfere with practicing your faith?

Written by: Victoria I. Sánchez

Should being gay ever interfere with your faith? Read Rhea's thoughts on the matter (The real name of the interviewee is not given for safety and family reasons).

What's your story? Were you afraid to tell your parents? And what did you think they would do?

I guess I didn't really think about it. I think always knew I was gay. My first crush was with my teacher, when I was nine years old. I used to write her letters and dedicate them to her. She was ill one day and I wrote her a letter. I used to have an obsession with her feet, and now I have a thing for women's feet (laughs).

(Laughter) What did you say about her feet?

I used to say how cute and how soft they were, and I wanted to touch them (laughs). I never gave those letters to her! I used to write them and keep them under my pillow, like a proper Bollywood film!

Did you ever date any men?

Yeah, I had boyfriends and we used to go to restaurants and check out girls together. I knew I was attracted to girls, but I loved the guys I dated. I loved who they were as people, but I was never physically attracted to them. Still, they were really nice guys.

Do you think heterosexual relationships are different from homosexual relationships?

No I don't think they are. You know, having been both in straight relationships and gay relationships, I think it's the same. You fight, you make up. The only thing that's different is the physical biology of the partner.

Are you comfortable being a lesbian?

Over the years I have become a lot more comfortable with being gay. I have a lot of gay friends as well as straight friends, and am comfortable with both groups.

I know you said you 'think' you always knew you were gay, but what does that mean exactly? How old were you when you really realized it?

When I had my first girlfriend, I was twenty. I really realized it when she first pursued me. She organized my birthday party, and from then I noticed her. And then we got really close, we were friends, and our feelings developed. And I kind of took the lead from there.

So you are one of six sisters and brothers. Are your sisters straight or gay?

I have one gay sister, two straight sisters and two straight brothers.

When did you find out your sister was gay?

We found out we were both gay at around the same time. We spoke about everything that we'd gone through every day. She was experiencing the exact same thing as I was. I mean, we both happened to share our first kiss with our girlfriends on the same day!

“As far as Hinduism and my sexuality are concerned, I don't think there's any link between them. If anything, Hinduism just makes me a good person, not a good or bad lesbian.”

So did both of you sit down and come out to your parents with or without your girlfriends?

Well, we just told our mom, and she was like, 'okay, cool.' And then they kept coming around and it was three months down the line, and then we said, 'we really love these girls.' It wasn't a sit down meeting, or anything like that because my mom had met them and because they were amazing girls. My mom never really said anything.

But your dad?

My dad... We've never sat down and told him.

You've never told your dad?

Never told my dad. He's met three of my girlfriends, but he's never been introduced to them as my girlfriends. There's a kind of respect there with Asian families.

What do you think he would do if you ever told him, 'Dad, I'm gay'?

He would say it's a phase. He would not agree with it. He would disapprove.

Do you think he would disown you?

No.

You're with a partner and your partner is black. Do you think your family would accept your partner if she was Hindu and Indian?

Yes. I've had a Hindu girlfriend, and my dad is very close to her. Whenever she comes around, there's more conversation, and he's very comfortable. My dad is a very serious man and he has trust issues. It took him a good five years to trust my first girlfriend, and now they get along. When he sees my current girlfriend, he acknowledges her, says 'Hi,' and just leaves the room. My mom is very welcoming. But I can tell they think 'First, you're gay...at least bring home an Indian girl.'



Do you find that your parents treat you any differently from your siblings (Lesbian versus straight)?

Not really, no. I mean, obviously, you know my mom is like, 'so when are you gonna stop being gay'? Obviously for a straight, old-school, Indian mom, she doesn't know what it's like being gay. She thinks it's a matter of switching it off—of it being a phase. She thinks it's a four year thing, like 'when are you going to settle down with a guy?' It's that kind of thing.

What's the difference between you and your lesbian sister?

She wants the straight life. She wants to have the husband, the kids, the nice car, the house—to fulfill my parent's dream, and I think that's beautiful.

Does she want it?

She wants it, yeah. The way society is today, it would be difficult for her to open about her relationship with a woman, and it's difficult for a lesbian. That's what my sister is all about. Peace.

So then, do you think your sister just wants to have kids because she feels pressure from family and society? Do you think if that pressure wasn't there, that she would be gay?

She genuinely wants children, gay or not. However, having children in a gay relationship is frowned upon and it will be very hard to live a 'normal' life with two mums.

Do you think your dad is in denial of your sexual orientation or your relationship with your partner?

Yes. Well, he would be, because this is abnormal to him. He's got four girls, two of which are married, two are gay. Both my brothers are also married. I mean, he knows my sister will get married one day, but it's just abnormal to him.

Was religion forced upon you, or did you actively choose your religion?

I actively chose to practice it of my own accord. And I'm currently practicing Buddhism as well.

As a Hindu Lesbian, do you still view yourself as being Hindu? How do you regard Hinduism in terms of the religion claiming anything about gays: good or bad?

I'm still very religious. I don't think that Hinduism involves my sexuality at all. Hinduism teaches us about being good people and dealing with detachment. I've read the Gita front to back, back to front, and it says nothing about sexuality. It just concerns itself with our removal from worldly things. As far as Hinduism and my sexuality are concerned, I don't think there's any link between them. If anything, Hinduism just makes me a good person, not a good or bad lesbian.

Did you look for answers in religion when you first realized your sexual preference? Does practicing Hinduism help you?

When I first admitted to myself I was gay, I turned to the Gita, as I mentioned earlier. I read each page carefully, and it comforted me to know that how I felt about girls wasn't a sin. So, yes. It does.

Still, in a lot of religions homosexuality is forbidden. What do you think of this? What do you think of the life of homosexuals within such religions?

There are some religions which state that homosexuality is forbidden, and I have seen friends having to choose between their family or their partner. Some religions have portrayed homosexuality as evil and curable. Clearly, one has no idea how it feels to be gay if their loved ones think it can be cured. My thoughts on these religions saddens me and I feel it will take a lot of time to spread the awareness.

What obstacles are there to overcome?

The main obstacles to overcome are making people understand that being gay doesn't mean you're selfish. But sometimes I think it may be impossible to get through to people who are really firm in their belief that being gay is wrong. ■



A SHAME TO LOVE?

Written by Najia Anwar
designed by Ali Rashid

Where we take every day as granted some people struggle against the odds to stand up for a basic need to live to love. Najia Anwar discusses the issue of Honour Killings within the Asian community in the UK.

Honour killings are murders practised by families on family members who are believed to have brought shame on the family name. The normal victims are from the female gender.

The shame could be caused by a victim refusing to enter into an arranged marriage or for having a relationship that the family considers to be inappropriate. Some victims are driven to suicide due to family pressure.

The number of women and girls in the UK suffering violence and intimidation at the hands of their families or communities is increasing rapidly, according to figures revealing the nationwide scale of “honour” abuse for the first time.

Statistics which were obtained under the Freedom of Information Act about such violence – which can also include threats, abduction, acid attacks, beatings, forced marriage, mutilation and murder – show that in the twelve police force areas, reports went up by 47% in just a year.

One of the many victims to fall under such haunting female subjugation was Banaz Mahmod, the young Iraqi Kurdish woman from south London who was murdered by her family and buried

in a suitcase after she was spotted kissing her boyfriend outside a tube station. One of the gang members Mohamad Hama, 30 who tortured, raped and strangled Miss Mahmood boasted how he was the final to have stamped on her neck to “get her soul out”. When testifying in the Old Bailey, Mr Hama laughed and joked as they described the series of degrading acts of sexual violence Miss Mahmood endured over the two and half hour ordeal at her home. Her murder was planned and ordered by her father, Mahmood Mahmood, 50, and her uncle, Ari Mahmood, 52, after she fell in love with a man they deemed unsuitable.

Then there was also the case of Nosheen Azam, who came to Sheffield from Pakistan as a young bride and was trapped in an abusive marriage. She was found in her back garden, aflame. Nosheen survived the ordeal but is now brain dead, and her body badly burnt. No one knows whether she set herself alight to commit suicide or whether it was an attempted murder.

Nosheen’s father, who visits her in a care home, recalled the moment he told her not to leave her husband, for the sake of her family’s pride.

In a recent bid, police have held many press conferences and community led organised meetings to understand the nature of such killings. These measures were taken in order to prevent the practice of such horrific crimes.

In a recent case the police failed to protect and understand the nature of an honour killing. The unfortunate victim was Miss Mahmood who’s attempts to seek protection by the Police were futile. Upon repeated disclosure that her family was intending on murdering her, the police was nonetheless quick to dismiss her plea as mere “fantasy”. Miss Mahmood was left no choice and with no one to turn to, she

broke through a window and escaped her father’s clutches from her grandmother’s house...Only to be murdered later...

The case led the Association of Chief Police Officers (Acpo) to publish a new strategy in 2008, which highlighted the need to gauge the scale of the problem to improve police work and recommended that all English and Welsh forces introduce a mechanism to record the number of reports produced. There is no national guidance in Scotland.

The Iranian and Kurdish women’s right organization (Ikwro) said it was concerned that some forces were still not collecting the data in a consistent format. They have since called upon Acpo and Acpo Scotland to help ensure this was done, and to release statistics more regularly. Complete data for recording these crimes was crucial to prove the scale of the problem, adding that she feared momentum had been lost in recent years.

The failure to protect victims seems very deeply rooted. In a desperate attempt to understand such shortcomings, organisations such as Karma Nirvana have dedicated their lives to providing aid. In order to create awareness they have resorted to communicate through all mediums and act as mediators between victims and help.

Jasvinder Sanghera of victim support group Karma Nirvana said the real figures of statistics could be four times as high.

Commander Mak Chishty of Acpo insisted this was not the case, adding that the police national database, which is being phased in, would provide collated figures:

“We have reviewed every force with a questionnaire and the 2008 strategy has been completed.” Mak Chishty also reassured people that they were trying to fix the understanding of the police and communities by taking adequate necessary actions, “We’re now in consultation on a new strategy. All frontline staff has received

awareness training and every force has a champion on honour-based abuse. I’m confident that any victim who comes to us will receive the help they need.”

Incidents, such as these, tend to occur when the woman defies the patriarch; be it a father, brother or son. If a female takes charge of important matters in her life, such as marriage or love, she is then abused or murdered for having ‘dishonoured’ the family. These growing problems need to be talked about openly and sensitively as more young girls or women can be victims and their life can be at stake by this dominating culture.

In another recent case Samaira Nazir, 25 was murdered brutally by her brother and cousin. Miss Nazir had reportedly fallen in love with an asylum seeker.

She [Samaira Nazir] was attacked viciously in front of her two and four year old nieces.

Samaira was repeatedly stabbed vigorously in the neck by her brother Irshad Nazir and cousin. Irshad then murdered his sister just because she fell in love with a man who was from a different caste. He murdered her in front of his young children. Samaira’s only fault according to her family was the shame of loving the ‘wrong’ man. Love cost Samaira her life.

In order to avoid such circumstances in the future there should be more awareness in such communities. There should be more integration between the police and communities to create a better understanding. In order to eliminate such grave problems both children and adults should be educated on honour killings as an unacceptable tradition. There should be more interaction between primary aid and potential victims. Primary aid should be made more accessible. This will hopefully lead to an end of such merciless traditions. ■

INSIDE GENDER

Written by Selina Moses,
Designed by Biljana Biki

Socially constructed attributes and roles of the masculine and the feminine - - Gender - - often creates our understanding of man and woman. Interact writer, Selina Moses, discusses the relationship between gender and identity as we develop and realize ourselves within our given circumstances.

This desire for identity starts from birth and grows as we develop with minds and views of our own. The earliest identity we are given is gender, to identify whether we are male or female and duly provided with pink for girls and blue for boys (although cases of children who are born as one sex and identify as the other is increasing).

Take a recent case in America. Identical twins Jonas and Wyatt were born as boys but while Jonas was a typical rambunctious boy, his brother Wyatt preferred more feminine interests and attire from an early age. By the age of four, Wyatt was already heavily into pink tutus and jewellery. This obvious manifestation was backed up by Wyatt himself who claims he had always known he was a girl and expressed a desire to have a body to match up to his image of himself before school age. Finally after going to doctors and accepting that Wyatt was serious about feeling like he was born into the wrong body, his family authorised his preference and the female that he always wanted to be, Nicole, was created. She [Nicole] is content with her decision and at peace with her assertion, aiming for surgery and hormone stimulants to shape her future.

