

# CEASE FIRE

Magazine of the Nottingham Student Peace Movement

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## Quiet please! We're stealing your freedom

Hich Yezza

Yes, Tony Blair might very well be a "tragic buffoon" (as a particularly observant journalist remarked recently) with a very shaky grip on what most humans refer to as "Reality" but even he has started to realise that the nightmare he has helped unleash in Iraq is not the glorious success he has been trying to parade for all these months. Whereas the talk two years ago was all about "How can we go from being liberators to becoming Nation-builders?" all we hear now from the sombre corridors of the New Labour citadel and beyond is "How do we get out of this mess without losing face?". Too many people have died pointlessly for those of us who have opposed this cynical act of barely-disguised neo-imperialist aggression to afford a most weary and saddened "I told you so".

Closer to home, the recent Government defeat in passing its 90-day arrest-without-trial anti-terror proposals is certainly cause for celebration but should not deflect us from pursuing the fight against the ferocious assault on our basic liberties that this Government has been conducting relentlessly for years now. The debate over ID cards may have subsided but the proposals and the white papers are still there and the Government is intent on having its way by any means necessary. All it needs (and what it is publicly hoping for) is for the citizens of this country to succumb en masse to the alluring drug of political apathy. What the sinister mandarins are counting on is that enough members of the British public will keep quiet and do nothing to oppose the new legislation (whether it's the introduction of ID or the anti-terror laws), the government wants us to think "It's the brown chap down the street who will be suffer most under this law, so what do I care?".

Here in Nottingham, an ambitious season of political activism is already under way so if you haven't already joined one social justice society or other please do so now and start making a difference (yes, some clichés do mean something). The big theme of this issue is Free Speech, clashing opinions on this topic are presented and it's for you, dear reader, to make up your own mind. There's a lot you can do here on campus, it's just a matter of genuinely believing in the possibility of a better world, what you *can't* afford to do, however, is spend another day, listlessly absorbing the delicious offerings of daytime TV. Where to start? Read this issue then visit <http://www.su.nottingham.ac.uk/~environ> oh, and talking of clichés: Welcome to the revolution!

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# NEWS: One Voice comes to Nottingham Uni

Hich Yezza

In an age of rampant cynicism, it's very hard for most of us to take anything brazenly idealistic at face value, we either dismiss it as naïve and unrealistic or raise suspicions about its "true" intentions often invoking that lovely, lovely phrase: Hidden Agenda.

puzzling of conundrums: How to achieve Peace in the Middle East.

The idea behind One Voice is simple enough, a grassroots movement started in the Occupied Territories and in Israel in 2002 that has been trying to boost its momentum and is aiming for that magical threshold

This is why the focus of its work so far, according to the organisers, has been to try getting a representative picture of what the Israeli and Palestinian publics want. Their findings, obtained after an ambitious surveying effort, show that whilst when it comes to certain topics such as the status of Jerusalem, the fate of the refugees and the holy sites, the gap between the two sides is still unbridgeable, other issues seem to meet far less opposition and we can even speak of some sort of "consensus", for instance, the end of the occupation and the need for Palestinians to have a fully-working state.

Jake Hayman, a Nottingham University graduate who is now based in the New York office of One Voice in charge of overseeing the fundraising efforts, gave a very heartfelt summary of the organisation's scope and aims before introducing his fellow speakers, Shiri Ourian and Malak Abu Meizar, two prominent One Voice activists from Israel and The Occupied territories respectively. The presentation was sleek and certainly showed a great deal of belief in their quest and a lot of effort on the ground canvassing people and publicising their initiative. The audience was respectful and attentive but the questions they asked often betrayed the deep-rooted scepticism many still felt, scepticism that will be familiar to anyone who has dealt with the Middle East and its history so replete with false dawns and crushed hopes.

The One Voice movement might turn out to be all about hot air and no action, or it could be the starting point for a new generation of Israelis and Palestinians, it certainly deserves to be given a chance and there's one way to find out which way things are going to go: As the cliché goes: Only time will tell.

*To know more visit:*  
<http://www.OneVoiceMovement.org>



Mohammed Ali with the One Voice Declaration

Do not despair however, for there is hope, and there MIGHT be a chance an idealistic approach can be a productive one.

Let me tell you why.

On the 10<sup>th</sup> November, thanks to an event organised by Forum, our campus was host to the good people of One Voice, an International organisation dedicated to the Herculean task of solving that most

that would turn it into a mass movement, and with 150,000 members already signed-up this doesn't seem as far-fetched as the cynical voice in your head might suggest. As to what the organisation is actually proposing, One Voice says it is not interested in proposing solutions, only in getting people to communicate and discuss their positions.

# EDITORIAL

## DEBT RELIEF OR MAKE-BELIEVE?

Hich Yezza

People often disagree about how to go on about solving the world's plethora of critical issues, from global warming to combating malaria, the methodologies and strategies offered often vary drastically from one camp to the other.

On the other hand, hardly anyone seems to challenge the fact that debt relief is a good thing. In fact, saying otherwise is the closest thing to heresy in the secular left's ideological battleground, and yet, voices are now being raised to say the unsayable. And it's not the usual suspects from the first world's elites who are saying it but people from the grassroots movements in the Third World.

Indeed, after many decades of active campaigning for debt relief, a certain truth is starting to emerge: Debt relief is not the magical potion many have thought it to be, in fact, in certain cases quite the opposite has often happened.

The argument for debt relief is easy enough to comprehend, many countries are crippled by the colossal bills of debt repayments that drain most of their income and leave very little to spend on their populations' welfare. It's easy to see how relieving the debt would unlock billions of dollars for the governments to spend on essential infrastructure building and on extensive education and health programs.

However, the reality has been rather different for two major reasons: First, the debt relief that is often offered is not the no-strings-attached waving away of the debt that the public often think it is, in fact, it's seen by many to be quite simply equivalent of a poisoned water cup offered to a desperately thirsty person in the heart of the desert. The offer comes with extensive demands for the country to perform certain drastic changes in the way it runs its economy. And most of the changes are of course to the detriment of the country itself and their sole purpose is to enhance the investment opportunities of the "donor" countries' multinationals. These include savage "liberalisations" of the import-export systems making it very easy for outside mammoth corporations to invade a national market and crush the local competitors. This has happened on numerous occasions in Africa and elsewhere and the trend seems to be only getting quicker and more aggressive.

Secondly, the debt relief hardly ever comes ahead with conditions that are actually beneficial for the local populations, for instance, increasing the reach of genuine democratic reforms. This makes the debt relief a mostly impotent tool at reaching the very poor since the allocation of the country's resources is never up to them. The notoriously widespread corruption that most third-world countries have been suffering from for decades shows no signs of abating and means the bulk of the new income (unlocked by the lifting of the debt) often gets squandered by the elite way before it reaches the population at large.

