



Although a well-placed emoji can add nuance to positive statements, adding them to tragic news stories – as USA Today did – just looks sinister, says Rhiannon Lucy Coslett



# (Un)like



1 An edition of the newspaper *USA Today* chose to supplement all its front-page stories with Facebook's new 'emoji reactions'. Of course, the Internet's response was largely one of horrified bemusement (currently we lack  
5 an emoji for 'horrified bemusement' so, apologies readers, you're going to have to do the hard work yourselves by reading the words the old-fashioned way).

The general consensus was that the juxtaposition of a crying face emoji next to the headline 'US hero of French  
10 train attack stabbed' was crass, jarring, and borderline offensive. The implication that readers would be unsure how to feel about tragic or distressing news stories without the help of a  
15 supplementary emoji was rightly decried as patronising. Here, the lack of sufficient complexity of the emoji pictorial language was laid bare. Plus, they looked very strange in newsprint.



20 Most people are used to seeing emoji – or 'picture words' – by now. Far from being a visual language purely in use by teenagers, they have been adopted by users of all ages (including Islamic State recruiters – make of that what  
25 you will) as a way of adding context to written electronic messages, 'softening' words which might otherwise be misconstrued, or sometimes replacing them altogether (as

an excellent *New York* magazine essay on the rise of the emoji notes, both *Moby Dick* and R. Kelly's *Trapped in the Closet* have been translated into emoji).

*Most people are used to seeing emoji by now*

30 There's no doubt that they are useful for some purposes, such as showing someone that what you have said is in jest, or expressing a desire for an avocado. But in others, such as in the case of *USA Today*, their emotional limitations are laid bare. It's something to do with their  
35 inherent ridiculousness; while they work well when it comes to adding nuance to positive statements, when paired with sentences describing sadness, or terror, or pain, they remove it. A case in point would be the time I saw an Instagram upload of a wall of human skulls, beneath which  
40 was the hashtag #killingfields, and a sad face emoji.

Naturally, all of this will have people asking themselves whether the emoji represents the end point of human expression; the demise of literacy; the death of the sentence as we know it. When asked what on earth he  
45 was thinking, David Callaway, the editor-in-chief of *USA Today*, said, 'Social media and its



icons are becoming a dominant form of communication in our world. We wanted to show what they would be like if transferred to print.' (Awful, is the answer.)

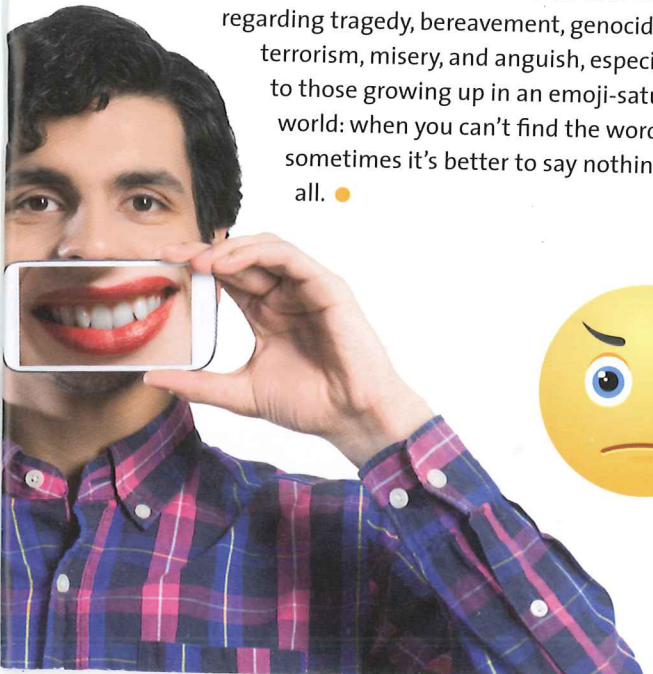
50 Is this, you might ask, the future of journalism? Certainly, as print begins to flail helplessly on its deathbed, we are increasingly seeing a blurring of the lines between social media and journalism online. In  
55 some cases, this is a positive development – citizen journalism has changed the way news is reported, and well-moderated comment sections can add insight  
60 to the articles above them. In contrast, the emoji and its emotional limitations just look sinister alongside news reporting.