It isn't difficult to observe how gender is projected onto people with just a colour. For example, in family restaurants where plastic cutlery and cups are given to children, it's worth observing how the colour coding influences the child. The staff are careful to give pink to the girls and blue to the boys but if they are given any other colour of green, yellow or orange, there is no fuss made over it. It is their parents who request a certain colour for them instead. Children love bright colours and aren't so conscious about this 'rule' which tends to be enforced by adults.

Little girls are known for their penchant for pink and many freely

choose this colour as their favourite while they are young but there is the opinion that to be pushed into it by being told that girls must like pink is narrowing the definition of what it is to be a girl. Talking to an acquaintance of mine, he started off life as wanting bright pink sparkly items but upon school age, he was quickly bullied out of it and descended into the kind of macho man his environment expected him to be. In the last couple of years, he finally rebelled against all that he'd been suppressing and came out as gay. Having heard the opinion for several years that boys who wear pink and play with dolls will grow up to be gay men, and therefore undesirable, it is easy to see why some people have a fear of even choosing what colour they like, leading to their difficulty to coming out in society. Most men don't take to wearing more than a hint of pink and it is still an accessory met with some disdain.

It can be argued that being so liberal with children means that they are confused about what is male and female. Without set gender stereotypes, it can be perplexing to the child. On the other hand, such rigid rules can easily stifle the child, make them feel trapped and confused as they will encounter other people and types of behaviour that won't fit into the definition that they have been taught to believe in. Many grow up into teenagers who are confused about their sexuality because of the way some of their peers don't conform to the 'rules.' If they discover their sexuality at that age, they are far more easily shamed into believing that is it wrong to be gay.

We live in a world where the potential to do anything is endless and on paper, no one is exempt from achieving anything based on race, gender or disability (even though people still struggle in daily life to do so) but children are still being brought up with the Wendy House rules. It is one thing to be taught that one is a girl and the other is a boy just by biological difference but to be given a colour, mindset and personality that traps you into that gender could be potentially damaging to a person's understanding of gender and sexuality in later life. Having been taught rules on how men and women 'should' be in society can limit and not equip them to understand people who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, asexual, transgender or transsexual. ■

BEAUTY

A TRANSLATION OF AMBIGUOUS LAYERS

Written by: Emma Jacobs

Designed by: Muhab Shokat

There are certain realities of existence that we accept without question and the idealisation of beauty as an identity is one such. Beauty today seems to be a universal pressure. Is it a consequence of natural selection... Or perhaps of male domination? Ultimately, it seems depending on what we choose; beauty can be a reflection of who we should be or who we are. Emma Jacobs explores the glorification of beauty and how and why it's practiced in traditions across the globe.

In 1958, the theorist Ambrose spoke of the diverging expectations between men and women in society. Amongst us all is this instability in how we present ourselves to who we are where judgments are razor sharp. If we listen to society, much of a woman's identity comes from the body. Frankly though, the inaccessible female type for the Western world tells us more about the lascivious fantasies of aging male anthropologists than women leaving their stereotypes to stale. Conceptualising this, Ambrose believed men need not care about appearance.

In the West, unrealistic expectations are placed upon women. Magazines are the new gospels where men leaf through an unrealistic flick-book of feline symmetrical features, finding themselves cooing in between pages. Expectations travel beyond the face extending into a preference for an hourglass figure that declares her femininity and sex appeal, so minute expectations all round then. Such preferences span cultures and generations, meaning there really are universal standards of beauty. But it is these universal standards that cause people to mask genuine identities and perhaps inhibitions. Western female body sizes seem to be shrinking to new extremes and the hushed cult of Thinspiration emancipates itself in the creases of our society. Alexa Chung is glorified as an anorexic pin-up where her chopstick thighs jerk other wafer-thin hopefuls out the way. Her tiny frame is treated as 'normal' and for this reason; Thinspiration will be kept alive. It seems, regardless of body type, women across individual cultures are willing to strive for what that culture deems as near-perfect. Are we tragically confusing presentation for identity? Our school uniforms do not define us as people, but give us an extraterritorial identity. Is a fear of being ourselves a uniform we all wear?

Much of Western beauty obsession feeds itself into the lucrative world of slicing and dicing- the plastic surgery billion-sum market. The surge in surgery denotes a breakdown in the relationship between us and the idea that beauty must be invented rather than cultivating what we already own. The desire to appear as 'plastic' as possible is largely fuelled by the media where ideas of youth and sexual standards are propelled by the prosperous porn industry. Where some prefer a slick look, the French take a

fancy to female under-arm hair - - the forecast for Paris may be fog as women burn their bra's over their balconies. Hair however is low on the scale of beauty worries, it is inescapable after all. Beauty is hypnotised before us as a cultural facade in the form of an economic lily-pad in Capitalist waters. It is understood for its potential in what it can do for a person and we exhaust it as an item.

Naomi Wolf believes beauty standards are to maintain the politic, economic and sexual subjugation of woman by man. Yet Feminists shriek about the horror of women having to conform to Western ideals as if plucking is the hardship and not clitoridectomy. We may not take Vogue to be the bible nor nibble on celery pampered with dragonfly excrement (yet another excessive diet?), but our society appears to be functioning on the outside yet the real problem is often overlooked. It tends to happen that women extract promises from misleading icons, such as those in magazines, and in turn create an identity that is virtually an offspring of the media itself. The effort to be regarded as beautiful is perhaps more a plea to simply be looked at.

Ultimately, there is a worldwide basket of negative images that women find themselves in and psychological effects run deep because of their life-long pursuit to cultivate a perfect image. Beauty should be seen as freedom of expression and if it meets someone's ideal, it is merely a preference embodied and fantasy projected. My argument lies in the sentiment of what one culture finds beautiful; others will not, so what essentially is beauty? First we must respectively browse through the meaning of beauty amongst individual cultures.

Alternative interpretations of beauty span centuries and continents allowing us to define ourselves in a maze of ways. Perhaps experimentation is the only neutral factor between cultural takes on beauty. With experimentation we are creating a wider pool of heterogeneity and determining a healthy future of inter-faiths, creeds, and colours. For our own and each other's sake, we must tug at why identity and appearance are victimized in their contexts.

Asian and African cultures have a rich tapestry of beauty methods where the lessons from their ancestors have been passed down through the fluxes of generations. Foot Binding was an exclusive part of Chinese culture to create a stylized walk that was aesthetically pleasing. This practice was forced only upon women in order to slow her down and keep her in check as she grew older. This can be stretched across all rituals of beauty where control is a potent component and an instrument in dictating lives.

Chinese tradition suggests that beauty is found in the form of movement and many individual cultures respond to physicality through different customs. African cultures are renowned for being physically investigational with the practice of Scarification. This ritual encourages all to strive towards a standard of human perfection within their culture. A perfection however, that spans class, race and a human history like nothing else; and without such bodily decorations an entire cultural history would be misrepresented. Is truth the real identity of beauty and what we choose to deny, the nemesis of beauty? The thought of scarification is painful enough but it acts as a cultural differentiator between the self and the other whereby in this context, beauty is achieved in distorting the natural, in testing one's body and discovering beauty as a means of re-invention and escapism.

Henna is a common Asian beauty practice and the more decorated with henna the woman is, the more beautiful she is perceived to be. Henna is aesthetically visual and the patterns are consistently elaborate.

The beauty is not only that of face value here, it is also something an Indian woman waits for as it is applied in a pre-matrimonial ritual.

Beauty is then sustained and imprinted when a woman has fulfilled another identity; such as that of a married woman. She becomes something of a centrepiece and is admired as an Indian woman of true happiness, beauty and prosperity. Each cultural group invents ideals and symbols that reflect a certain value and henna defines the value of a woman's development within certain Asian communities.

Lesser known social groups such as The Cree Tribe and the Navajo Tribe have a meditative and holistic approach to beauty where it is released from within and instilled from a young age. Unusual practices, normally intertwined with nature and starting from a young age, imply that beauty is in what surrounds us. It also suggests that beauty cannot be made if our interpretation is so subjective. Similarly, the Middle East connects beauty with what one does not see, but

rather glimpses and scents. This idea of an invisible beauty is a disintegrated concept in our modern society and the 'less is more' idiom is associated with a whole other previous generation so far removed we cannot trace its beginning.

In terms of religion and beauty itself, Asian religions in the Eastern hemisphere more often than not retreat to religious texts when applying themselves to beauty. Hinduism, for example suggests beauty is demonstrated through behaviours. Religious idols displayed in Western religions have not been nude, signifying that beauty might not be found in religious idols but rather in the scriptures. Contrastingly, Eastern religious idols are considered beautiful, especially when depicted in the nude, because it is real and has to be revered to its nature. The Kama Sutra which originated in India and the Bijinga paintings in Japan, both containing beautiful depictions of women in sexual contexts, are considered religious because their natural form and beauty is God-like. There is certainly a relation between what cultures find beautiful and the appearance of their Gods. Such forms of adornment are the measure to which we judge other people. Most people find it difficult to accept aesthetic merit behind a form of apparel other than that which we currently admire within society. In short, cultures can admire the beauty of what is displayed in their houses of worship and use that admiration to define their own cultural idea of beauty.

Nietzsche spoke of beauty as an illusion as it speaks of stability in a world that is constantly changing. And to this it is unfortunate that beauty seems crucial to our happiness or at least such a favoured factor. On the other hand, Punk godfather Iggy Pop famously stated that we are encouraged to have 'a lust for life' that 'is realised through tweaking and transforming the body'. A 'lust for life' is free for our taking but the freedom associated

with this cannot be developed if we are constantly cluttering our minds with what we physically wish to be.

Perhaps with so much choice in our twenty-first century, there is no end to the reign of self-modification...

In briefly resurrecting the king of all logical thought, Darwin believed the function of beauty is universal but its manifestations differ. Therefore, while results may differ, the passion for beauty and the readiness to abide (and suffer if need be) are similar across all cultures. A process of empowerment would require a diverging belief system - one in which beauty is a mere accessory in our interaction and should never be the basis of our perception of others.

Unfortunately, this truth is often disregarded, but we can only infiltrate the problem one individual at a time. Despite our different methods, what chimes between us all is the clatter of finding endless ways to approach beauty. The ways in which we approach beautification may be at odds to grasp with between cultural groups, but humanity is transient and the interpretation of existence bears no boundaries.

So, let us put our words into action by embracing the weird and wonderful. Let 'society' and its connotations become drastically out of fashion and something of a taboo. Instead, welcome life as a circus and may the roaming 'freaks' be of inspiration to you and your ghost. ■



AN EARLY ACCOUNT OF RACISM

Written by Najia Anwar

Designed by Ali Rashid

Racism today is recognized as wrongful behaviour as it is used to discriminate the inferior from the superior based on prejudice belief systems. In the past however, it was the norm. Interact writer, Najia Anwar, reveals the story of Queen Victoria and her Urdu teacher, Abdul Karim, and the racially-motivated reactions regarding their relationship within the British Empire.

One of the earliest accounts of racism dates back to the era of Queen Victoria. At this time, Queen Victoria was the empress of India and the Indian people, under British rule, were deemed as lower class.

Abdul Karim was a 24 year old Indian male and one of the two waiters appointed from India by Queen Victoria. The waiters were to cater for the princes' needs at the Queens Golden Jubilee. The queen wrote in her diaries about her two new Indian servants: "The one Mohammed Buksh, very dark with a very smiling expression... and the other, much younger, called Abdul Karim, is much lighter, tall and with a fine, serious countenance. His father is a native doctor at Agra. They both kissed my feet."

Abdul Karim however, was fast to gain the affection of the Queen. He was upgraded from a waiter to a munshi (teacher). From teaching the queen how to speak and write Urdu, they soon became close friends (yet, he was commonly known as her 'close advisor'). Karim had created a phrase book of everyday Urdu words for the Queen to use when speaking to her Indian servants, as well as visiting royalty, and had written them out in Roman script.

The phrases include the standard ones such as: "You may go home if you like" and, "The egg is not boiled enough". But some of the phrases are significantly more intriguing. For instance: "You will miss the munshi very much" and, "Hold me tight".

In the past their relationship was blown out of proportion. It was portrayed as an elicit relationship between the two and discussed only behind closed doors. The discovery of the Windsor documents however, suggests it was a misinterpretation. Their bond, it appears, was that of a mother and son considering Queen Victoria clearly signs 'from your mother' at the end of each letter written to Karim. The documents also contain letters from Queen Victoria to Karim, frequently concerning his wife (of whom, it would appear, she was equally fond), signed: "dearest mother" or "Your loving mother, Victoria R.I."