Of course, this might be a rather bleak way of painting the situation but for many in the third world, reality is often bleaker. Which leads to the question: If even debt relief can't get the job done, what can?

The answer is simple, anyone campaigning for debt-relief has to realise that this must be part of a wider campaign to give the power back to the peoples through effective efforts of promoting genuine democracy. We also have to ensure that debt relief is not used as a back-door channel by the rich to bully and blackmail the debtor countries. Only in this way can we bring about a significant lasting change for the better to the lives of billions around the world.

## CEASEFIRE

Official Magazine of the  
Nottingham Student Peace  
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Hich Yezza

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# IN FOCUS: FREE SPEECH

## FIGHTING FASCISM Dan Robertson

In response to the disgraceful article by Phil Edwards (real name Stuart Russell) of the BNP published by "independent" student newspaper, *The Sanctuary*, Ceasefire have decided to publish a debate on fighting fascism. Firstly we have contacted *The Sanctuary's* editor, Thomas Freeman, to explain why his paper has apparently solicited an article from the BNP, giving them an effective platform from which to promote their fascist ideology. Secondly, two anti-fascists debate over whether or not a 'no platform' policy is effective in beating the BNP and their ilk.

It's easy to get complacent about the BNP. According to local anti-fascists they are not particularly active in the city although there is concern about their rise in racially segregated areas like Sneinton. Traditionally fascists have had more support in rural areas of Notts and Derbyshire.

It should be noted, however, that Nottingham student Sadie Graham ran for the BNP in Erewash in 2001, and there are rumours that George Aitken, owner of Rock City/Stealth/Rescue Rooms is a supporter. The BNP's recent attempts to gloss over their street thug image with attempts to break into 'respectable' politics are dangerous indeed. There can be no doubt that a strong anti-fascist movement must be maintained to prevent fascists gaining power.

No doubt Mr Freeman will defend his paper's decision to publish the BNP article with cries of "free speech", but truly free speech requires equal access to the platform

for all. The student response to the BNP article took up a small proportion of the page, and did not attempt to tackle most of the racist, anti-women and homophobic views of the article. Prominent anti-fascist organisations did not appear to have been invited to comment.

I also have serious doubts about the "impartiality" of the paper.

In its inauspicious first two issues it has run articles attacking "pikies" (sic) and the Chechens, and there is a pervasive air of xenophobia and elitism emanating from between the pages. Mr Freeman claims that "If the student demographic of Nottingham will not properly represent themselves within the paper, we cannot be held to task" (personal correspondence), but why would progressive students back a paper that advertises the RAF, Rolls-Royce and the BNP?

Make no mistake, those with a conscience will "properly represent themselves". Not by supporting a publication titillating the privileged at the expense of the abused, but by finding papers that support their views. *Ceasefire* aims to support the views of those who want peace and an end to racism, not to generate controversy by courting fascists. As holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel rightly said "We must always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented." Don't remain silent – come off the fence and join us.

**The Nottingham Student Peace Movement aim to organise a campus anti-fascist meeting soon. Watch out for details:**

<http://su.nottingham.ac.uk/~nspm>

## THE SANCTUARY'S DEFENCE Thomas Freeman

Good grief! What's wrong with you lot out there? I publish a piece of political propaganda from the BNP in the expectation of stimulating a lively debate about issues of increasing contemporary relevance and urgency and what do I get - the usual neo-Swampy diatribes and a truly splendid Spartist rant from a 'lecturer in the School of History' which she tells me 'isn't for publication'.

It's almost as if the people who oppose the BNP have taken upon themselves the lofty mantle of divine rectitude and, disdaining all debate, believe that spitting and sizzling in their Ivory Towers is all they have to do to persuade right-thinking people to their anti-BNP view.

Our 'lecturer in the School of History' claims that debate on this issue would not be 'legitimate'. And here was I thinking that for students and teachers of history ALL historical and contemporary events were up for open-minded, objective and dispassionate analysis and comment.

We are a politically neutral publication, trying to provide an interesting and informed forum for discussion, something which impact consistently fail to do largely by virtue of SU dilution. Dilution because the SU too easily bow to people shouting at them, much in the tone of some of the preposterous, unsubstantiated responses we have had from some of your readers. We understood that the article would raise eyebrows but I am also aware, as should you be, that students at university are old and wise enough to form their own opinions about what was a clearly

# IN FOCUS: FREE SPEECH

with an invitation to write (unedited) for publication, testament to our neutrality and lack of censorship - the very qualities which will make this newspaper a consistently interesting, informed and controversial read, something Notts Uni has needed for a long time. But to no avail.

So now I say: "Come on out, darlings! The lecture-hall is full and your podium awaits". I'm probably wasting my time.

*Thomas Freeman is the Managing Editor / Founder of The Sanctuary Newspaper and can be contacted at:*

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## NO PLATFORM FOR FASCISTS

Luisa Miller

The lies told by the far Right, by organisations such as the British National Party (BNP) are racist, homophobic and sexist; they are not only offensive but also dangerous as they incite hatred and violence. To defend the spread of such lies under the cry of 'freedom of speech' is ludicrous; if the BNP were to take power in this country then they would not only silence people's freedom of speech but also freedom of movement and for many their freedom to live. I believe that the freedom to live without fear of oppression is more important than the unimpeded freedom of speech. Fascists do not believe in freedom of speech but are quick to exploit liberal arguments in favour of it for their own purposes.

The right to free speech is not absolute; it has always been conditional: restricted by laws covering sedition, slander, criminal libel, treason, contempt of court, intention to provoke a breach of the peace and inciting racial hatred.

Giving the BNP a platform in publications other than their own, such as a 'student' newspaper, gives them the veneer of political respectability that they crave, providing their ideas with undeserved

legitimacy. It is one thing to allow an individual the right to free speech and quite another to allow an organisation of hateful fascist ideology a platform within a community that they are not part of and indeed likely to, at best offend, and at worst provoke hateful attacks. Why are students at our university offering the BNP a platform when they can no longer get their own paper printed anywhere in the country due to its repulsive and offensive content?

Fascism is not simply a set of opinions it is an extremely violent movement, which is growing alarmingly. This year the BNP gained a total of 192,750 votes in the election, four times that of 2001.

There are currently 21 local councillors, and in these areas incidents of homophobia and racist attacks have risen. Indeed, in the recent election a post-graduate student from Nottingham University, Sadie Graham, stood as a candidate for the BNP. In Europe the near election of Le Pen's Le Front National and in Belgium the far-Right Vlaams Belang who won nearly a third of the vote in the last election should be a loud wake-up call to everyone concerned with preserving their freedom of speech. We can't dismiss these ideas as extreme and held by an insignificant minority, we must actively engage with preventing this abhorrent ideology from spreading.