I first came across the emoji story on a creepy, hilarious Facebook group called Boring Dystopia, which is one of my  
65 favourite things on the Internet at the moment. A sort of humorous plea for the return of civilisation, it rails against the corporatisation of our culture and the appropriation of our emotions to sell products, with users nominating billboards with slogans such as 'Is accountancy the new  
70 yoga?' and headlines such as 'Japan will open a fully robotic lettuce farm by 2017'. Telling people how to feel about news reporting via emoji fits perfectly into this Orwellian vision of a future Britain in which emotions are dictated by corporations and psychological autonomy is discouraged.

75 I'm not an emoji refusenik (though I'll admit that my phone is so old I'm unable to send them). Visual languages are nothing new, as anyone familiar with emoticons or wingdings will no doubt be aware. Pictograms have existed for thousands of years, preceding the written word. My  
80 autistic brother uses a system called Pecs as an alternative method of communication, and they are not dissimilar to emoji.

Despite the popularity of these cartoonish faces, I'm not too worried about the demise of the written word –  
85 the way long-reads have taken off and the surprise sales figures for tree books imply that readers are still craving verbal stimulus. But I would offer a word of caution regarding tragedy, bereavement, genocide, terrorism, misery, and anguish, especially to those growing up in an emoji-saturated world: when you can't find the words, sometimes it's better to say nothing at all. ●



## Emoticon, emoji, and kaomoji

An emoticon is a typographic display of a facial  
95 representation, used to convey emotion in a text-only medium. Like so: ;-)

Invented multiple times over human history, its Internet-era genesis is widely considered to have occurred in September 1982, when computer scientist  
100 Scott Fahlman suggested to the Carnegie Mellon University message board that :-)) and :-( could be used to distinguish jokes from serious statements online. Shortly thereafter came the name, a portmanteau of the phrase 'emotion icon'.

105 In contrast to the grassroots creation of the emoticon, emoji were created in the late 1990s by NTT DoCoMo, a Japanese communications firm. The name is a contraction of the words *e* and *moji*, which roughly translates to pictograph. Unlike emoticons, emoji are  
110 actual pictures, of everything from a set of painted nails (💅) to a slightly whimsical ghost (👻). And where emoticons were invented to portray emotion in environments where nothing but basic text is available, emoji are actually

115 extensions to the character set used by most operating systems today, Unicode.

To complicate matters, some emoji are also

120 emoticons. The standard for the characters breaks them apart into sets by theme. Most are filed under 'Miscellaneous Symbols and Pictographs', but the emoji which depict emotive faces  
125 are separated out as 'emoticons'.

There's more. Although the name's not much used in the West, it's probably best to distinguish kaomoji from emoticons in general. Independently invented around the same time as emoticons, they make the most of the  
130 fuller character set necessary to write in Japanese, and can be read head-on. They may be as simple as (\*\_\*), or as complex as (ノ◡ノ)/\*:°☆ or ㄟ\_ㄟ.

Oh, and then there's stickers, the custom pictures used in a number of instant messaging clients such as  
135 Facebook Messenger or Line. Some apps refer to them as emoji, but they're fully specific to the app, and can't be cut and paste anywhere else except when they're treated as an image.

With that much variation, is it surprising that people  
140 get a little (◡\_◡) ㄟ\_ㄟ if you confuse :-)) with 😊?







# The deadliest of journeys



*She knew thousands drowned trying to flee war-torn Libya. Yet Ivie, 25, took her young son on an overcrowded voyage across the sea. Here, she tells Julie McCaffrey her traumatic story*

1 When the boat lurched violently and threatened to capsize, I was too scared and exhausted to scream. In my mind, one word repeated:  
5 please. Please, do not let me die like this. Please, after coming so far and risking so much, let me reach safety. I am so close – please, God, help me. I had been on board for 15 hours on a  
10 journey they said would take five. The single-deck wooden boat had no roof, which gave no protection from the sea and left me open to the elements. My skin had a film of water spray, my  
15 hair dripped, my lips stung with salt, and the relentless icy wind cut to my bones.

In front of me, all I could see were the backs of other passengers'   
20 drenched heads. The boat was so overcrowded, we were crammed together, sitting on benches between each other's legs. But my thoughts troubled me more than any physical

25 discomfort. Would my four-year-old son, Chisom, and I drown in this sea, like so many others before us? After five years of trying and failing to find peace for my family, would it all end  
30 here – right now, under the waves?

## Escape to Libya

In Nigeria, my father was a politician, which made my family a target for armed opposition thugs. Before the  
35 election in December 2010, six men came to the house and kidnapped Papa. Seeing him roughed up and dragged away left me more distressed than I'd ever felt. Then the  
40 men came back and tried to pin me to the ground to rape me. I struggled free and screamed for my life.