Even though Abdul Karim was a close friend and advisor to the Queen, he was never accepted by the royal circle that made it their aim to get rid of him. The Royal circle never failed to avail every opportunity possible to diminish his presence.

On one occasion they even tried to diagnose him falsely of a sexually transmitted disease. At another occasion, they tried to make religious differences an obstacle between the Queen and Karim. The Queen however, decided to ignore such prejudice. In

resilience, the Queen decided to favour Karim's religious beliefs and decided to build him his own place of worship, a Mosque in Woking, England. The royal circle held great racial beliefs as to how a fellow native Indian waiter held a class and status as high as them. They therefore, refused to accept him and were adamant on all costs to see him stripped of power. Queen Victoria recalls this moment as she thought their actions were motivated by race – and jealousy.

Karim only notes the hostility towards him in his diaries once in passing: "The memorable year [Diamond Jubilee year] did not open well... The unpleasantness I remarked on last year still existed."

Abdul Karim was honoured with different titles and medals of Honour by her Majesty. He was given houses in Windsor, Balmoral and Osborne and extensive land in Agra. The royal household was not only opposed to the idea of a servant being catapulted into such prominence but were also scandalised by his race. At a period of great flux for the British Empire in India, the idea of an Indian advising the Queen on Indian politics became unacceptable, and rumours started to circulate that Abdul Karim was passing the Queen inflammatory advice about India and that he was a spy leaking sensitive and secret foreign policy information.

The Queen hoped to make Karim a knight on the Diamond Jubilee. Her hopes though were not too far from being outrun by the disapprovals of the royal household. This hope infuriated the royal household to the brink of passing the Queen as a mentally insane woman. The prince tried his best to keep peace in the royal household and tried in all his abilities to refrain Karim from becoming knighted on the Queens diamond jubilee. Once the queen found out the refusal to accept Karim as a knight on the Diamond Jubilee she simply refused to attend her own event.

During the eve of the Diamond Jubilee the Queens family and courtiers even threatened to declare her insane in a bid to quash a potentially scandalous relationship. Despite these objections, the Queen stood by Abdul Karim, even accusing her household of racial prejudice, till her last days, refusing to let him go. Upon her death in 1901, he was the last person to see her before burial and walked behind her casket at her request.

After Queen Victoria's funeral, Abdul Karim became an ostracised man and was immediately exiled back to India. With members of the royal household marching into Abdul Karim's home, they seized all items bearing the royal crest and burned all his letters from the Queen.

Karim died eight years later at the age of 46, a largely broken man in virtual obscurity; a far cry of remembrance on the times he was the most recognised member of Queen Victoria's household. In the partition that followed the independence of India in 1947, his descendants moved to Pakistan where they were relatively unknown and the story of Abdul Karim was lost from their history. Now his mausoleum in Agra, India is being cared for by his great-grandson. ■

MURDEROUS MOTHERS AND COMPASSIONATE DEMONS:

Goddesses who inspire terror and tenderness

Written by: V.I. Sánchez and E.Jacobs

Images: Pieter Weltevrede

Designed by: Ali Rashid

Ever wonder if there was a time where women, instead of men, were the superheroes? Interact writers Victoria Sanchez and Emma Jacobs journey back in time to pay homage to a few jaw-dropping Goddesses who broke gender stereotypes before they were ever projected onto women in society.

Why do religions, in cultures that often subjugate women, depict their Goddesses as powerful? Has the role of woman in society changed from ancient times? By looking into the divergent personalities of these Goddesses, we propose a reconsideration of female stereotypes in society.

Society seems determined to fit gender inside strict definitions; female identity has not exactly been a malleable and fluid concept. Historically, motherhood and subservience have assumed pivotal roles in allowing human beings to find cathartic solace in religious female figures. However in Hindu, Buddhist, Slavic, and Norse religions, Goddesses are attributed with qualities above female purity and servility, which suggests that at the time of the religious text's creation, femininity was defined by many components. Hindu Goddesses, for instance are named after un-gendered truths: Durga means invincible, Lakshmi means prosperity, and Saraswati means knowledge. On the other hand, while women should not be defined solely by sex, childbirth, and the realm of the domestic, we must also remember that there is great strength in the 'feminine'.

Some varieties of feminism have too often made the mistake of downplaying the distinction between the nurturing mother for the powerful working woman or the hypersexual woman. For a television show that has often been regarded as empowering and even feminist, *Sex and the City's* female characters' lives are entirely centered around men. Not only that, but by emphasising certain roles (sexy bitch, business woman) and marginalising our reproductive powers through modern expressions, a woman is defined according to the principles of men and is stripped of what is exclusively hers; the biological power to sustain and nourish life. The deeper misconception lies in the belief that once she has reproduced, a woman's duty is over, and thereon she is abandoned to 'useful' household practices.

The icons presented here challenge gender stereotypes across culture and time, and possess a range of abilities—from massacring demons to providing for human beings. These Goddesses are all duplicitous and manifest many faces, but it is because we all—men and women—wear many faces as well; we are all of us brothers, fathers, mothers, sisters, lovers, colleagues, and neighbours. Though women of the present hardly need to enroll in monster-slaying courses, we must not forget that that we too possess the ability to surpass our conventional functions

and that our gender roles should never hinder our vast potential.

DURGA

When Durga was born, it was at the height of chaos. A buffalo demon called Mahish was terrorising humans and Gods into hiding. He was an indestructible monster—and his vast army of demons expected to defeat the Gods. The Gods soon called a meeting to discuss possible ways of opposing him. Shiva (the God of destruction), and one of the three most powerful manifestations of God, proposed that everyone should contribute a portion of his or her power to create a whole new being. The result yielded to a new Goddess whose face reflected the glory of Lord Shiva, six arms from Lord Vishnu (the God of protection) complete with six weapons, and two feet from Lord Brahma (the God of creation). And so Durga was born from male and female substance, as a lovely and powerful Goddess.

Valiant Durga defeated Mahish and reinstated the Universe's balance. In India, an important festival called the Durga Puja, it's celebrated for 10 days in honour of Durga's victorious battle. Through her resistance against affliction and cruelty, Durga is a protecting Goddess that brings warmth and peace to her people. She also provides nourishment to humans and animals. She isn't afraid of anything; in fact, one of Durga's favourite things to do is ride around on lions and tigers. It is said that hearing her stories cleanses one's sins.

KALI

If you think Durga was badass, then meet Kali, the black one. She is a fearful Goddess; one look at her is enough to give anyone bad dreams. She has eight arms (also interpreted as four arms), a third red eye, and a belt made of human hands. If that wasn't terrifying enough, she also wears a necklace made of skulls, which is one of the few things covering her naked body. Born from the fury of Durga, it makes sense that she is so frightening. Kali shot out of Durga's forehead when she faced an even greater demon than the last—Raktabija. This demon was virtually impossible to defeat because each drop of blood from his wounds formed a new demon until an innumerable army of Raktabijas faced her! Kali's blood-dripping tongue proves her triumph over this demon; she stuck out her tongue, caught all the drops of blood and then swallowed Raktabija's body whole.

In fact, she is so powerful, that the Gods were afraid of her and thought she would kill the entire world in bloodlust. In the end Shiva, her consort, laid his body

down on the ground beside her to calm her fury. She accidentally stepped on him and instantly, her bloodlust was gone and she was herself again. In Indian art, Kali is often depicted dancing on a prostrate Shiva, who looks up at her with admiration. It is important to note that Kali vanquished this demon in order to protect her worshippers, who consider her to be a devoted mother Goddess, not an assassin. Kali also makes certain that everyone

gets ill now and again so their bodies can repel more serious diseases. She is revered because she neutralises negative thinking in the minds of her followers. Kali is responsible for making sure that all things die in order to continue the cycle of life; because of her role in the karmic cycle, Kali is commonly mistaken as the Goddess of death, but she is actually the Goddess of kala (time). Some go so far as to call her the most compassionate of the Goddesses because she is in fact responsible for ending our illusions and freeing us from the cycle of karma by releasing us from our bodies.

USHA

Usha is a Hindu Goddess known as the Goddess of dawn. Respectively, she is also known as the daughter of the sky and the lady of the night. Usha stirs creatures off their feet and with her hands, lifts up birds to take flight in the heavens. The energy she exerts is an unending resource and she bears fruit continuously—nature could not be without her. Usha brings not just light to slumbering creatures; but hope, happiness, riches and all the other good things.

BODHISATTVA

Bodhisattvas are beings that renounce their salvation and refrain from entering Nirvana (enlightenment) in order to devote their existence to saving others. Bodhisattvas are worshipped as deities in Mahayana (Tibetan) Buddhism and can be men or women who have spent several incarnations (or life-cycles) performing righteous endeavors and have reached the level of a deity. They must master the Six Perfections and maintain them; generosity, ethics, patience, effort, concentration, and wisdom.

A famous female Bodhisattva was called Palden Lhamo (whose name translates to Glorious Goddess). She is a wrathful depiction of a Bodhisattva, and rides her mule through an expansive ocean of blood. She is midnight blue, has three eyes, wears a sun at her belly, and a moon on her head. The story goes that she married a cruel king who would take human sacrifices and practice cannibalism. She swore to herself that if she could not change his ways to good, she would kill her son, as he was following in the king's evil path. When the king spurned all her warnings, she fulfilled her vow, killed her son, and changed from her human form into the terrible figure described above. As she rode away on her mule, the king shot at her with one of his arrows. The arrow hit the mule's flank, and as she pulled it out, Palden Lhamo transformed the wound into an eye so she could watch over the region and defend the innocent against the king.

Don't let her wrathful face confuse you; she is considered to be a guardian of the Buddhist faith. Bodhisattvas are recognised as deities of compassion and love because they exist and serve through self-sacrifice. Palden Lhamo is a representation of supreme dedication and kindness; she is a Goddess, but she is also a woman. Her sexuality cements the notion that gender does not have strict regulations.

MARZANNA

A Slavic Goddess associated with nightmares, death and witchcraft; Marzanna is an embodiment of the winter season. If you pass her by without fear, she will appear as a beautiful young woman and may even grant you blessings—but if you show any fear, she takes the form of a hideous hag with wolf teeth and clawed hands and consumes you. No one represents the game of mask-wearing better than Marzanna. Her appearance



depends solely on the judgement of the outsider; in other words, the preconceived notions of whoever approaches her would shape Marzanna's wicked or divine manifestations. It could be said that Marzanna's role implicitly acts on behalf of all women by fighting fear of the unknown. Despite Marzanna's gloomy entrance, one of her central purposes is destroying fear: she has no respect or compassion for cowards. The figure Marzanna projects undermines our cultural interpretation of women today, which often neglects that women can be figures of authority and awe—and not just sexually minded or maternal. Marzanna aids in the process of renewal; and is welcomed rather than dreaded because she is a symbol for transition, remembrance, and fearlessness.

SYN

Syn is a Norse Goddess; a guardian of Frigga's palace (the Goddess of marriage and the hearth), who refuses entrance to the uninvited. She also defends the weak and is called upon by those who are wrongly accused of crimes. Syn embodies self-possession and is called upon by many for aid in their own battles. A far cry from the domesticated woman, she is an assertive and fierce judge. Her role suggests an ability to control the flexibility of femininity and power. Syn exists as defender of humans in times of despair and crisis.

Our misinterpretation of womanhood over the centuries has erased the significance of these icons and what they represent, but perhaps with understanding, we can follow the message these powerful women are projecting. These Goddesses don't just protect men or women, but the many dimensions of being human; they protect identity, character, and truth. ■

interact







PITCHES AND PREJUDICE

Words Nick Chowdrey
Design Ali Rashid

This year, there have been a couple of high profile instances of racial issues in the English Premier League. However, it seems the problem is much more pronounced in football cultures abroad. Interact writer, Nicholas Chowdrey, discusses racism in Poland and Ukraine at the European Championship 2012.

On Monday the 28th of May, the BBC aired a Panorama special entitled 'Euro 2012: Stadiums of Hate'. Produced by acclaimed journalist and broadcaster, Chris Rodgers, the documentary explored the phenomena of racism in modern day football culture in Ukraine and Poland – the host nations of this year's UEFA European Championship.