Largely due to a banal fascism creeping into the public unconscious and a growing acceptance as 'common sense' right wing, authoritarian ideas,

particularly through the mainstream media, the far Right's irrational appeals can speak to pervasive unconscious prejudices in a dangerous manipulating manner. Toleration of lies dressed up as part of the "marketplace of political ideas" is an apathetic acceptance of politics as something that is consumable rather than requiring your active participation.

The publication to which I have been referring did so in a careless attempt at creating controversy without thought to the impact on those who might suffer as a result of the dissemination of such racist material. Rather than reply through them - I am not prepared to share a platform with fascists - I would rather reply on a platform for peace that aims to prevent rather than cultivate killing people - i.e. is not sponsored by dealers in the arms trade.

Stopping short at a call to militant anti-fascist action against those responsible for neo-Nazi propaganda, though for thoughtless sensationalism rather than fully sharing the ideology, I instead choose to take direct action by collecting copies and placing them in the local recycling in the hope that they might one-day serve a useful function by becoming toilet paper. Statistics sourced from the BBC.

This article was produced as a result of discussions at Lenton Anarchist Forum. The forum meets every Thursday from 7.30pm at the Crocus café.

# IN FOCUS: FREE SPEECH

## WHY ADOPTING NO-PLATFORM IS A DANGEROUS APPROACH

Alex Gregory

Some people seem to think that the best way to deal with political movements whom they disagree with is to adopt a 'no platform' policy. This is where certain forms of speech are denied public expression because they are considered dangerous.

There is a myriad of arguments for either side on this debate, so I am just going to offer one in favour of adopting a policy of free speech. The most obvious, and perhaps most important argument for free speech is that we should have the humility to be aware that we could be (and, historically speaking, almost certainly are) wrong. However, I think most of us would agree that this argument is less apt in the case of groups such as the BNP. I am therefore going to concentrate on the idea that you cannot suppress 'wrong' views without also suppressing 'right' ones.

The no-platform approach basically relies on the idea that there is a real distinction between some forms of speech and others. No-platformists maintain that there is a distinction between speech that is 'propaganda' or an 'act', and that should therefore be suppressed, and speech that is merely opinion, and should remain free. Without a very clear distinction, the speech that gets suppressed is going to depend on the whims and fancies of the particular people who are deciding what should be suppressed.



So, what might the distinction between normal- and propagandist-speech be? You might think that it is the same as the distinction between fascist and non-fascist speech. Unfortunately, defining fascism is notoriously hard, and therefore cannot provide a clear guide to which forms of speech should and should not be suppressed. You might then think that the distinction is that between prejudice and non-prejudice speech. Again, however, finding an uncontroversial definition of prejudice is difficult. For a start, lots of people will claim that positive discrimination is prejudice, or that our society is prejudiced against British culture. I am obviously not saying that these viewpoints are correct, only that finding an uncontroversial definition of prejudice, or fascism, is near impossible.

We therefore cannot appeal to these concepts in order to make the distinction between normal- and propagandist-speech. Without the distinction, we have a choice. We can either let everyone go around suppressing whatever they think is harmful (more or less turning

suppress nothing. The latter entails that some harmful speech will be heard, but, importantly, it also makes sure that other potentially true and useful speech can also be heard.

I choose the latter.

Just to be clear: Some forms of speech are most definitely dangerous and harmful; and it would be fantastic, in principle, if there were no platform for it. However, my objection is that any attempt to deny a platform to dangerous and harmful speech will also end up suppressing other types of speech. Free speech is all or nothing.

*Alex Gregory runs a blog at <http://atopian.org> - this article will be repeated there, and there is an open comments section should you wish to leave one.*

# CURRENT AFFAIRS: TIBET

## HAPPY ANNIVERSARY

Alastair Davey

This year marks the 40th Anniversary of the creation of the Tibetan Autonomous Region and the 'peaceful liberation' of Tibet. According to China's state-controlled media, Tibetans have been celebrating the day their country was granted special autonomy as a province of China. Autonomy that saw Mao's Cultural Revolution lead to the destruction of 6000 monasteries and the imprisonment and torture of thousands of Buddhist monks and nuns. Autonomy that outlaws all images of the Tibetan flag and Tibet's spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama. Autonomy that places strict controls on the freedoms that we so take for granted in the West.



The story of Tibet's struggle is epitomized by the story of a young boy. In 1995, six year old Gedhun Choekyi Nyima was recognised as the Panchen Lama, one of Tibet's most important religious leaders. Two days after the announcement, Gedhun Choekyi Nyima (pictured above) and his parents were abducted by Chinese officials and nothing has been seen or heard of them since. Despite numerous

requests from the UN and foreign governments for evidence of his whereabouts and welfare, China has refused all requests for verifiable information.

By the time you read this article, Chinese President Hu Jintao - himself a former governor of the TAR - will have completed his UK visit to hold talks with Tony Blair. These talks are primarily aimed at strengthening the UK's ties with the booming Chinese economy. It seems as though it is acceptable to trade with a power that represses its population - as long as we don't violate any human rights ourselves, our hands are clean. Our government's stance on the human rights issue is a carefully-worded non-committal - 'it is a sensitive issue'. China executes 10,000 people a year, many for non-violent crimes. Is this not a point worth raising? A point worth being 'insensitive' over?

The widespread presumption that market-oriented reforms will bring about freedom for the Chinese people and academic freedom for Chinese intellectuals has yet to deliver. Intellectuals are still not permitted to introduce or study western political systems or democracy; research on the Cultural Revolution and the history of the Chinese Communist Party is restricted; and studies of reform policies "should not" be biased against official positions.

Despite this, students will soon be enrolling at the University of Nottingham's new China campus in Ningbo. These students will be of our University and yet will be studying in a society where 30,000 people are employed to monitor individuals' internet access (BBC news is one of many banned websites), and where free elections are a fiction. Will the University guarantee their students elected representation and freedom to express political opinions?

Education, and the sharing of ideas, can truly work to cross social divides and break down ideological barriers. However, the University's responsibility is towards its students and staff, not for wider social reform in China - something that will be a long and difficult process. The building of Nottingham's Ningbo campus is as much a shrewd business decision as it is a bold academic leap. In the rush to reap dividends from investment in China, the issue of human rights and freedom of speech is continually pushed to the bottom of the agenda. Pierre Sané of Amnesty International has called for "all business leaders investing, trading and producing in China to take a hard look at the facts in our report and assess them against the long term moral and financial interests of shareholders."



When our very own Vice-Chancellor Sir Colin Campbell, himself a member of Tony Blair's China Task Force, meets Hu Jintao I hope he congratulates him on the 40th Anniversary of the Tibetan Autonomous Region. Perhaps Hu Jintao does not have such fond memories of Tibet. He spent little time there as Governor and in 1989 declared martial law to crush a largely peaceful uprising in the Tibetan capital, Lhasa.

So celebrate your 40th anniversary, but others may remember a different anniversary - it is 10 years since young Gedhun Choekyi Nyima vanished, leaving so many questions unanswered.