Before they ran off, they tried to burn down our house and threw  
45 liquid on my body. I saw the skin melting on my arm and realised it was acid. Three women rushed

towards my cries for help and took me to hospital. Left with no family  
50 and no safe home in Nigeria, my husband Joseph planned our escape to Libya.

It's not hard to find out who the people smugglers are, but it was  
55 extremely difficult to find their 6,000 naira (£20) fee, more than a month's wages. We worked in a supermarket and saved what little money we had.

## Locked up

60 Then, in February 2011, we fled in the night, concealed in the back of a dark, hot, fume-filled truck, which took a month to get from Lagos to Tripoli. There were 15 of us in the back of the  
65 truck.

At first, Joseph and I worked as house helps for a rich family in Libya. Life was good: we had food, a bed, and managed to save some money.  
70 Chisom was born and I felt happy



and optimistic for the first time in my adult life.

But in 2013 fighting broke out, and it was so frightening and confusing. You could be grabbed by soldiers just for being in the street, and the constant snap of gunfire was terrifying. I didn't know who was on the good or bad side – everyone was violent.

In September 2014, the police came to the house and, with no explanation, took Joseph away in a van. Then they drove Chisom and me to a private house fortified with metal doors, shuttered windows, and armed guards. No one said what we'd done, or where they were keeping Joseph – I have not seen or heard from him since. The guards told me I owed them US\$1,500 and, if I didn't pay, they'd say I was carrying cocaine. I begged them to be fair, at least for my son's sake and for my unborn baby.

After three months and one week, they let me go. Chisom and I were homeless, penniless, and still in serious danger. But women are very strong and mothers will do anything, anything, to protect their children. I begged in the streets for money towards the boat fare to Europe. But pleading for money is pointless when everyone else has none too.

### Bound for Italy

Then, at 4 a.m. on January 9 last year, I was at the shore begging when I saw a boat leaving – so I ran, as fast as I could, holding Chisom's hand. I

waded out with him on my back and the passengers made room for us.

A man next to me on the boat whispered we were bound for Italy. In Libya, people talk about crossing the Mediterranean quietly but often. They speak of Italy as a place we can work and support our families. They said the waves on the crossing are ten storeys high, but they weren't. Frightening tales are told to put people off getting on the boats, as many have died in the water. But out there on the black water under the night sky, I knew God had a clear view of me, and would decide if I lived or died.

I also knew my second child could be born any moment. Life would be hard for her because I had no money. Nothing. No one had much water or food on board, but I felt so sick from the constant sway I was scared to eat or drink anyway. The bottom of the boat was wet and sticky with vomit. It was not pleasant, but no one complained. No one dared. When a powerful light beamed into our eyes, passengers panicked, jumped to their feet and started pushing each other. That's why the boat suddenly upturned. This time, though, fate was not cruel. The light belonged to Italian rescuers. Chisom was the first to be carried from the boat.

### Freedom

They gave us water and blankets on their warm boat that sailed smoothly and quickly, and the sight of lights on the shore of Sicily made me weep

with relief. Ashore, my legs were weak from the motion of the sea, and from my pregnant belly, which now seemed heavier than ever. It was so wonderful to be on solid ground. Solid, safe ground.