The programme presented many incidents of racial hatred across both countries, including swastika graffiti, fans making monkey noises at African players, Asian supporters being swarmed and attacked in the stands and, perhaps most chillingly of all, whole sections of supporters coordinating 'Heil Hitler' salutes and chanting anti-Semitic anthems.

Sol Campbell, former England star, urged supporters planning to make the trip over to Eastern Europe this year to "stay home, watch it on TV... don't even risk it." Furthermore, many of England's players of African origin subsequently announced that their families would not be attending the championship, in fear of being racially assaulted.

Ukraine's President, Viktor Yanukovich, downplayed the accusations, asserting that authorities and security services would be "watching all the matches closely" for signs of violence. Even so, what with these two countries' particularly horrific history of racial abuse against their citizens, many people will have been shocked by the BBC footage.

Here in the UK, we are fortunate to live in a society where this kind of extreme behaviour is no longer tolerated, or at least driven so deep into the ground that its rotten grasp is unlikely to ever reach us. Even those fascist institutions that still remain – like the British National Party or English Defence League – aren't present their true faces publically, rightly afraid of the concurrent national backlash that would no doubt ensue.

This being said: visit any local pub in one of Britain's less prosperous areas and you're likely to hear plenty of passionate conversations between people who are not necessarily racist, but at least hold highly conservative views on subjects such as immigration and multiculturalism.

One can empathise that this might be a natural reaction in times of austerity, but that doesn't mean that it's right, nor that it's something we needn't be worried about. After all, without wanting to draw any similarities between the ConDem government and Hitler's Nazi party, it was this combination of economic depression and racial segregation that was capitalised on in the 30s and 40s to install a murderous degree of xenophobia in the normal, decent folk of Germany.

This is historical proof that, under the right conditions, these backwards values can spread like wildfire. I'm glad to say that my home country is sociologically developed enough for this to not be feasible; however, it genuinely remains to be seen whether this is the case in Poland, Ukraine, or indeed any other less economically developed nation.

The only weapon in our arsenal against this cultural disease is education. People must be made aware that immigration is but one of many factors that affect unemployment. I personally believe that, once this blame factor is removed, cultural and racial acceptance will increase significantly. ■

WHERE DOES IT COME FROM?

Written by: Qudsia Hussain
Designed by: Antonio Furione

We live in a city where people wear trench coats, eat fish wrapped in paper, touch wood for good fortune and wish others to 'break a leg' before an important performance. Have we ever wondered where these originated from?

Trench Coats

Today when we think of a trench coat we immediately think of Rosie Huntington Whitely adorning the classic 'Burberry trench'. The trench coat however, is called so by soldiers in the First World War who wore them as they fought in trenches. At the time, materials used for outer wear could not protect the wearer as it was not waterproof. Fortunately, all this changed when Scottish scientist Charles Mackintosh layered a softened rubber between the woollen sheets of cloth - it was the first venture paving the way for British outerwear. In 1856, came Thomas Burberry who served agricultural workers with clothing that allowed them to remain dry automatically becoming a hit with Burberry's customers. His continuous experimentation with clothing then led to the discovery of gabardine, a twill cloth, a stronger material which allowed the wearer to remain dry in the wettest of weathers. Burberry patented this cloth in 1879, and his creation is still worn today.

Fish n' Chips

Take a stroll down any high street you will be sure to find at least a 'chippie' or two. Fish n' chips, a classic duo, a treat for some at the end of a long school day are the most celebrated staple of British cuisine or so we think. The humble potato chip was brought over by Sir Walter Raleigh from France in the 17th century. Fried fish was introduced by immigrants from Spain and Portugal where chips were originally a substitute for fish rather than an accompaniment. There, in the austere Victorian era, fish and chips became a comfort food for the working class. George Orwell in *The Road to Wigan Pier* gave credit to fish and chips because they 'averted revolution'. Today, this classic British invention is overlooked partly because of the rising cost of fish. In fact, recently Prince Charles took it upon himself to save this national dish, by suggesting fish can now be sustainably sourced.

Knock on Wood

This superstition refers to when a person is about to receive good fortune and they would say 'touch wood' in the hope that it continues. It originates from ancient pantheistic religions where it was believed that trees and other natural objects were occupied by spirits. To 'touch wood' meant that you were inviting their appeasement and warding off their wrath. It also has a further derivation from English folklore during the Elizabethan era, where people spoke of their secrets in woodland areas and would 'touch wood' in order to prevent the spirits from hearing and making their deepest fears come true. 500 years later, we still find ourselves saying 'touch wood' when we wish for our good fortune to continue.

'Break a Leg'

Originating in the theatre, this expression was initially used by actors to wish each other good luck. While there are many differences in opinion regarding the origin of this expression, here are some of the most famous ones. In the Elizabethan times the audience would stomp if they enjoyed a performance, they would stomp harder the more they enjoyed it and the leg of their chair would break. 'Break a leg' refers not to the actor, but to audience's chair. Another understanding within the same era was that spirits and ghouls were believed to wreak havoc at any opportunity. It was often believed they would do the opposite of what you'd want; so by saying 'break a leg', the spirits would do the opposite and good luck was to follow. ■

Poetry in people

Written by Kingsley O. Reuben
Designed by Muhab Shokat

K.O. Reuben explores the art of poetry from interpretation to its various forms. Ultimately, why is poetry such a universal form of expression?

Poetry is a form of expression adopted by almost every culture on the planet. The word Poetry comes from the old English *metergeweorc* “verse,” or *metercraeft* “art of versification.” By definition poetry is an art. Many writers have used the form to better understand life or to simply express it.

Leonard Norman Coehen has said that “Poetry is just the evidence of life. If your life is burning well, poetry is just the ash.” The Kahlil Gibran states that, “Poetry is a deal of joy and pain and wonder, with a dash of the dictionary”. Even Wikipedia has a shot at giving us insight with their own definition: poetry (from the Greek *poiesis* — *ποίησις* — with a broad meaning of a “making”, seen also in such terms as *hemopoiesis*; more narrowly, the making of poetry) is a form of literary art which uses the aesthetic qualities of language to evoke meanings in addition to, or in place of, the prosaic ostensible meaning.

“Poetry is a mirror which makes beautiful that which is distorted” Percy Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry*, 1821

Yet, for all these interpretations of the art what do we know of its near infinite forms? The truth is there is no one way to write a poem. Different cultures adopt different ways of writing a poem. Some can even be sung. Take for example the poetic form called *Ghazal*: a short lyrical poem in Urdu. It is between 5 and 15 couplets long where each couplet contains its own poetic thought but is linked in rhyme that is established in the first couplet and continued in the second line of each pair. The lines of each couplet are equal in length. Themes are usually connected to love and romance. The closing signature often includes the poet’s name or an allusion to it.

Another form more commonly used in the western hemisphere and championed by Shakespeare is the *Sonnet*. The *Sonnet* is a lyric poem that consists of 14 lines which usually have one or more conventional rhyme schemes.

In Japan, an ingenious form was coined, using only three lines. This type of poem is called a *Haiku*. A *Haiku* is a Japanese poem composed of three unrhymed lines of five, seven then five more words; and usually containing a season word.

The definitions could go on because there are so many poems written by the use of so many different forms; such as the *limerick*, the *elegy*, *epic*, *ode*, *pastoral*, *rhyme*, and the list goes on still. What is universal about all of these poetic forms is that they strive to assist the writer in better interpreting the world and his emotions towards it through the passage of his life. We as human beings actually aren’t that different from poetic form at all. We are all very different and diverse but all have something special to give, in our own unique way, composing a poem with our lives for the earth to sing. For in the words of Percy Byshe Shelley, “Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.” ■

THE APOCALYPSE

Written by Victoria Sanchez

Designed by Ali Rashid

The Mayan Calendar predicts the end of the world in December of 2012, but Apocalypse stories have been around for thousands of years. Read about what Interact Writer Victoria Sanchez says about Hindu and Christian Apocalyptic beliefs and how, against all odds, they came to be so similar.

It happened that a fire broke out backstage in a theater. The clown came out to inform the public. They thought it was a jest and applauded. He repeated his warning. They laughed even louder. So I think the world will come to an end amid the general applause from all the wits who believe that it is a joke.’ —Søren Kierkegaard

It has been said by different religions many times that the world will end. Under varying accounts, it will end by famine, it will end by the sword, it will end by sickness, it will end by fire. Are these apocalyptic texts merely a way of materializing human fixation to death and the future? And why is man so obsessed with the end of the world?

That humanity is gripped by the idea of the apocalypse is quite clear—especially when there are apocalypse theories in almost every culture and religion on the planet. These questions have been increasingly present in recent discussion. First, with the coming of the year 2000, in which many radicalists declared there would be catastrophic events that would destroy civilization, and now in 2012, when the Mayan calendar has predicted the world’s end on the 21st of December. With so many theories and dates, to which Armageddon does man ‘show up?’ Dinitia Smith, writer of ‘Apocalyptic Meditations’ in the New York Times discusses the widespread Apocalyptic theories found in many religions. From Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Islam, Christianity, and Hinduism, there exist stories of the apocalypse in various forms. The word ‘apocalypse’ is a word of Greek origin that means ‘to reveal,’ but has come to be known as almost an exclusively Christian word. In 2005, Time

Magazine featured an article about the top 25 evangelical preachers in America; highly influential evangelical preachers who are on that list (like T.D Jakes and Joyce Meyer) have declared that we in the ‘end times.’ While all of these apocalypses are fascinating, specific attention will be placed on Hindu and Christian end-time theories, mostly because of the unique fashion in which they diverge and intersect.

It’s a curious and funny thing to compare the texts of two very different religions like Christianity and Hinduism. But as one continues to read and discover, one finds that the differences dissolve, transform, and coalesce into something recognizable. Although Hinduism is widely regarded as a polytheistic religion, many Hindus consider it a monotheistic one—in which God is perceived as having many faces, so what seems to be many gods is actually the externalization of the many personalities of one God. Likewise, despite the fact that Christianity is classified as a monotheistic religion, it is actually a unification of a triumvirate as a godhead, with 3 entities existing as one: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. To truly grasp the ways in which the texts of these two religions converge, one must be conscious of their history. The Vedic texts in Hindu scripture date back to 1500-1000 BCE, and are older than the Torah by some 500-800 years (Cohn 1970: 43). Perhaps precisely because Hindu civilization was so ancient, and because they had witnessed the constant destruction and reestablishment of many kingdoms and cultures for millennia, their stories and ideology reflected the incessant renewal of the world. Unlike the Bible, the end of the world for Hinduism is not the end of the story because their history has proved that there always will be a new beginning. Adversely, throughout history, the Jews had been enslaved and conquered, but something changed with the advent of Rome. From ‘the annexation of Palestine by Pompey in 63 BC down to the war of AD 66-72, the struggles of the Jews against their new masters, the Romans, were accompanied and stimulated by a stream of militant apocalyptic’ (Cohn 1970: 216). That being said, the book of

Revelation was a reaction to the Roman prosecution of Christianity. Roman rulers like Caligula and Domitian commanded to be worshipped as deities via Caesar worship, and because Christians exclusively worshipped one god, those who did not obey suffered consequences as severe as death (Barclay 2004: 21). With all of these historical differences, there is still textual evidence that the tie between these two texts is more intertwined than it would seem.