*Alastair Davey is President of Tibet soc*

# CURRENT AFFAIRS: FRANCE

**LIBERTE,  
EGALITE,  
FRATERNITE,  
REALITE**  
Richard Hinds

*"A riot is at bottom the language of the unheard."*  
- Martin Luther King Jr.

The term "race riot" gets bandied around far too often. While often not completely without merit, it tends to obscure as much as it elucidates. The riots currently spreading across France provide ample evidence of this. While race and racism play a crucial role, so too does government repression, police brutality, poverty and unemployment.



The short-term cause was the death by electrocution of three youths who were apparently trying to escape from the police. This incident was merely a spark, however, which ignited long simmering resentments among France's young immigrant populations.

France's population of immigrant origin is more than 10% of the total population. Most of these people are descended from workers brought to the country (usually from former French colonies) in the aftermath of the Second World War as part of a

deliberate, and initially very successful, government and industrial policy. These workers were housed in specially built ghettos, known as cités, which were deliberately placed away from the urban centres. Nowadays these structures have become dilapidated and run-down.



Those who have lived in France often comment on the stark divisions they encounter in French society. NSPM member Dan Robertson spent a year there while studying for his degree and notes, "The research department I was working for consisted of an entirely white European research team whilst cleaners and chauffeurs were almost entirely black and brown."

Dan was also in France during the 2002 presidential election which saw Jean Marie Le Pen, leader of the far-right Front National (FN) secure a place in the second round, beating the Socialist candidate Lionel Jospin into third place. While the fascist fuckwit was given a thorough kicking in the second round the fact that he had secured almost 17% of the vote in a first round contested by no less than 16 presidential wannabes and in the aftermath of a damaging split with the FN did not pass unnoticed.

It was this potent combination of poverty, inequality and racism which was ignited by the tragic deaths of the three youths, but the government response has only served to fuel resentment. This response has been led by Interior

Minister, Nicolas Sarkozy (below), commonly referred to as "Sarko." Former resident of France and onetime Liberation journalist Doug Ireland suggests that pushing the ambitious and famously hardline minister to the forefront was a deliberate strategy on the part of President Jacques Chirac and Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin, based on the belief that his inevitable failure would hurt his nascent campaign for the presidency.

While Chirac and Villepin appear to have predicted Sarko's failures accurately enough, they seem to have woefully underestimated his potential to exacerbate the situation. Sarkozy has been widely quoted in the English-speaking press as having promised to "clean" the ghettos of "scum". In fact, it seems that what he said was somewhat stronger than that translation suggests. Doug Ireland explains that what he actually promised to do was "karcherise" the ghettos of "la racaille." Karscherising Ireland explains is the process of blasting a surface with water or sand under high-pressure in order to clean it even at the risk of damaging the surface underneath. "La racaille" meanwhile is considerable more pejorative than "scum". Ireland opines that the term "has the flavor of characterizing an entire group of people as subhuman, inherently evil and criminal, worthless, and is, in other words, one of the most serious and dehumanizing insults one could launch at the rebellious ghetto youth."

The response on the part of the rioters was as mild-mannered as you might expect. The Guardian carried a report of youths in Strasbourg who stole a car, drove it into a housing project setting both alight. The driver of the car seemed very sure of what he wanted: "We'll

# CURRENT AFFAIRS: FRANCE



stop when Sarkozy steps down.” Other rioters have made similar assertions.

Various other elements of the government’s response seem to have achieved little beyond fuelling antagonism. The presence of fully kitted up riot-cops on estates during quiet periods, for instance, has invited comparisons with cities under occupation (the use of colonial laws to impose curfews has only emphasised such parallels). Similarly the tear gassing of a Mosque in the northern Clichy-sous-Bois suburb, even if it was accidental as claimed, can hardly have helped to reduce tensions.



Perhaps unsurprisingly there have been various attempts on the part of right-wing commentators to suggest links between the riots and Islamic extremism, although the evidence for this is limited at best. In fact, the Union of Islamic Organisations of France, described by Associated Press as “France’s biggest Muslim fundamentalist organization” issued

a fatwa forbidding all those “who seek divine grace from taking part in any action that blindly strikes private or public property or can harm others.” Similarly many imams have denounced the riots and according

Le Monde some have even gone out with police in order to protect them from angry youths.



Where this goes next is anyone’s guess. My own opinion is that Britain’s own “race riots” in the early 1980s can be said to have had beneficial effects. Such outbursts of violence mean people can no longer bury their heads in the sand and have to face up to the problems of racism and poverty. This is not to suggest that a positive outcome is inevitable, the violence could serve to strengthen the already powerful far-right (the FN have focused on Islam in much the same way as the BNP in the UK, although they have rather more to show for it than their British counterparts).

Nevertheless it is to be hoped that something good does come out of this. As blogger ‘lenin’ points out, just think how many cars will have lost their lives in vain if this all adds up to nought.



*Richard Hines is a former member and presiden of NSPM  
He maintains a blog at  
<http://disillusionedkid.blogspot.com>*

# OPINION: WHOSE INSECURITY?

**Dan Robertson**

The news media seem to be increasingly full of lurid stories about terrorism and crime, and a common reaction is a general feeling of anxiety throughout society. Is this anxiety misplaced or are we really more insecure than ever before? It may really depend on who "we" are.

Since the 7/7 bombs, terror, and the threat of terror, have filled many with dread. This has certainly been fuelled by media speculation, but the facts tell a different story. You are still more likely to be killed by lightning than in a terrorist attack. Likewise, whilst muggings and burglaries are a common occurrence in student areas, most crime is committed against the poorest and most vulnerable in society. This is an interesting statistic because poverty is a huge factor in determining not just whether an individual will become a victim of crime, but their quality of life, health, and life opportunities. Low wage jobs are becoming more and more precarious, with short-term contracts taking the place of lifetime careers, and a continual push by employers for lower wages and poorer conditions. The working classes suffer from a much more rational insecurity about their day to day existence, than the fear of terrorism.

One group of desperately poor people in the UK are those seeking political asylum. Not only are they reduced to existing on a pittance (destitute asylum seekers are entitled to 38.96 per week in benefits) but they face being deported to countries in which they could be persecuted if their claims are rejected. Despite the growing number of refugees in the world, the UK is making it harder for asylum seekers to enter the country, spurred on by tabloid-fuelled hatred of their kind. These are forms of insecurity

that are severe and very real, but media and political discourse is rarely concerned with them. Whose insecurity should be dealt with first? Do we really think our laptops getting nicked should be a priority?