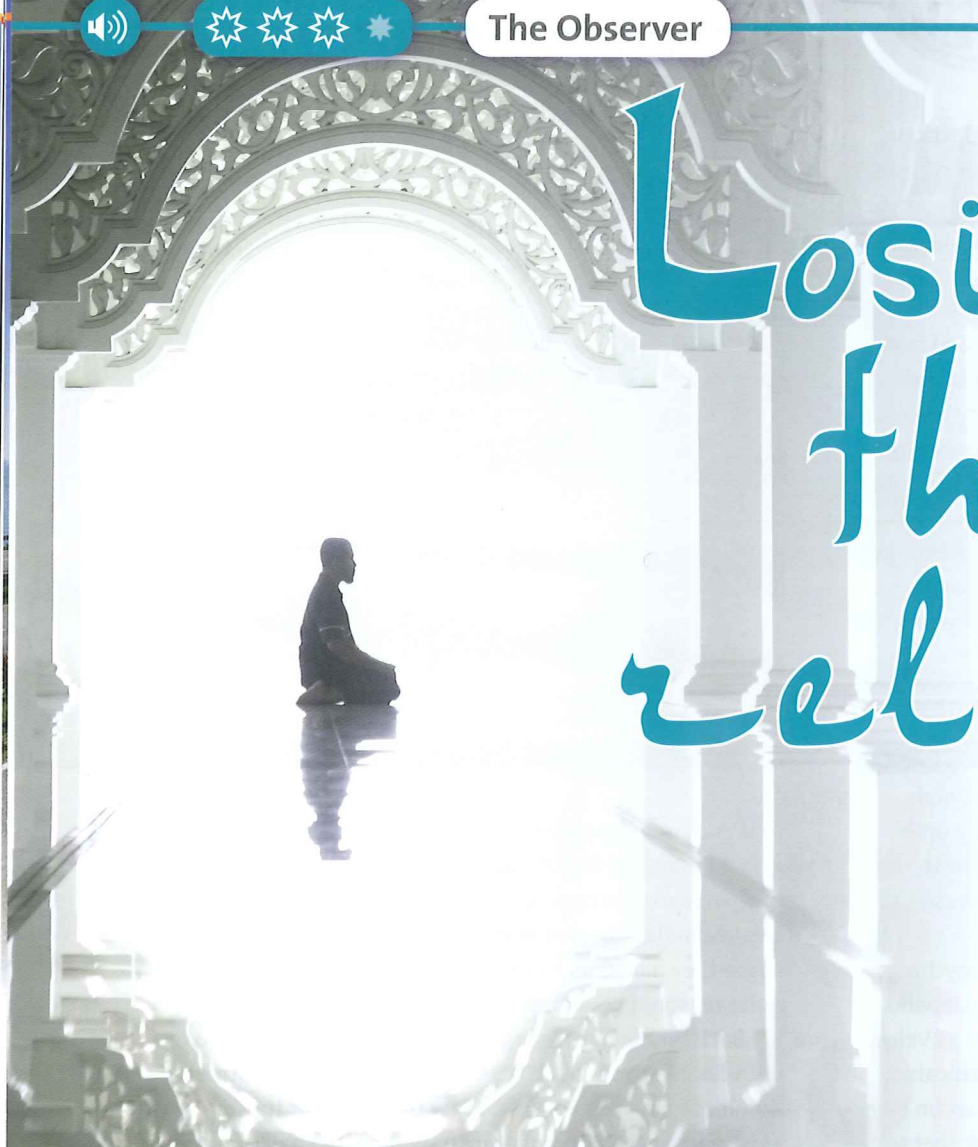
People in bright jackets led us into a big building and doctors checked us before we were taken to rest. Staff asked us to be patient, as there were 1,000 of us. I didn't hear anyone protest – no one had reason to. That night, Chisom and I slept wrapped around each other in our clean bunk bed. My daughter, Nalani, was born five days later. She was welcomed into the world by doctors and showered with love from the other families here.

The people from Save the Children say I'll stay here until my papers are processed. I don't know when that will be, but I have more comfort than I've had in years. They give me a phone card every three days and I desperately call everyone I know to ask if they have news of Joseph and my parents. I have to accept maybe they are dead, and focus on looking after my children.

When I'm allowed to leave, I'll go straight to work in a supermarket and work extremely hard. That's all I've ever wanted to do. I don't want to be a burden. I just want to give my children food, shelter, education, and a chance to reach their potential. Now, whenever I cradle Nalani or hold Chisom's hand, I can say with confidence, 'Everything will be OK. We are safe.' ●







# Losing their religion

***As debate rages over the radicalisation of young British Muslims, are we overlooking a different crisis of faith?***

***Ex-Muslims who dare to speak out are often cut off by their families and fear for their lives. A brave few tell us their stories***

1 Sulaiman Vali is a softly spoken 32-year-old computer engineer. A natural introvert not drawn to controversy or given to making bold statements, he's the kind of person who is happiest in the background. He lives alone in a modest house on a quiet street in a small town in East Northamptonshire. He doesn't want to be any more specific than that about the location. 'If someone found out where I lived,' he explains, 'they could burn my house down.'

Why should such a person, someone who describes himself as a 'nobody', speak as if he's in a

witness protection programme? The answer is that six years ago he decided to declare that he no longer accepted the fundamental tenets of Islam. He stopped being a believing Muslim and became instead an apostate. It's not a term to be lightly adopted. In an era in which British Islamic extremists travel thousands of miles to kill those they deem unbelievers, an apostate's concern for his or her security at home is perhaps understandable.