Despite variances in culture, religion, and style, Hindu and Christian apocalypse literature do have various motifs in common (and here, let me carefully emphasize the distinction between common Hindu and Christian scripture and the apocalyptic scripture found in their holy texts). The structure of the Bhagavata Purana is similar to the New Testament. It is written in verse, it contains stories about the life of God, and ends with a prophetic uttering—a divine speak-out against wickedness, and a promise of paradise. One possible explication for this resemblance in textual anatomy is that these books belong to the same genre: ‘All apocalyptic literature deals with these events—the sin of the present age, the terrors of the time between, and the blessings of the time to come’ (Barclay 2004: 4). The structure of these texts, however, does seem to cause disputes among people who practice these religions, especially within Christianity. Huldreich Zwingli, a reformation scholar wrote: ‘With the Apocalypse we have no concern, for it is not a biblical book...The Apocalypse has no savour of the mouth or the mind of John. I can, if so will, reject its testimonies’ (Barclay 2004: 2). Zwingli’s testament is a feeling shared by many, for the book of Revelation—which at first appears to be an erratic and violent set of ideas—is so very different from previous books. Nevertheless, there have been many things said about Revelation, and for as many who would condemn the book, there are those who would praise it; the early Church historian and Archbishop of Quebec, Philip Carrington has said:

In the case of Revelation, we are dealing with an artist greater than Stevenson or Coleridge or Bach. St John has a better sense of the right word than Stevenson; he has a greater command of unearthly supernatural loveliness than Coleridge; he has a richer sense of melody and rhythm and composition than Bach...It is the only masterpiece of pure art in the New Testament...Its fulness

and richness and harmonic variety place it far above Greek tragedy. (Barclay 2004: 2) The book of Revelation has gained so much attention precisely because it is such a controversial book. Yet it is striking to see that while Biblical apocalyptic is often disputed by scholars and men of faith, the Bhagavad Gita¹ and Bhagavata Purana², decidedly less-known texts in the western world—do not fall too far behind. Mahatma Ghandi has said about the Gita: ‘I find a solace in the Bhagavad-Gita that I miss even in the Sermon on the Mount...my life has been full of external tragedies—and if they have left no visible or indelible scar on me, I owe it all to the teaching of Bhagavad-Gita’ (Ghandi 2000: 35). As suggested by Ghandi’s quote, central to Hindu doctrine is the notion of detachment, and the Gita is believed to teach this. Because detachment to worldly things is key to reaching enlightenment (or Moksha), the apocalyptic texts in Hinduism would also reflect this. That is why Hindus are not dreading the end of the world—because detachment from anything that does not lead to god is essential to life. That being said, the language in both texts is still violent in its prophetic implications. For instance, both Christ and Kalki³ were figures of deliverance, but also fearful avengers and judges:

11 And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. 12 His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself...14 And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. 15 And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. 16 And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.’ (Revelations 19:11-12, 14-16)

Compare this to:

19-20 Mounting His swift horse Devadatta, the Lord of the Universe [Lord Kalki] endowed with His sword... will subdue the ones who turned away from the holy. On His horse moving with speed about the earth He, unrivaled in His splendor, will slaughter the thieves disguised in the garb of kings.../12-24 He will be born as Kalki...By his irresistible



might he will destroy all the barbarians and thieves, and all whose minds are devoted to iniquity. He will then re-establish righteousness upon earth; and the minds of those who live at the end of the Kali age shall be awakened...The men who are thus changed by virtue of that peculiar time shall be as the seeds of human beings, and shall give birth to a race who shall follow the laws of the Krita age, the Age of Purity. (Bhagavata Purana, Book 12, Chapter 2, Verses 19-20, Vishnu Purana Book 4, Ch 12:24)

Here, the roles of both Christ and Kalki (the last incarnation of Vishnu) are paralleled. The two figures have been described as warrior-gods, and have come to punish evildoers so that their followers can be liberated. That two different religious texts can produce such strikingly similar imagery given their distant geographical locations is strange enough: two deliverers on horses coming to wage war and yet, to bring peace; they are armed with swords; they were both born on the earth; and they both come to dethrone the kings of the earth. Ironically, though Kalki's horse is not described in detail, it is always depicted as white in artwork and both Kalki and the Christ are very frequently drawn as descending from heaven. Additionally, both texts also dedicate a few lines to the subject of how false prophets will hold sway over multitudes and cause the downfall of unsuspecting people: '11 Then I saw a second beast, coming out of the earth....13 And it performed great signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to the earth in full view of the people. 14... it deceived the inhabitants of the earth.' (Revelation 13:11-14). We have then, the Hindu scriptures which also describe a time for false prophets: '30 When there is deceit, false testimony... violence, depression, fear...32...the Vedic scriptures will be slighted by false doctrines [heretics]' (Bhagavata Purana, Canto 12, ch 3, v 30, 32). These apocalyptic scriptures dedicate time to write about false prophets in the same manner, and warn followers to disregard them. The interesting thing is that the 'final days' for both religions is now. According to Hindu scripture, the Kali age is the age we currently live in; and in comparison, many contemporary Christians read Revelation with the belief that Jesus will be coming to liberate them during their lifetime. The ideas and principles of Christian and Eastern religions are analogous enough to have been compared to each other before.

In fact, it has been disputed whether the historical Jesus traveled to India and acquired a knowledge of Hindu/Buddhist teachings, incorporating them into his work. In 1888, Nicholas Notovitch traveled to India and wrote a book entitled, *The Unknown Life of Jesus Christ*. In this book, he documents a visit to a Buddhist monastery in Kashmir where he finds textual evidence that Jesus lived and studied there during his lifetime.

James Hanson, author of 'Was Jesus a Buddhist,' goes so far as to call Christianity 'Buddhism of the West' (Hanson 2005:87). What's more, is that there have been many comparisons between Biblical and Buddhist scriptures, for instance.

One such example is with the golden rule: 'Do to others as you would have them do to you' vs 'Consider others as yourself'

The parable of the house built on the sand: 'A foolish man which built his house on sand' vs 'Perishable is a city built on sand'

And the equality of man in the eyes of God: 'Your father in heaven makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous.' vs 'The light of the sun and the moon illuminates the whole world, both him who does well and him who does ill, both him who stands high and him who stands low.' (3 Luke 6:31, Dhammapada 10:1, Hanson 2005:82, respectively).

Oxford scholar Burnett Hillman Streeter noted that 'The moral teaching of Buddha has a remarkable resemblance to the Sermon on the Mount.' (Borg 13). However, the veracity of Notovitch's account has been debated and even dismissed by many. That Christian text could find such striking resemblance within Hinduism as well as Buddhism is incredible, but it may indeed be rather far-fetched to argue that Jesus was influenced by Indian religious texts, given the geographical distance and improbability of his Messianic wandering to travel so far. As for how much Jesus was influenced by wandering Hindus or Buddhists, one cannot say, but the idea would form a path with very little evidence. But let's put all this aside for one moment and think about how fascinating is it to examine possible ancestral relations between such fundamentally different religions. Perhaps there is something within mankind to explain these textual coincidences:

The most accepted explanation for the

textual similarities is the universalist, ecumenical, or humanist argument that the spiritual condition of humankind is basically the same. To wit, whether we follow Jesus, Buddha, Lao Tzu, or Zarathustra, we all have the same three-pound brain, body and senses, the same emotions and needs and the same basic experiences of suffering, caring for others, fearing death, and looking to a higher being. The psychoreligious sameness is manifest in Sigmund Freud's discontents of civilizations, Carl Jung's archetypes, Joseph Campbell's hero legend, and William James's varieties of religious experience, to name but a few... (Hanson 2005:85)

What else can explain a phenomenon where these remarkable similarities exist except for this humanist argument? If we were to take the time to analyze many religious texts side by side, we would see as much 'sameness' as difference, but it cannot be denied that these textual intersections are uncanny. Religious scriptures have evolved over time and have helped shape society to this day, but who has shaped scripture? God? The human mind? Whatever the answer may be, it seems that scriptures of all kinds have sprung from a similar source.

There has been an increased preoccupation with the apocalypse now that the Mayan calendar has predicted the world's end in 2012, and there are websites popping up connecting Hindu, Christian, and Mayan apocalypse theories, amongst others. What is the answer to the big question? Why does apocalyptic text exist and why will exist for as long as the human race lives and breathes? Perhaps we are interested in the idea of the apocalypse because we think: they. They will not survive. This will happen to them. We, as individuals, think we will somehow be exempt from any pain as the lucky, or blessed survivors. Or perhaps we are comforted by the apocalyptic bandwagon—because we will all be faced with the same dilemma at the same time. I suppose it is a small sort of comfort for some. Then there are those of us who do not believe in the apocalypse, those of us who believe that the world will not change very much in the years we have yet to live. All things said, the world is full and wide, and we human beings share many things in common, but what remains unchanged within most apocalypse literature, is the permanence of the future. And hope. ■

HIP HOP

it keeps the people going.

Written by Eva Oppong
Designed by Muhab Shokat

The Hollande-Sarkozy elections this year in France brought to light the relationship between music and the youth of France. Interact writer, Eva Oppong, discusses the socio-political repercussions of Hip Hop from its origins to its purpose from the perspective of young people in Paris.

Hip hop in France is big. Outside the USA, the second biggest hip hop industry belongs to France where hip hop is the voice of the generation demanding to be heard, just as it is in most of the world.

Hip hop originated in the 1970s in the streets of New York, at a time when the public school system had drastically cut and limited access to art programs. The roots of hip hop can be traced to West African griots. A griot is one who uses oral tradition to preserve history through the art of storytelling, poetry, dance, music etc.

As hip hop grew out of American soil and settled into France, its popularity grew largely amongst the African communities that lived in the banlieues. The immigrants used music as a tool to bring their African heritage abroad. The common themes of French hip hop include race, culture and opposition to social order.

High unemployment rates and crime rates are common features in many urban banlieues. Banlieues are residential areas dotted around the most popular cities in France. Most of the youth from the banlieues are descendents of immigrants who came to work in France after the Second World War. They live in an era where there is confrontation of culture, and also, where most youth are seen in a lower social status, even though they were born in France. Hip Hop is very popular amongst the

youths because it gives them an identity. Through hip hop, the youth are able to see themselves in a positive image and are empowered by the music and culture, as it allows them to break down the boxes and barriers placed by society.

In 2005, hip hop was blamed for allegedly insinuating the violence in the French riots, which was actually sparked off by the death of a young man. Many political leaders called for legal action upon the hip hop artists, and as a result, many artists were sued. Former President, Nicolas Sarkozy, is well known for saying he'd clear out the scum from the banlieues with a Karcher (pressure water hose used for removing graffiti from walls.)

Over the years, Sarkozy has been very vocal of his strident opinions of French hip hop artists. (This adds controversy, as his own son is a music producer, and in 2008, joined forces with other hip hop artists who are well known for their anti-sarko campaign.) In other words, Sarkozy is not a popular person amongst the underprivileged youths of France that identify with the hip hop culture.

In support of François Hollande's presidential campaign, two French hip hop directors #2h12crew, used the visuals of Hollande's two-day trip in the banlieues of Paris along with Jay-Z and Kanye West's "N*ggas in Paris," from their collaborative album, Watch the throne. 2h12crew created a 3-minute video, which they posted on YouTube.

I can admit that before this video, I did not know a thing about François Hollande, nor was I even aware of the French elections. I was under the impression that Hollande produced the video at first, but I was wrong. The video went viral within a matter of days. This video stirred much debate and generally brought awareness of French politics. The song itself is political, and using it for politics in France, raised

many questions.

An interesting part of the N*ggas in Paris song is towards the end, and it goes,

"No-one knows what it means but it's provocative. It get's the people going"

These are the words sampled from fellow thespian, Will Ferrell, in the film Blades of Glory. Sampling is part of the biology of hip hop, and most of the time, no one actually knows why certain samples are used. But this is what makes hip hop, HIP HOP. It is interesting to see that hip hop, being the music that Sarkozy so harshly criticized for encouraging violence, helped his opposition, Hollande gain popularity amongst the hip hop community outside of France. Hollande has also played an active role in establishing a common understanding with the youth.

Only time will tell as to whether Hollande can be successful in repairing the tumultuous relationship between politics and the young people of France. This can be something many future leaders can learn from. Hip hop is not a fad. Hip hop will only get better unless the people get better, which I feel is something a lot of politicians do not understand. In reference to Ferrell's sample, no one knows why the producer used Ferrell's sample, just as no one knows why the directors used N*ggas in Paris, but they knew what they were doing. The video brought French politics on the forefront of the hip hop community, and brought awareness of the French elections. On a lighter note, we should all recognise that hip hop is the music of the people.

Hip hop - it keeps the people going. ■

UPCYCLING RE-IMAGINE OUR WASTE

Written by Emma Jacobs
Designed by Muhab Shokat

The practice of Upcycling is rumored to have derived from Marcel Duchamp's "Fountain" back in the 1920's. In Duchamp's day, upcycling was known as 'readymade' or 'found art', and has maintained a simple and penetrable identity with its scrap-like exterior. Interact writer, Emma Jacobs, illustrates the purpose and inspiration derived from transforming everyday objects into objects of art.

Marcel Duchamp saw what no one else did; the expansion of meaning in everyday objects. Common objects are hardly contemplated because we expect them, and their presence is reassurance enough that our world is intact. Duchamp used a urinal ("Fountain") in order to question our everyday habits and existence. In disconnecting objects from their fundamental role, he would then be able to question whether we function as humans or as slaves to things.