The measures that have been implemented in order to deal with the "headline story" insecurities are manifold. A whole swathe of new anti-terror laws are being debated and look set to be implemented, and the police are being given a license to shoot-to-kill. In attempts to tackle (or at least appear to be tackling) crime, the government has introduced Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs), and councils and property owners increasingly rely on CCTV. These measures appear designed to reduce the insecurity of the "average law-abiding person", but who is that person? Not those belonging to Afro-Caribbean, Arabic or Asian ethnicities, who are being disproportionately targeted by police anti-terror laws (and by laws in general). Not youths, mental health service users or prostitutes, who are under the threat of criminalisation for breaking ASBOs. Not those whose homes and streets are not under the watchful eyes of CCTV, where crime is displaced. Not political protestors, against whom anti-terror laws, ASBOs, and anti-harassment laws are being used. These measures allow those whose concerns are considered important to evade their fears, whilst their insecurities are displaced onto the less privileged in society.

Ultimately this is bound to fail, as insecurity in one segment of society will sooner or later increase the insecurity of others. The insecurity of Muslims who feel that their people are under attack fuels the insecurity of those who suspect them of being terrorists. The insecurity of those desperate for money feed the insecurity of those who fear theft. Whilst those with power and a voice in society can call

for draconian measures against those who don't have such power, they still have to lock their doors at night, glance anxiously around on the tube, and keep their wallets out of sight. Terror and crime are desperate attempts by those who have little power to make an impact on the world. To reduce the chance of these things happening, we have to empower everyone in society to take back control of their lives. That means that everyone gets a say in how their life is run, how political decisions are made, and how resources are allocated. To know that you genuinely do have the same opportunities and status as your neighbours is to eradicate insecurity about your privilege or resentment of your neighbour's. Creating a society in which direct democracy is implemented means that no one's voice should go unheard, and everyone has the confidence to take back control of their lives.

For most students, insecurity is a fleeting and temporary problem – until the poorest and most vulnerable are made secure we shouldn't see ourselves as the priority. Perhaps our deepest insecurity is that we know we don't really have a right to the privileges we have, and that the dispossessed are at the door.

*Dan Robertson is president of the Nottingham Student peace Movement (NSPM)*

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1) Lifetime mortality rates :  
Lightning = 1:56,000, Terrorist-related activity = 1:88,000 (National Safety Council, US, 2002)

2) "The type of area in which people live can affect their likelihood of being a victim of violent crime. In general, those households located in council estates and low-income areas were the most likely to have been victims of violent crimes - around twice the rate of those living in affluent suburban and rural areas." (Proportion

of adult victims of violent crime: by household characteristics, 1999: Social Trends 32, <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/STATBASE/ssdataset.asp?vlnk=5072&More=Y>

In the US (2004)

- Persons in households with an annual income under \$7,500 were robbed at a significantly higher rate than persons in households earning more.

- Persons in households with an annual income of less than \$7,500 have higher rates of assault than persons in households with higher income levels.

- Households with an annual income below \$7,500 were burglarized at rates higher than those of households with larger incomes.

- Households earning below \$7,500 and above \$75,000 experience motor vehicle theft at similar rates.

[http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/cvict\\_v.htm#income](http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/cvict_v.htm#income)

3) Asylum seekers cannot claim mainstream welfare benefits. If destitute, they can apply to the National Asylum Support Service (NASS), the Government department responsible for destitute asylum applicants, for basic food and shelter. A single adult is eligible for £38.96 a week, equivalent to 70% of basic income support.

<http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/news/myths/myth001.htm>

4) 90% refugees rejected on initial claim, with many having to go through the appeals process to have their claim successfully recognised

<http://www.irr.org.uk/2003/march/ak000004.html>

5) The justification for CCTV is seductive, but the evidence is not convincing. In a report to the Scottish Office on the impact of CCTV, Jason Ditton, Director of the Scottish Centre for Criminology, argued that the claims of crime reduction are little more than fantasy. "All (evaluations and statistics) we have seen so far are wholly unreliable", The British Journal of Criminology described the statistics as "...post hoc shoestring efforts by the untrained and self interested practitioner."

Many CCTV system operators routinely exercise their prejudices to discriminate against race, age, class or sexual preference.

<http://www.privacyinternational.org/issues/cctv/statement.html>

## NUCLEAR WEAPONS: The Importance of Opposing Trident Nuclear Re-Development

**Khalid Shroufi**

In 2006 the UK government will decide whether to spend £10-15 billion replacing the Trident nuclear weapons system used on British submarines.

Apart from 2006 the last decision to upgrade was 1980 (this was the decision to use trident, which came into force in 1994) and the next decision to upgrade is likely in around 2030.

Treaty (NPT), to actively disarm. Further the UK and France are the most obvious states to disarm first, facing no obvious security threat like India, Pakistan or Israel, while the US, Russia or China will never disarm on their own.

[www.cnduk.org](http://www.cnduk.org) explains why the coming year is vital for British nuclear disarmament and how to help.



Public pressure is essential in stopping this Trident upgrade. Future governments are unlikely to scrap nukes that they have paid billions for. If the UK scraps re-development, Trident will still remain operational until 2025, while the UK can show how its meeting article 6 of the Non-proliferation

Humanity has survived 60 years, but nuclear war will ravage a thousand generations to come.

The UK doesn't have to be hypocritical when it opposes WMD, and the billions saved can help improving lives.

**NO TRIDENT  
REPLACEMENT**

# A LESS PAINFUL PERIOD

**Luisa Miller**

It can be expensive being a woman - if you buy into the world of corporate advertising aimed at us, playing on insecurities to convince you of the need to buy the latest ineffective beauty product. Consuming such products is often also very costly to health, carcinogenic chemicals and the psychological detriment, and to the environment, both in their production and disposal.

This is particularly so when it comes to periods. We are bombarded with choice: tampons in all sizes, with applicators, without, pantliners, sanitary towels, with wings, without, extra thin, extra long, extra absorbency... The average woman spends over £2,000 on periods over her lifetime. £364 of this figure is tax - the government claims that sanitary products are "non-essential luxury items".

Add to this material cost the destructive impact on the earth. The outer casing of a tampon, which are used for just 3 seconds, each have a life expectancy of over ten years. It takes a tampon six months to biodegrade and a plastic sanitary towel liner lasts indefinitely.

Studies show that an estimated 74% of tampon users flush rather than use a bin - and around 25% of sanitary towel users. This leads to 75% of blocked drains being caused by flushing sanitary protection, and more critically millions of these products find their way to sea with our raw sewage becoming fertile breeding grounds for bacteria such as Hepatitis A and polio while littering our beaches and damaging coastal and aquatic life. Bin users, though better than flushers, are still contributing to unnecessary environmentally damaging waste and expediting the swell of landfill sites.



The prevailing attitude towards periods is to be 'discrete' and the common preference for disposable 'protection' (yes, a period is very dangerous and we need to pacify society's misogyny with tough security) fuels our flush-it-and-forget-about-it culture. But what about the health implications for women?

We are all aware of Toxic Shock Syndrome, a rare but potentially fatal illness that particularly affects younger women, and is linked to tampons. But you just change your tampon regularly and then its fine, right? Not so simple...