'Oh yeah, I'm scared,' agrees Nasreen (not her real name), a lively 29-year-old asset manager from

east London who has been a semi-closeted apostate for nine years. 'I'm not so worried about the loonies because it's almost normal now to get threats. What worries me is that they go back to my parents and damage them, because that's not unheard of.'

The danger is confirmed by Imtiaz Shams, an energetic 26-year-old who runs a group called Faith to Faithless, which aims to help Muslim non-believers speak out about their difficult situations. Shams has a visible presence on YouTube and has organised several events at universities. 'I am at physical risk because I do videos,' he says. 'I don't like putting myself in the firing line, but I had to because no one is willing to do it.'

As real as the potential for violence might be, it's not what keeps many doubting British Muslims from leaving their religion. As Simon Cottee, author of a new book *The Apostates: When Muslims Leave Islam*, says, 'In the Western context, the biggest risk ex-Muslims face is not the baying mob, but the loneliness and isolation of ostracism from loved ones.' Muslim apostates have to fight for the right to be recognised while



knowing that recognition brings shame, rejection, intimidation, and, very often, family expulsion.

## Expulsion

70 Vall comes from a strictly religious Indian-heritage family. He was born in Kenya and moved with his parents and six siblings to England when he was 14. As outsiders, his family stayed close. 'I always knew if I wanted anything they'd be there for me,' he says. His father is an imam who follows the puritanical Deobandi scholastic tradition of Islam, which has influence over a third of Britain's mosques. All through his teenage years, when adolescents typically rebel, and even at university, Vall dutifully followed his father's faith.

It was when he left his home in Leicester to work in Cambridge that he first encountered an intellectual challenge to his world view. He found himself working alongside non-Muslims and atheists, and inevitably questions of faith arose. Nevertheless, he kept his reservations to himself when he returned to live in Leicester, where an arranged marriage awaited him. 'She was very religious, from a devout family,' he says, still pained by the memory. But he couldn't go through with it. 'I wasn't going to lie and carry on with a marriage knowing that I didn't believe in God.'

His decision went down very badly. His family would have forgiven him, though, as long as he remained a Muslim. That's all they really asked. And it was the one thing he couldn't do. He was perfectly happy to be a cultural Muslim, take part in celebrations, and observe traditions, but he couldn't pretend a faith he didn't possess.

'This idea of belief,' he says, shaking his head. 'You can't make yourself believe what you don't believe.' So he confessed his atheism to his horrified family.

One of his brothers reminded him that the penalty sharia law stipulates for apostasy is capital punishment.

'I don't think he would have any problems about my being killed,' says Vall, although he emphasises that he doesn't believe anyone from his family would seek to do him physical harm or encourage others to do so. Instead he was expelled from the family.

## Human drama

130 There has been a great deal of public debate in recent years about what drives young Muslims towards radicalisation. It's an urgent subject of study in various disciplines of academia, has resulted in a library of books, and is the focus of well-funded government programmes. What is much less known about, and far less discussed, is the situation of young Muslims going in the opposite direction, those who not only turn away from radicalisation but from Islam itself.

Although it is fraught with human drama, existential crisis, philosophical doubt, family rupture, violent threats, communal expulsion, depression, and all manner of other problems, the apostate's journey elicits remarkably little media interest or civic concern. According to Cottee, there is not 'a single sociological study on the issue of apostasy from Islam'. No one knows what numbers are involved; few understand the psychological difficulties individuals confront or the social pressures they are compelled to resist. As with many other areas of communal discourse, insiders are reluctant to talk about it, and outsiders are either too incurious or sensitive to ask.

Vall has seen his mother just once for a few minutes four years ago. 'She didn't want to touch me,' he says. 'She thought her God would be angry with her if she treated me kindly.'

According to Nasreen, it is perhaps even more difficult for women. 'You're much more visible as a woman. You're conditioned to behave in a certain way with a headscarf. I mean, you're not going to go to a pub with a headscarf, are you?

You're not going to stay out late with a headscarf. It's a form of control.'