Our possession obsession may suggest otherwise; but upcycling is slowly but surely proving that gain is what we make and it lies in our state of mind. A man with a crazy idea, maybe, but Duchamp's glorification of the urinal made object into art and people into thinkers. "Fountain" shifted the focus from the physical craft and how pleasing the end piece is to the eye to the artistic expression itself. Duchamp centered much of his art on exploration and in the same vein, upcycling is not a practice to simply jump, or fall into, but requires a certain mind set, preferably one that is open and willing.

The surge of upcycling couldn't be more ideal, as it is my belief that in our post-ideological age we lack a hopeful vision of the future. We are too comfortable in our remote chairs lavishing one zombie apocalypse after another- unaware that we are fulfilling desires of a broken

future. Upcycling however promotes new beginnings, even for the broken remote about to be thrown out in our zombie induced rage. Such resourceful thinking may be just the required training for a state of grand human efficiency. I am not undermining the future we have already achieved, but we can absolutely up the ante in our bid for change.

The function of upcycling is not art that is produced but the communication behind it.

Much of art as we know provokes no abstract thought to its audience but acts as an exterior identity of the artist. Upcycling is predominantly about vocalizing our perceptions about materialistic value. It is interesting that when it comes to dealing with waste, we widely recognize the cause yet deny its consequence and shuffle back into the crowd when it comes to who is responsible. There lacks a personal sense of responsibility with upcycling, yet it does not always stem from the need to save the planet. Upcycling can be an engaging process in which we rid ourselves of clutter through a natural release of creativity.

The creative attribute of upcycling is fast becoming a way of life for people. For many, it is a craft that is sustained by social and communal habits. Although it is difficult to percolate in the quick-paced digital era of today, where immediacy translates as the fruits of our labor, people around the globe are having serious liaisons with upcycling.

In Mexico, the Nahuna people have found fortune in miscellaneous food wrappers. As a cross between waste pickers and pioneers of craft, their productivity has restored their dignity. Where previously they may have felt disregarded, they have found humble work that is part of a bigger workforce within society. Still, there is a stigma when it comes to working with waste and as a result people aren't queuing



up to get their hands dirty.

In Brazil, a successful computer recovery centre has made its name in the upcycling world. Based in Porto Alegre, these Brazilian technical magicians have ironically created a lucrative business by collecting old computer components to invent new systems. They are completely resourceful and demonstrate the power of mind over matter.

In Paraguay, there is little aid from the government where instead self-made groups operate, such as The Association of Cart Drivers, who receive no funds for their community work as street cleaners. They exist in a small way by seeking the good in what seems lost. In quite bleak circumstances, hope is not quite enough to soften their gruelling hours and no pay. What really spurs them on is the support from one another and the infectious energy that upcycling sprouts. Groups such as The Peace and Justice Service are developing an environmentally informative training program for recyclers. This is essential to the longevity of upcycling and for the rapport between societies to transcend such important information for the sake of our old and tired planet.

Along the same lines, in the Philippines, many have embraced the ethos of upcycling in the form of a school made entirely from plastic bottles. By incorporating children into the process they are educating our future generation to use what is around us, as opposed to supporting consumerism and an increase in manufacturing.

It is clear that efforts are being made worldwide despite lack of government aid,



but there are two upcycling pioneers and artists who ought to be brought to special attention: Barbara Hashimoto and Vik Muniz.

Barbara Hashimoto from Japan is renowned for creating 'The Junk Mail Experiment' in which she shreds unimaginable amounts of unwanted mail to create large sculptures and installations.

Through upcycling, Hashimoto established a rapport between art and consumerism to essentially turn an excessive habit into excessive art. Hashimoto's work chimes with that of Frans Krajcberg, a pioneer on environmental issues in the sixties. Krajcberg saw its importance before we saw its effects and he made people realise that the products we take from nature must be nurtured.

Vik Muniz is a Brazilian born artist who saw the potential in the waste-pickers of the world's largest land-fill in Rio de Janeiro. His documentary *Wasteland* shows his compassionate intervention into the lives of waste-pickers. He demonstrates that the thousands of items of waste need not be seen as the depressive reality running down their arms and through their fingers. Muniz instead re-contextualised waste to provoke a free flow of creative expression - all the hidden potential that would otherwise have been discarded.

The documentary shows Muniz interact with close to half a dozen individuals working at the landfill. He photographs them in their dreary surroundings and creates beautiful replicas made entirely from waste. The process was an emotional one to watch which lends to its success. Muniz dived into this project because he understood that these

unlikely materials can provide a form of compensation (in an emotional sense) for the workers. Muniz showed that art is not a professional entity and simply derives from what the individual wants to achieve. Muniz did not remove the waste, nor is he able to but he removed the conventional grudge against waste. Muniz declared that the rubbish did not constitute an end but a beginning.

The purpose of *Wasteland* by Vik Muniz is to show the combination of the power of art and the alchemy of the human spirit.

Despite all these efforts to place upcycling as a mainstream art form, there have been some negative reactions. Countries that are less developed do not have government support therefore, people have had to make the problem local and use their own initiatives in the war against waste. Whispers of whether aesthetic waste is well utilised has travelled between chains of communities and its function has been perceived predominantly as economic gain. The point of upcycling is missed here; its purpose is in the innovative approaches to sustainability where groups of people collaborate to create something out of nothing. It comes down to allowing that extra lease of life in objects, that will in any case spend centuries eroding land-fills, to inspire our creativity and self-expression.

Whether upcycling is admired as a branch of art or as the highest creative outcome of recycling, there is no room for criticism when its potential, in so many ways, is untapped considering its significance to our future.

Some struggle to understand how it benefits the waste pickers to see waste transformed as art, but if waste is being redeemed all

over the world, this expresses respect and a transgression in our wasteful ways.

Most upcycled art is sold for free and if funds arise it routinely goes back to its source, such as the money that Muniz raised. Muniz sold his photography based on his time at the land-fill for a lot of money which went directly to the landfill in Rio for improved standards of sanitation in the community. Those that intend on making a large profit are in the wrong market and are not being true to the ethos of upcycling. Upcycling gives product with no financial investment whatsoever. Our creativity can overcome an attitude of wastefulness; a mind-set often indulged in our lifestyles. As upcycling catches on, a new view into saving and skimping has led us into an artistic world that is creative, free and out in the open. If such a *laissez-faire* attitude continues to languish our environmental maturity, upcycling will seem a flimsy grasp in taking hold of this issue.

By waste being managed in a creative way we are expanding the dynamics of art. Simultaneously, we are creating new schools of thought and with the courage to be inventive. The most impressive entity of upcycling is the powerful combination of reinventing a trade and reaping the communal aspects of art. Art forces people to think and question. People are beginning to talk, others are bellowing their opinion and certain communities are redefining themselves on the whole. Art and change combined propel upcycling forwards and where these entities are so inviting; the world is invited to contribute. It is not a question of why, nor of how or who anymore. It is a question of what is said and when. ■

TOP SIX FICTIONAL INVENTIONS



“Why, sometimes I’ve believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast.” (Alice in Wonderland: Lewis Carroll, 1865)

All of us wish that there are certain things that would make our lives easier, the invention and development of domestic appliances have done so over the decades. But some people (like me) hanker after more exotic inventions, things that only exist in a fictional world. Here are six impossible things to believe in (and wish existed) before breakfast.

1. A Mary Poppins bag: Who doesn’t want one of these? It produces everything, from lamps to plants to the whole of Marks and Spencer’s. No one need shop at IKEA anymore, no fiddly flat pack to deal with. How perfect is that? You can even haul the kitchen sink out of it (not that you need to). No problems with deciding your luggage mass at the airport, the Mary Poppins bag will take of everything. The downside is the natty design that looked like it was made with Laura Ashley in mind. Not at all flattering to anyone under seventy. It doesn’t come in other colours or patterns but for the most part, it is definitely a bag worth having.

2. An invisibility cloak: Easily one of the best inventions ever dreamed of. This object would be most commonly utilised by teenage boys to sneak off to the girl’s

changing rooms. Unfortunately an item as common as this would create havoc among everybody so it is best that nobody has one. There’s not much point creeping up on your adversary if they have the same weapon. But it is a fun thought for the individual.

3. A magic tinderbox: More useful than a magic lamp. Nowadays we use lighters to light with but in the days of Hans Christian Anderson they used these boxes all the time. Imagine how useful it would be to strike it once and conjure up a dog with bronze eyes; twice, you get a dog with silver eyes and thrice; a dog with gold eyes. Each one of them would do whatever you wished for, whether you have a cash flow crisis, you want to find the man of your dreams or if you just can’t be bothered to get up for a beer. Unlike the genie in the lamp, you don’t get a limit on what you want and you get three cuddly hounds to go with it.

4. A Hobgoblin’s hat: Most of you would be thinking that a black top hat isn’t exactly in style or match with much of your wardrobe but the point of it is not to wear it. Only Hobgoblins can wear it without getting a headache. But throw some stray eggshells into the hat and soon enough you will get a host of fluffy manoeuvrable clouds to fly on. Beats driving any day. For a never ending supply of raspberry juice, pour some water in and wait for it to turn into your breakfast drink. The Hobgoblin’s hat is useful for manipulating things into

other more interesting things. Just don’t lure someone in otherwise they will find themselves a changed person (literally) and for goodness sake, don’t put a dictionary on top of it, it’ll only shrivel the book and spread the words all over the ceiling and nobody wants to read the alphabet while they are trying to sleep. Proceed with caution.

5. The Tardis: Every history student should own one. Imagine being able to write your dissertation in the comfort of your Tardis whilst the Roman Empire battles on. Personally I’d rather go back in time and gatecrash a Hollywood party in the 1950’s but it’s up to you where you want to go and what you want to do. You might never want to book another holiday again. But watch out for falling houses. And pirates. Just don’t die within the time warp.

6. The Giant’s bath is huge and only fits in a bathroom fitted with the MAGICS plumbing system (you can’t find it just anywhere). It is like a personal swimming pool with three buttons on the side that provides fountains and whirlpools. If you want an adventure, press the third one and you can whirl down the plughole, through the drain to a land that looks like the new moon with a magical beach and forest. There you will find talking trees, mermaids, a truculent dragon and as much honeycomb as you can eat. Bath time would never be the same again. ■

THE CLASH OF RAMADAN AND THE OLYMPICS

Written by Rebecca Attwood
Designed by Ali Rashid



The coinciding dates of Ramadan and Olympics certainly lends to an in-depth discussion on the role of religion for the athletes. What are the consequences of fasting? Are they upholding the practice this year? Rebecca Attwood discusses how players have accommodated their religious affiliations in a global tournament.

On Your Marks

It is estimated that around three thousand Muslim competitors will participate in this year's Olympics. But unlike their non-Islamic peers, they have an extra hurdle to overcome as Ramadan will take place throughout the duration.

There are a number of reasons for this unfortunate scheduling. Firstly, the International Olympic Committee gave the bidding cities a seven-week window (15 July to 31 August) in which the Games had to be staged. As the fast of Ramadan lasts almost a month and starts and finishes during this period, partial overlapping was unavoidable. The full clash has occurred as London organisers felt that the Olympics needed to take place during the school holidays in order to recruit the large number of volunteers that were required and to take advantage of the lighter London traffic during the summer months.

To Fast or Not To Fast?

Each Muslim competitor has based their decision, as to whether they will fast during the Olympics, on their own circumstances and factors that are unique to them. UAE swimmer, Obaid Al Jasimi believes that competing in the Olympics is 'a mission for the country' and so will likely postpone his fasting until after the Games.

admits that he will feel isolated from his family if he does not take part in Ramadan but also feels that he cannot let his teammates down by not performing at his best.

Sbihi particularly displays loyalty for the older members of the rowing team as, for some, 2012 may be their last chance to participate in the Olympics. To make up for the fact that he will not be fasting, Sbihi will pay for 1,800 meals for Moroccan citizens. Sbihi discovered this alternative method of respecting Ramadan through the Qur'an, which states that for every missed day of fasting, either sixty people will need to be fed or the participant will have to fast for a further thirty days.

Not all Muslim athletes have chosen to take this approach. British hockey player Darren Cheesman (who due to injury will unfortunately not be competing at this year's Games) believes that his religion is more important than hockey.

Cheesman points out that while others ask him 'why do you fast when you play hockey?' he replies 'why do I play hockey when I fast?'