Tampons and towels are NOT sterile, despite their glowing white appearance; 25% of the world's pesticides are used on cotton, also a heavily genetically modified crop, this is used to make tampons, which are then bleached. When you consider that the vaginal wall is the most absorbent part of the body it is easy to understand how dioxins released during chlorine bleaching and plastics manufacture have been

shown to cause cancer, miscarriages, birth defects and infertility.

On average we spend about 6.5 years of our lives bleeding. This is a completely natural thing that doesn't need to be harmful. The cheapest, least damaging way possible - for you and the environment - to cope with menstruating is to consider using a mooncup. This is a small, silicone, eggcup sized device that sits at the bottom of your vagina. It is so comfortable that you forget its there, lasts for ten years, saving you a fortune, and simply requires rinsing out as often as you would change a tampon. Sounds odd at first but so did a tampon or even a period when you first encountered them. It's definitely not just for hippies; a more radical thing to do would be to use nothing, there are women who do.

For more information or to buy one go to [www.mooncup.co.uk](http://www.mooncup.co.uk)

# THE REAL WORLD MAP



Khalid Shroufi

If an alien was to look at the map of the world, and saw “Peters world map” instead of a conventional map they would never believe that Western Europe once colonised most of the world. But this is true, Africa is in fact 14 times the size of Greenland, not of equal size as most maps suggest, and the Southern hemisphere has the same degrees of latitude as the North.

Peters map shows the accurate area of each country, which has been distorted to fit the globe onto flat paper, and it doesn't cut off the S. hemisphere. It seems important that everyone should be aware of the true size of our globe, one of the most important images of mankind. Peters map is on sale in some Oxfam shops as well as many other sources.



Source: <http://www.globecorner.com>

# REVIEWS: MUSIC

**Four Tet @ Rescue Rooms  
Nottingham  
Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> November  
Tom Gillespie**



Diehard Four Tet fans probably won't like what they're about to read. Tough. Considering this gig sold out weeks in advance you're lucky you've got any review to read at all. Thanks to a bit of last minute wheeler-dealing, however, I got my hands on perhaps the most sought after tickets in Nottingham for the past month or so. Despite arriving as early as 8:30, the Rescue Rooms was packed to capacity with elaborately dressed scenesters and bearded-weirdy electronica heads, all eager to see how the king of 'folktronica' (think bleeps, breakbeats and squeaks blended with more 'organic' acoustic samples) would convert his production-driven studio sound into live performance art. Unfortunately, most left wishing they hadn't asked. Don't get me wrong: I adore Four Tet (real name Kieran Hebden)'s delicate compositions, and his albums get heavy rotation in my house, but as a fan I think he is seriously underselling himself with his current live show. Hunched over a tabletop of laptops, samplers and drum machines, Hebden effectively performed on-the-spot remixes of his well-loved album tunes. Occasionally some momentum was sustained and the crowd was

moved, such as during the new single 'Joy'. More often than not Hebden's tampering resulted in the songs (whose brilliance lies in their stripped-down understatement and restraint) being smothered in a mess of crashes, bangs and white noise. The result: A venue packed with awkward-looking, static spectators.

**EGYPT  
Yousou N'Dour**

**Hich Yezza**



When the word "Superstar" is mentioned very few music-listeners in the west can genuinely claim to have an African artist in mind and yet, this is undeniably the status Yousou N'dour enjoys on the old venerable continent.

Since his breakthrough album almost a decade ago "The Guide", Yousou Ndour has enjoyed a quasi-saintly reputation among his adoring crowds of fans in Africa and beyond and although this album is a departure from his trademark up-tempo mbalax style (A fusion of Western-African and Cuban musical traditions) it is a truly stupendous piece of work that must surely rank as one the most spiritual and mystical musical projects ever brought to life.

It's not a "concept" album as such but there IS a running theme to it: the ancestral musical river running from the Senegalese golden shores to the Egyptian Nile banks. Indeed, the album invites us to sample a

glorious tapestry of beautifully crafted soundscapes evoking both deeply haunting and positively uplifting emotions in the listener's mind and heart.

In this album, Yousou N'dour has also abandoned his more familiar (In Europe and the US) pop music style of vocal and instrumental arrangements and opted for a more classical Arabic style of compositions, a style famous for its deeply evocative themes. He has managed to produce a work of sublime coherence and beauty, which showcases his unique vocal style perfectly bouncing off the orchestral narrative of the music.

One of the words that most reviewers, whether in Africa, France or the US, frequently resorted to using when describing this album has certainly been "Sufism", a mystical tradition of Islamic spirituality which has had a prominent role in Senegal's long history. Indeed, the respect and veneration that N'dour shows for his religious and spiritual roots is both sincere and very central to the emotive power of his performance.



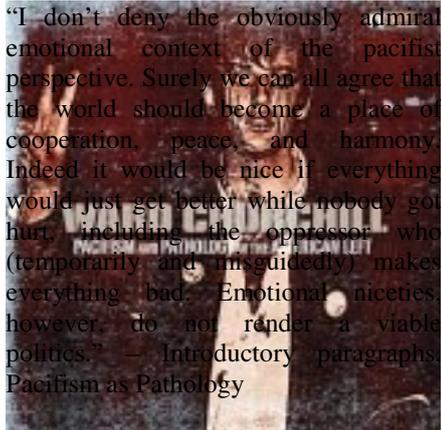
After listening to this album, I had no doubt whatsoever that it was a deserving winner of the best World Music album award at the 2004 Grammys.

I heartily recommend you give it a listen and if you're not blown away by the power and passion of its delivery and craft then you have a serious bone missing in your soul.

# REVIEWS: BOOKS

## Pacifism as pathology Reflections on the role of Armed Struggle in North America By Ward Churchill

**Dan Robertson**



"I don't deny the obviously admiral emotional context of the pacifist perspective. Surely we can all agree that the world should become a place of cooperation, peace, and harmony. Indeed it would be nice if everything would just get better while nobody got hurt, including the oppressor who (temporarily and misguidedly) makes everything bad. Emotional niceties, however, do not render a viable politics." — Introductory paragraphs, *Pacifism as Pathology*

Ward Churchill has achieved notoriety in increasingly wide circles following his very public resignation from the University of Colorado earlier this year. The resignation was prompted by protests against his planned visit to a New York college, linked with an essay he wrote in the aftermath of 9/11 entitled *On the Justice of Roosting Chickens*. Taking its title from a comment by Malcolm X the essay argued that US crimes against humanity made a violent response inevitable, and that Americans should not feel like wronged innocents. As Churchill said at the time "I have never said that people 'should' engage in armed attacks on the United States, but that such attacks are a natural and unavoidable consequence of unlawful U.S. policy. As Martin Luther King, quoting Robert F. Kennedy, said, 'Those who make peaceful change impossible make violent change inevitable'."

Churchill's upsetting of the status quo is nothing new, however, as the 1985 essay *Pacifism as Pathology* clearly demonstrates. Pacifism... is an indignant attack on the 'high moral ground' often claimed by supporters of the nonviolent ideology often espoused by progressives. Churchill attempts to debunk the idea that revolutionary

change can be brought about through nonviolent means, suggesting that pacifism is often merely an excuse for white middle-class activists to feel good about themselves whilst American state power continues to massacre people abroad and in its "internal colonies" (the Black nation, Native Americans, Hispanic Americans, etc.)

Race and genocide are important themes in Churchill's work. Churchill, contentiously, claims to have Native American ancestry and has been active in the defence of indigenous groups and non-white peoples. Violence to halt what he sees as state-led genocide is necessary and justified. The essay begins with the example of the Jewish holocaust in which millions were led "like lambs to the slaughter" with very little organised violent resistance. Churchill claims that this passivity in the face of mass destruction was brought about by a pathological aversion breaking out of "business as normal", even up to the gas chamber doors.

Pacifist claims of successes in obtaining civil rights for blacks and stopping the Vietnam war come under fire as "myths". Churchill points to the manner by which the violence, both threatened and actual, by those in groups like the Student National Co-ordinating Committee (SNCC), helped nonviolent leaders like Martin Luther King to attain his objectives. The ending of the Vietnam war had more to do with the successes of the Vietnamese guerillas than North American pacifists. Churchill is particularly scathing of the pacifist's propensity to let non-white fighters do the revolutionary struggle whilst continuing to assert that "the time is not right" for similar actions in the mother nation. This is designed to allow such 'activists' to remain in the "comfort zone" whilst remaining under the delusion that they are involved in revolutionary activity.

Pacifism, according to Churchill, is delusionary, racist and suicidal. He suggests a therapy for this pathology involving clarification of a person's values followed by "reality therapy" in which s/he should live amongst the

marginalised, to truly understand the experience of oppression.



**Ward Churchill**

Reading *Pacifism...* is not easy for a white middle-class activist, nor should it be. It is easy to see the contradiction inherent in seeking the "comfort zone" of white privilege whilst also feeling morally compelled to halt the slaughter carried out by state power. One is left with a greater respect for those who face the violence of the state for attempting to defend their people, and a lesser view of the puritanical pacifists who lay considerably less on the line in their 'symbolic' protests. Churchill's argument is not that violence should be the only component of the struggle for lasting peace, or that nonviolence is inherently contradictory. "[I]t seems the highest order of contradiction that, in order to achieve nonviolence, we must first break with it to overcome its root causes. Therein, however, lies our only hope."

*Pacifism as Pathology is available for members to borrow from the Peace Movement's library:*

<http://www.su.nottingham.ac.uk/~nspml/library>

# REVIEWS: BOOKS

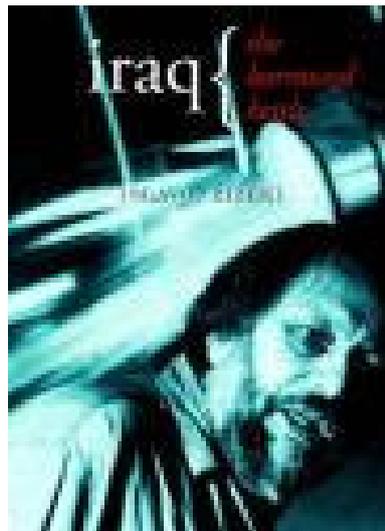
## The Borrowed Kettle By Slavoj Zizek

Sam grafton

The world's attention is currently Slavoj Zizek's *Iraq: The Borrowed Kettle* is a difficult, but deeply interesting examination of our current political predicament. If this slim volume is at times overburdened by the sheer number of topics it seeks to address, it is better than it being emaciated by too few. The work is not solely, or even mainly, about the war in Iraq, but then as Zizek reminds us 'the Iraqi crisis and war were not really about Iraq either.' The book moves impressionistically from one issue to another, examining Palestine, ethical violence and the possibilities for a radical democracy. Zizek's unique theoretical lens, comprised of a synthesis of Hegel and Lacan, results in a political disposition which is quite inimitable. While the breadth and depth of his learning can be intimidating, the reader derives great pleasure from the way in which he draws on popular culture to illuminate the most abstruse of philosophical points.

So while Iraq has only one reference to Hitchcock (Zizek's philosophical touchstone) elsewhere *The Usual Suspects*, *Antigone*, *Woody Allen* and even *John Gray* (esteemed author of *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*) are used to untangle a particularly troublesome political concept. Zizek is unafraid to be controversial and is as hard on liberals and pacifists as he is on the neo-conservative agenda. What makes this book so worthwhile though is not its bravery, but rather its originality. In this example he examines the images of Saddam Hussein having his mouth and hair inspected after his arrest in 2003. Rather than the examination of a homeless, destitute old man, these

images recall the Nazis inspecting a Jew in a ghetto raid. While the aim of this operation was clear (to 'desubliminate' the figure of Saddam, presenting him as mere miserable scum), we should not forget that it was US propaganda which created what it was now desublimating in the first place... it was US propaganda that elevated Saddam, that miserable local thug, into a monstrous sublime figure of Evil. Again, the parallel with the Nazi figure of the Jew is pertinent here: in both cases the same figure oscillates between demonic monster and impotent scum. Once he is revealed, the omnipotent scary monster turns into a blotch waiting to be erased.



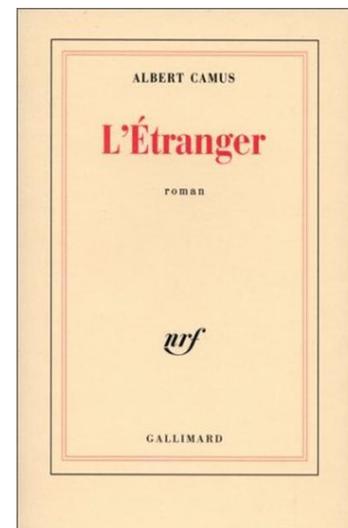
Here the insight is as much literary as it is political reconfiguring the oft-repeated mage within a new historical and ideological context which the reader immediately feels to be 'true'. Zizek is a great phrasemaker, wielding metaphor as his most potent political weapon and deftly employing humour to expose the absurdity of so many stock political positions. Many paragraphs stand alone as choice morsels to be savoured for their wit as well as their wisdom. America's self-interested foreign policy is 'a weird reversal of the well-known ecologists motto: act globally, think

locally', and our supposedly universal human rights are a specific invitation to violate the Old Testament Decalogue: 'The right to privacy' = the right to adultery... 'The right to pursue happiness and to possess private property' = the right to steal (to exploit others). Freedom of the press and expression of opinion = the right to lie... 'freedom of religious belief' = the right to worship false gods.' Here then is that rare breed, a writer who deals with the political at its most fearsomely complex, but who also utilizes prose that is as incisive as it is dazzling.