Al Jazeera Sports Producer, Mohamad Assoul, has stated that, 'Ramadan is the month of victories and the blessed month will give a moral push to the athletes to excel' highlighting the claim that Ramadan provides an intense focus which gives athletes an added strength whilst competing.

This is not the first time that being a religious athlete has caused conflicts. Eric Liddell famously followed his Christian beliefs in the 1920s and refused to compete in the 100m heats as they took place on a Sunday. With the dates of Ramadan changing every year, it is not unusual for the Islamic tradition to clash with other sporting events. Those who play team sports with fixed seasons such as football will no doubt experience playing matches whilst fasting for Ramadan. The key difference for the Olympics is that the

whole competition takes place during the summer months, inevitably meaning that daylight hours will increase and ultimately resulting in Muslim athletes fasting for longer.

The Score

It is expected that athletes' physical responses to fasting will differ depending on the type of event that they compete in. Competitors in short events such as weight-lifting or the 100m sprint are likely to notice little difference, particularly if they take place early in the morning. Yet in long endurance events or activities that are scheduled later in the day, disadvantages regarding stamina could become apparent. There could also be issues for athletes competing in events that require participants to qualify within a certain weight band.

During Ramadan, no water should be consumed during daylight hours.

However, there has been research to show that simply rinsing the mouth out with a carbohydrate drink can improve physical performance.

Dining facilities in the Olympic Park will be open 24 hours a day to ensure that as well as being provided with an Iftar meal before sunset, Muslim athletes will be able to eat before dawn. All Olympic sites around the country (including those outside London, such as Weymouth) cater for numerous religions, with the Olympic Park's Multi Faith Centre acting as the focal point for the many religious participants.

Each Olympian, with eyes on a career-defining gold medal, draws strength from their faith, whether from following one of the major religions or from simply having faith in themselves. With such dedicated and passionate participants, we can be sure that despite the unfortunate timing for Muslims, every event is set to be a thrilling experience, both for competitors and spectators. ■

British rower, Mohamad Sbihi,

BEYOND BORDER CONTROL MIGRATION, MULTICULTURALISM AND SOCIAL COHESION

How does migration lead to multiculturalism? Starting from harmonious communities to social cohesion, are we gradually levitating towards joint action and respect on a universal platform? Interact writer, Antonello Furione, discusses the socio-political transformations caused by migration in Europe.

The act of migrating extends far beyond the act of moving across a geographical space. Within the borders of Europe, migrants are increasingly mobilising in response to discrimination and socio-economical marginalisation to demand their rights. These struggles are producing new forms of democratic political participation, and in some cases have succeeded in bringing about stronger anti-discrimination legislation, workers' rights and political recognition of cultural diversity.

At the external borders of the European Union, the violence of the border controls has exposed the disregard on the part of individual European governments for the protection of human rights. This inability or inadequacy of the nation state to guarantee and protect human rights has given rise to calls for alternative legislative frameworks and enforcement mechanisms that can operate at a supra-national and transnational level.

At the societal level, the superposition, construction and fracturing of identities effected by the process of crossing borders has transformed demographics and urban geographies across Europe and produced a new sense of self for the individual. Concepts like a 'mestiza consciousness', hybrid identities, and multiculturalism

are attempts to articulate and understand these changes that are visibly shaping the social and physical environment of European cities.

In this context, migration is then better defined by the profound social and political transformations produced through the lived experience of people crossing and contesting borders.

These transformations not only deeply mark the lives of men, women and children that choose to migrate, but also significantly affect European societies. By looking at and giving centrality to the daily instances in which people collectively and individually come up against the array of borders and boundaries in Europe, we want to explore the role migration plays in creating new forms of active citizenship and social change.

Through a constant reshuffling and reassembly of internal and external borders coupled with the proliferation of mechanisms of surveillance and exclusion, in the last twenty years Europe has emerged as an ever-changing configuration of bounded spaces. These bounded spaces, both figurative and literal, operate on and affect the condition of migrants at multiple stages of the migration process. Checkpoints, advanced surveillance systems, military operations and detention centers control the access of migrants to a territory. Point-based systems and immigration policy and legislation regulate their level of inclusion and indeed presence, in a wider sense, in European societies. Cultural hierarchies and an economical system that perpetuates inequality effectively determine their

access to the labour and housing market and public and political life, re-enforcing this structure of selective inclusion.

It is the daily encounter with and response to these borders that have produced a set of transformations which place migrants at the heart of social and political change. At a specific level then these transformations have redefined the act of moving, working and settling across nation state borders. In a wider sense, they have raised issues of the legitimacy of borders and prompted the questioning and reformulation of notions of citizenship, identity and social cohesion.

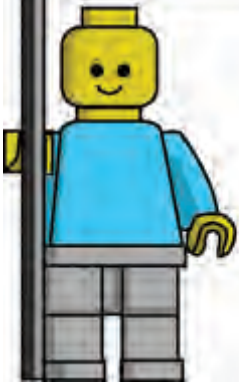
The act of migrating is therefore a force for social and political change, brought about through the efforts of individuals and groups to remove mechanisms of control and exclusion.

The experience of people that cross borders and their struggles for justice and recognition clearly indicate to us the areas we need to address in our aim of promoting a society based on freedom and democratic participation. Not only, they also clearly demonstrate the need and possibility for a form of political subjectivity and mobilisation beyond the boundaries of the nation state.

Through transnational campaigns for open access to detention centers and migrant rights as well as public events and performances that bring migrant struggles to the fore, Transeuropa Festival joins the migrant movement. A borderless Europe can never be fully achieved. At best it's an ambition, a 'tending towards'. But it's an ambition we share. ■

The Indegene Masks of facebook

written by Kingsley O. Reuben
designed by Muhab Shokat



Facebook has become a part of all our lives; but has virtual interaction become a truer representation of our identities than when we meet in person? Interact writer, K.O. Reuben, portrays the various characters we often come across in the other world.

In a world assimilating to a digital revolution, even the media has decided to take a permanent vacation to the isles of internet. The way the media speaks to us has changed and the print empire is already suffering with the e-Book and online news revolution descending from on high like a *deus ex machina*. However, of all things to take the crown of social networking application, tool or implement (whatever you wish to call it) none deserves the digital crown more than Facebook. It has swiftly become the poster boy or girl for digital advancement.

In the largely unpopulated world of the internet, websites float around in cyber space with strict laws for foreigners. Facebook went from popular website to practically a passport. In fact, hardly ever do I go on to a website and not see a Facebook enabled login. The truth is life in terms of login details has at least become easier to remember.

Of all the sites in cyber space, Facebook is the most densely populated. Cue the irritating indigenes of the social networking giant who make you want to 'deactivate' your cyber life.

1. Mr Status

Mr Status annoys us all with his vain statuses about the architecture of his fringe and why it's going to benefit the world. People like this often post status after status about why the sky is blue and not red and how wonderful it is that the broccoli they bought looks like Johnny Depp pouting. In real life, Mr Status is a mouse of a man who doesn't say much, or he's the opposite and just won't shut up.

2. Ms Profile pic

Let's get straight to the problem-she's always changing her profile pictures...ALWAYS! It's not that there is anything wrong with changing your profile pic becomes an online slideshow! Don't you wonder why she didn't just join Tumblr?

In real life, off of Facebook, Ms Profile Pic is a timid and shy individual; or on the other hand, an attention seeking movie star wannabe.

3. Mr Debater

He will debate about anything and everything. He will raise debates of no real value or particular worth and make it sound like his unappreciated genius will one day save the world if only we all paid him enough heed and sided with him. But for Mr Debater, it's never about positive social change but the winning of the debate itself. The people at oxford dictionary analysed him and came up with the word 'trump'. Nuff said.

Although Mr Debater can be somewhat annoying, maybe at times unbearable, he triumphs where Ms Group fails in specialisation. He is streamlined in his motives, he knows exactly what he wants and what he's working on. He often works alongside Ms group but he is at the forefront of innovation or simple change where it is needed.

4. Ms Group

The clue is in the name. This braniac makes about two groups a week, 8 groups a month, 96 groups a year plus all those highly useless notifications. Some of names of the names of these groups include 'let's talk about sax (who's up for saxophone classes?)', 'I'm running a marathon sponsor me or I'll judge you' and 'let's all make pasta tomorrow-no, really'. She's usually friends with Ms Profile Pic and Mr Status who are fame whores and love the idea of getting more exposure.

In real life, Ms group is a rather organised individual but yet very scatty. She never really attains any of the goals she sets out to attain because she has so many projects on the go. For all her multitasking genius she often falls short of a clear success.

Mr. Like

Not the most verbally capable creature you'll find on the website, but what Mr. Like lacks in full on 'commentating responses' he makes up for in liking absolutely EVERYTHING. It doesn't really matter if it's right or wrong, dodgy or uncool, Mr. Like 'likes' it all. It's not about the content that you're 'liking', it's just the principle. Isn't it? Mr. Like is 'Liked' by everyone, because he's a crowd pleaser.

In real life, he is the silent nodder, the one that laughs at all the jokes even though they are not funny.



Facebook is the new vehicle by which people express themselves. Not completely but it has taken up the market for face-to-face communication and turned it into something far removed from a good old face-to-face chat. Facebook for many has meant that we can be a type of person online and a completely different sort of character in person. It has become a ready made mask for those who wish to wear them hiding their true selves whilst presenting a projection of who they hope to be perceived as. The truth is though Facebook is a force for social networking innovation, human beings, no matter what type of indigene we classify ourselves as (no matter what faith) crave a desire for personal contact and experience. Something much more meaningful, beyond the cyber mask of the Facebook profile we don when we log in. ■



Curried Veggie Burgers & Sweet Potatoe Chips

Ingredients (makes 6 burgers)

6 sweet potatoes, cut to 1-inch thick/5-inch long sticks
6 curried patties [next recipe]
6 burger buns of your choice*
tub of guacamole
100g of fresh pea/alfalfa sprouts
5 small vine tomatoes, sliced
5 small spring onions, sliced
Fresh thyme
Olive oil
Salt and pepper

* Most aren't made with eggs, but read ingredients to be sure. Yeast-free options available at your local Whole Foods or vegan bakeries.

Directions

Making the sweet potato fries: Preheat the oven to 176C/350F/Gas 4. Put the cut sweet potatoes on a parchment-covered baking sheet. Drizzle olive oil, salt, pepper and thyme over them and put in the oven. The chips need around 30 minutes before they are ready, but you need to stir after 15 minutes.

Assembling the burger: Slice the buns in halves. Let them get some color on the grill. When done, place a big dollop of guacamole on the bottom bun, and add pea sprouts, sliced tomatoes, sliced spring onion and one chickpea patty (next recipe). Add the top of the bun, and insert a toothpick to hold it all together. Enjoy!

Curried Butternut Squash & Chickpea Patties

Ingredients (makes 6 patties)

300g butternut squash, peel and cut into 1-2 cm cubes.
100g sweet potato, peel and cut into 1-2 cm cubes
1 tbsp of palm sugar (or brown sugar)
1/4 tsp cinnamon 1 tbsp olive oil
1 tin (400g) cooked chickpeas, rinsed and drained
1/3 cup polenta (or breadcrumbs), and extra for coating
1 tbsp curry powder
2 tsp ground cumin
3 cloves garlic, finely chopped (or 1 tbsp paste)
1 tbsp fresh lemon juice
1 tbsp flour (or as needed for shaping patties)
handful of fresh coriander, chopped
2 tsp salt
1/2 tsp black pepper
1/4-1/2 tsp cayenne pepper

Directions

Preheat the oven to 190C/275F/Gas 5. Line a baking tray with baking paper. Tip the squash and sweet potato cubes onto the tray and drizzle with the olive oil. Mix the cinnamon and sugar together and sprinkle it over the squash. Toss it all together with your hands so it is evenly coated. Roast for 15-20 minutes until golden and soft when pierced with a knife.

Meanwhile, put the rest of the ingredients (including the squash and sweet potato) in a large bowl. Mix everything together well with your hands, squishing the ingredients and adding the flour as needed to create a mushy but still a bit chunky mixture. Molding until the mixture comes together and holds its shape.

At this point you can cover the surface of the mixture directly with cling film and refrigerate for an hour or until firm. It will be easier to work with when firm, but you can cook straight away if preferred.