## World Classics

### L'Étranger (The Outsider) By Albert Camus

Hich Yezza



"Mother died today. Or maybe yesterday, I don't know. I had a telegram from the home: 'Mother passed away. Funeral tomorrow. Yours sincerely.' That doesn't mean anything. It may have happened yesterday."

These opening lines of Albert Camus's *The Outsider* ("L'Étranger" in the original French) are one of the most famous ever. And for good reason, for they encapsulate the maddening, nonchalant essence that has made this book a universal

classic one of those books that

**RE**

## WORLD LITERATURE

### PROFILE: GABRIEL GARCIA MARQUEZ

powerfully resonate with people but in differing ways.



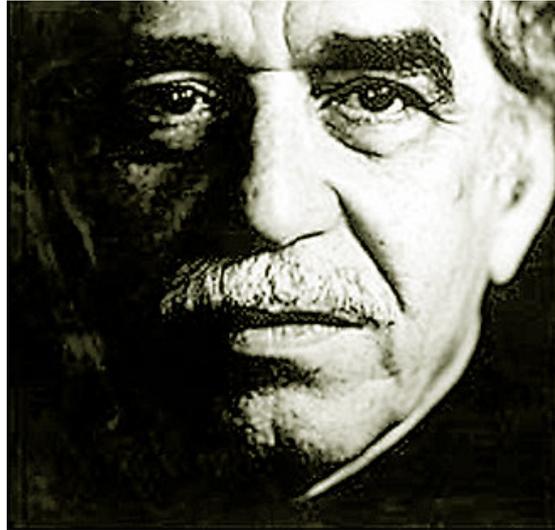
The story is simple enough, the main protagonist, Mr Mersault, an inhabitant of colonial-time Algiers, is a man whose mother dies at the start of the book and who finds himself implicated in the murder of an indigenous Arab. Camus has used a simple setting and straightforward narration to build a powerful indictment of human morality. Through the hostility and indifference that Mersault encounters from those around him (A sentiment that is more-or-less reciprocated), Camus has shown how our judgments of people's actions are inseparable from our moral outlook and therefore prejudices. Camus, the charismatic cult-figure of the "Philosophy of The Absurd" movement has used his protagonist's laconic and stoical behaviour to advertise his almost nihilistic view of life's meaning.

The book is a must-read for anyone who has grappled with the issue of human morality, this is not to say it is a moral fable, far from it, it is a robust indictment of the tyrannical impulses that democracy inherently generates and as such, remains today as relevant a manifesto for universal humanism, as ever.

Camus, a Literature Nobel Prize winner in 1957, remains a pivotal figure in today's literary and philosophical firmament. His influence and importance remain undiminished and *The Outsider*, while not his best work from a technical perspective, is certainly his most obsessively readable.

### PROFILE: Gabriel Garcia Marquez

Hich Yezza



That GG Marquez is a titan of 20th century literature is now beyond doubt, having won the Nobel Prize in 1982, and yet Marquez continues, 25 years on, to challenge our notions of what reality means.

Marquez was born in Mar. 6, 1928 in the town of Aracataca, Columbia. He began his career as a newspaper journalist and reporter in the 50s and made his transition into fiction in the following decade. His masterpiece, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967; Eng. trans., 1970), is a family saga that is now seen as sublime metaphor for the poetically chaotic history of his homeland.

"Magical Realism", the literary style (some would even call it "movement") he helped create back in the 1960s and of which he is by far the most famous exponent has been a radical breath of fresh air into the literary temple. His famous wit and sharp humour have delighted generations of readers, and his love for deliriously inventive plots and characters have continued to surprise and wrong-foot the critics and the public time and again.

His style of writing: fiery, uncompromising, passionate and fond of extremes to the point of recklessness is a true mirror of the South-America that has shaped his life from the very start. His work to this day contains an endless homage to it. In fact, he is known to be one of the most eloquent and heart-warming chroniclers of Nostalgia that have ever lived.

In his old age, he has gone back to his first love, journalism and seems to be spending most of his time working on his memoirs (the first volume of which was published this year) which are true gems full of delicious details from his impressively eventful youth. Whether he will ever equal again the heights of his craft that he achieved in his earlier novels remains to be seen, but the fact that he is now a true pillar of world literature is a tribute to his genius and his real encompassing love for his art, for his homeland and for his fellow humans, a true and noble sage of the rarest kind.

# REVIEWS: FILMS

## Broken Flowers (2005) Hich Yezza



This is by no means an unmissable movie but it *would* be a shame if you missed it. Let me begin at the start, much has been said about Bill Murray and his “face”, that rubber carpet of pinpoint emotional broadcasting. And it is true that it’s an endlessly fascinating surface conveying either bottomless indifference, almost nihilistic stoicism or, more often, pitch-perfect comical absurdity.

Murray is a clever actor, one of the very best, but the downfall of this gift is the temptation it gives any director that works with him to make the entire structure of the film a mere stage-set for his iconic stare-and-blink routine which is what Jim Jarmusch does here for long stretches of the film. Yes, a film doesn’t need to have a dozen car-chases a minute to be interesting but sustaining several minutes of pure emptiness simply by relying on Murray’s facial features as sole narrative compass is a tad tedious not to mention a rather lazy

approach for such an able director to adopt (at least he’s not as sadistic in his “nothing-happens” zealotry as Gus Van Sant criminally was in “Last Days”).

But enough about that face already. The film is about Don Johnston, a middle aged wealthy man living in a leafy textbook corner of sleepy American suburbia who learns, through an anonymous letter from an ex-lover, that he has a 19 year-old son who’s now gone missing. The ex-lover warns Don that his newly-acquired scion is in all probabilities looking for him, so with the help (or, according to some reasonable interpretations, despite the cumbersome hindrances of) his best (seemingly his only) friend and neighbour Winston (a mildly, nay deliciously bonkers Jeffrey Wright) he sets out on a trip to visit the four former girlfriends of his who might plausibly have sent that letter. The journey goes through predictably surreal tangents. For instance, the first ex-girlfriend (played by a charmingly angsty Sharon Stone)

has a Lolita-like tease-doll teenage daughter named...Lolita, presumably Jarmusch’s idea of a multilayered sophisticated in-joke.

The trip does however provide the director with endless prompts for Murray to make full use of his laconic expressions of kill-me-now boredom and self-disgust. Anyways, Don flies (and drives) around a great deal, a chance to “deal” with the messy trail of his ladies’ man past. What does he learn, if anything? You decide since I can’t be bothered to remember.

Still unsure about whether to watch it? Ok, how about this: If you worship Beckett or have previously enjoyed recent quirky comedies such as Rushmore and I heart Huckabees etc, you’ll forgive this as an indulgent but worthy effort, if you are more the John Grisham type, do yourself a favour and go watch Into the Blue, you’re worth it!

[www.brokenflowersmovie.com](http://www.brokenflowersmovie.com)