Divide and shape the mixture into six equal patties (about 60g each). Pour some polenta (or breadcrumbs) onto a large flat plate and lightly dip the patties into the polenta on each side as well as rolling the sides in it too. Heat about 1/2 cm of olive oil in a frying pan until hot, then turn heat down to medium and cook the patties for 4-5 minutes on each side until golden and crispy.

Serve immediately on a bun with trimmings or on its own with a side salad!



Risotto with Roasted Peppers & tomato Sauce

Ingredients (serves 2)

For the risotto:
1 cup of risotto rice
1 cup of mushrooms
Half a stock cube (diary-free)
Half an onion
2 cloves of garlic
Half a lemon cut into slices

For the sauce:
1/2 tin of chopped tomatoes
A handful of olives
A pinch of sugar
A pinch of salt
A pinch of pepper
A clove of garlic
Half an onion

Directions

Cut the peppers in half and deseed them. Peel a clove of garlic to put in each half. Drizzle olive oil and balsamic into each half. Put them in the oven for 30-45 mins on low heat to stop them from crinkling and ensure they will roast slowly.

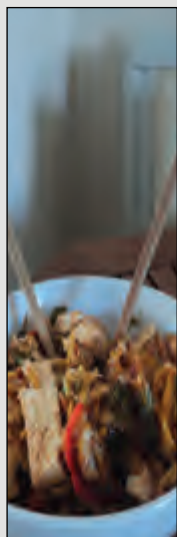
Chop half an onion and 2 cloves of garlic and fry them in olive oil, add mushrooms to the mix and stir until halfway cooked. Boil the kettle and pour hot water into a bowl with a crumbled half stock cube. Stir until you have a stock. Add the risotto rice into the frying pan, stir around to stop it from stickin. Pour the stock in slowly and stir. Add slices of lemon. On a low heat, simmer the risotto and stir it every few minute to ensure it won't burn. Do this for half an hour. The rice should be soft with a lemony tang when the stock has been absorbed. If not soft yet, add more hot water in small amounts.

To make the sauce, chop and fry half an onion and a garlic in a pan, then add chopped tomatoes. Season with a pinch of salt, pepper, and sugar. Add in a handful of olives and simmer for half an hour.

Remove the now absorbed slices of lemon and serve the risotto with the tomato sauce on the side, and a roasted pepper on top.



Vegans follow a type of vegetarian diet that excludes dairy and all other animal by-products (like eggs, gelatin, and honey). There are some vegans who also avoid foods that have been processed using animal by-products, such as refined white sugar and some alcoholic beverages



Vegetable and Tofu Stir Fry

Ingredients (serves 2)

A packet of Singapore noodles
Half an onion
2 cloves of garlic
A piece of ginger
A red pepper
A yellow pepper
Half a pack of firm tofu
Half a pack of bean sprouts
A pack of mange tout (snow peas)
A handful of broccoli
Soy sauce
Sweet chilli sauce
Sesame oil
A pinch of Chinese allspice

For roasted peppers:
2 red peppers
2 cloves of garlic
Olive oil
Balsamic vinegar

Directions

Chop peppers, onion, ginger and garlic and fry in sesame oil on a low heat in a wok. Parboil the broccoli and season with allspice and a splash of soy sauce. Add to the wok and toss the contents together.

Slice the firm tofu in strips and grill them for 5-8 mins in the oven or fry them lightly in a pan with soya sauce and sweet chilli sauce.

While the tofu is cooking, add bean sprouts and mange tout (if you add them before they will not retain their crunchy texture) to the wok and continue tossing the contents.

Boil the kettle and drop the noodles in hot water for them to cook for a couple of minutes (any more than 3 minutes and they tend to overcook). Drain them. When the vegetables are ready, mix them in a bowl with the noodles and add the tofu on top. Season with more soya sauce and sweet chilli sauce to taste, and serve in a bowl with chopsticks.



Vegan Brownies

Ingredients (makes 8-10 brownies)

1 can black beans
1 cup carob/cocoa powder
1 1/3 cup agave*
1 cup rolled oats

1 cup peanut butter*
1/4 cup coconut oil
1/4 cup coffee
2 tbsp flax seed meal
3 tbsp water
1 banana
1 tsp vanilla
1 tsp cinnamon
1 tsp salt

* A liquid sweetener made from the agave plant; it has the same

consistency as honey and is usually the same color.

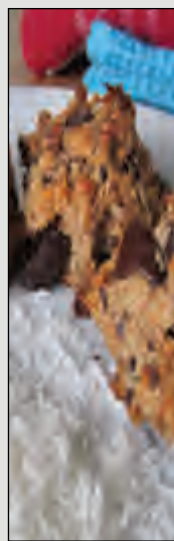
** Organic chocolate peanut butter brand made by the Peanut Butter Company is used. You can find this along with the other ingredients at your local Whole Foods.

Directions

Preheat oven to 176C/350F/Gas 4.

Pulse oats until it's mostly powder. In a separate bowl combine all dry ingredients. In blender combine drained beans, banana, and agave. Put the coconut oil for a minute or so in the microwave to turn it to liquid. Do the same with the peanut butter. Add all wet ingredients to dry mixture. Once it has melted add to the rest of the mixture and stir well.

Grease the pan lightly if you preferred but little or no greasing is just fine. Bake for 20-30 min, depending on your oven. Let it cool for 10-15 mins. At this point they're good to eat, but you can refrigerate overnight and eat it later!



Gluten-free Chocolate Chip Cookies

Ingredients (makes est. 3 dozen bite-sized cookies)

3 large ripe bananas, well mashed
1 tsp vanilla extract
1/4 cup coconut oil, barely warm (or olive oil)
2 cups rolled oats
2/3 cup almond meal*
1/3 cup coconut, finely shredded
1/2 tsp cinnamon
1/2 tsp fine grain sea salt
1 tsp baking powder
185g chocolate chips (or chopped dark chocolate)

* You can make your own almond meal by pulsing raw almonds in a food processor.

Directions

Preheat oven to 176C/350F/Gas 4, racks in the top third. In a large bowl combine the bananas, vanilla extract, and coconut oil. Set aside.

In another bowl whisk together the oats, almond meal, shredded coconut, cinnamon, salt, and baking powder. Add the dry ingredients to the wet ingredients and stir until combined. Fold in the chocolate chunks/chips. The dough is a bit looser than a standard cookie dough, don't worry about it.

Drop dollops of the dough, each about 2 teaspoons in size, an inch apart, onto a parchment lined baking sheet. Bake for 12-14 mins, or for as long as possible without burning the bottoms. Let them cool for 10-15 mins, and enjoy!

Recipes by **Selina D Moses** and **Victoria I. Sánchez**
Design **Ali Rashid**

FIRE (1996) FILM REVIEW

Written by Ali Rashid
Designed by Antonello Furione

'Fire' is an extraordinary feat by Deepa Mehta who wrote and directed what is thought to be the first exhibition of homosexuality in Indian cinema. Interact writer and film aficionado, Ali Rashid, offers his review.

“There is no word in our language that can describe what we are, how we feel for each other.”

Upon its release, Deepa Mehta's *Fire* (1996) received severe reactions and became a subject of great controversy in India, provoking hostile demonstrations by the extreme right-wing movement Shiv Sena who labelled it as 'a sort of social AIDS', which might 'spread like an epidemic'. This forced the closure of several cinemas nationally, though after the film was resubmitted to the Indian censorship board it was eventually re-released uncut.

The film is set in contemporary New Delhi in the 1990s – a historic decade in India; with economic growth booming as policies were liberalised and rate of population growth and fertility decreased. Conversely, Mehta's screenplay concentrates on the unmoved cultural traditions of India – particularly the injustices of women caused by the cultural practice of man's dominance over her in marriage.

The plot revolves around Radha (Shabana Azmi) and Sita (Nandita Das) who are imprisoned by their tradition in unfulfilled marriages. Radha, who is bound by social values and subdued into silence, has had to endure a 13 year long celibate relationship with husband Ashok, who is deeply frustrated by her inability to conceive. This leads him to follow the preacher Swamiji in believing that 'desires are the cause of suffering and must be surpassed'.

On the other hand, Sita the newlywed refuses to accept her fate of being trapped in a loveless arrangement with the disinterested Jatin that overtly has another

relationship with a Chinese hairdresser. The oppressiveness portrayed in the Indian marital culture eventually leads these two women to bond in a lesbian relationship. Mehta's commitment to the drama genre of the film is certainly a refreshing experience from modern dramas that are often dumbed down with sub genres. The unpretentious cinematography from Giles Nuttgens and low-key lighting adds to the realism that is being depicted, leaving Mehta's discourse to centre on her characters.

The performances from the actors and actresses are indeed superlative and have contributed greatly towards the artistic power of the film. Shabana Asmi and Nandita Das not only bring to life the characters they portray but also accomplish the difficult task of winning the viewer's sympathy and respect for their sexual relationship.

Furthermore, each character presented is purposeful and significant in telling the story; such as Biji, the mother who's invalid state signifies the paralysed tradition of the times, the Chinese girlfriend that signifies change and economic growth in India, or even the servant Mundu signifying the social class division that was beginning to form.

Despite the intensive nature of the narrative, *Fire* by no means feels like a lecture—you become immersed with the powerful performances that each periodic juxtaposing flashback of a young Radha (with her conventional family in a tranquil mustard field) brings with a welcoming degree of hope for gratification in the narrative.

On a different note, the instrumental

audio in the film was at times melodramatic in tense scenes, though for the most part it was modest as well as appropriate. Moreover, the establishment of the equilibrium perhaps dwelled on a little, but the many memorable quotes that captured their understanding of life so succinctly, kept me attentive and mesmerised.

“Isn't it amazing? We're so bound by customs and rituals. Somebody just has to press my button, this button marked Tradition, and I start responding like a trained monkey.”

Fire is without a doubt an intense drama, though it pleasantly remains true to its genre and enables the spectator to breathe in the social atmosphere of an Indian suburb.

Watching it in present times, it is a historic narrative of the Indian way of life in the 1990s, though some may argue and state the ideologies presented in the film were even outdated when released. ■



interact

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Get your voice heard by joining the editorial team for Interact Magazine.

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interactblogs.wordpress.com

Interfaith Calendar

Summer 2012

JUNE

- Sun 3** Trinity Sunday (Christian)
Thur 7 Corpus Christi (Christian)
Sat 16 Martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev (Sikh)
Fri 29 St Peter and St Paul's Day (Christian)

JULY

- Tue 3** Dharma Day (Buddhist)
Thur 5 Birthday of Guru Hargobind (Sikh)
Fri 20 Ramadan - start (Muslim)
Sun 29 Tisha B'Av (Jewish)

AUGUST

- Sun 3** Trinity Sunday (Christian)
Thur 7 Corpus Christi (Christian)
Sat 16 Martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev (Sikh)
Fri 29 St Peter and St Paul's Day (Christian)

SEPTEMBER

- Tue 3** Dharma Day (Buddhist)
Thur 5 Birthday of Guru Hargobind (Sikh)
Fri 20 Ramadan - start (Muslim)
Sun 29 Tisha B'Av (Jewish)

The team behind the latest issue



Emma Jacobs

WRITER

You only live once, but if you do it right, once is enough.

seewhatshemeans.wordpress.com



Selina Moses

WRITER

With a prompter in every cellar window whispering comebacks, shy people would have the last laugh.

kittyonadumpster.blogspot.co.uk



Muhab Shokat

DESIGNER

Kind words can be short and easy to speak, but their echoes are truly endless.

coroflot.com/muhabshokat



Becky Attwood

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Something's coming. I don't know what it is, but it is gonna be great!

1950samericangirl.wordpress.com

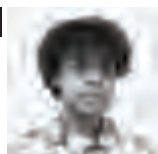


Antonio Furione

DESIGNER / WRITER

A compassionate attitude opens our inner door and as a result it is much easier to communicate with others.

therockblogreview.com



Ali Rashid

DESIGNER / WRITER

I gotta keep breathing ... because tomorrow the sun will rise, who knows what the tide could bring.

ofthedigital.com



Eva Oppong

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I had to lose myself before I could find myself.

purplevagabond.com



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Find a truly original idea. It is the only way I will ever distinguish myself. It is the only way I will ever matter.

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Qudsia Hussain

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In all our deeds, the proper value and respect for time determines success or failure.

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I think this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship.

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I am a poem and God is my author.

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I can't refuse it coz what to be, got to be.

why-dance.com



"Youth in Action" Programme