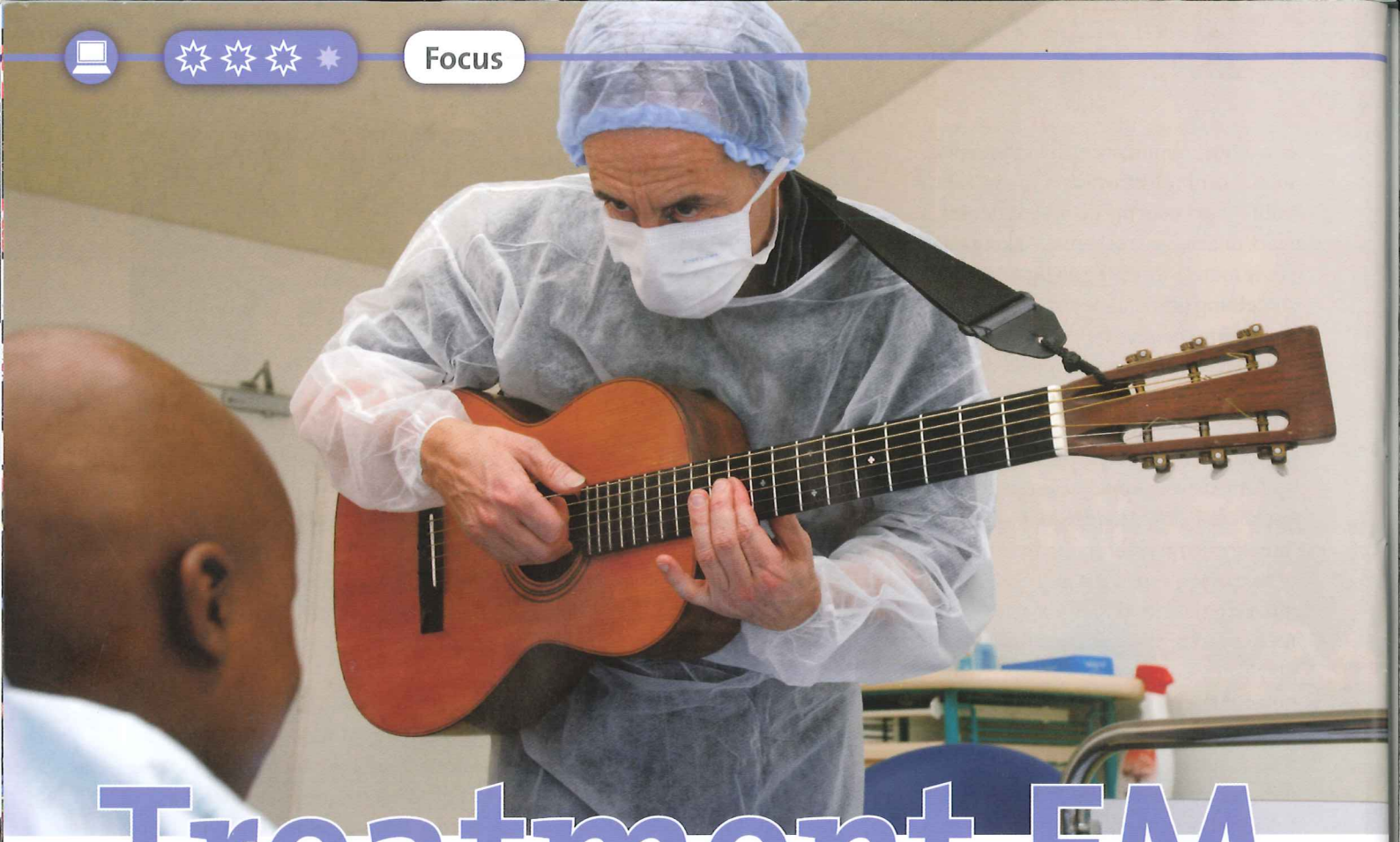
## Human right

It certainly seems perverse that while there is no taboo on the discussion of Islamic radicalisation, the mention of Islamic apostates still occasions widespread discomfort. We can publicly accept that there are Muslims that are so estranged from Western society that they prefer to live as fundamentalists, but have far more trouble recognising that there are Muslims who are so estranged from their religion that they prefer to live as freethinkers.

Nasreen, Vall, and Shams all agreed that it will only be by bringing greater attention to Muslim apostates in British society that their predicament will improve. It would also help, they say, if they could rely on the progressive support that was once the right of freethinkers in this country. 'Attitudes need to change,' says Cottee. 'There has to be a greater openness around the whole issue. And the demonisation of apostates needs to stop. People leave Islam. They have reasons for this, good, bad, or whatever. It is a human right to change your mind. Deal with it.' ●







# Treatment FM

*Music moves us to tears and drives us to dance. But as well as affecting our moods, it can also have a positive impact on our health*

By ZOE CORMIER

1 1 Music is medicinal. You might expect a statement like this to come from someone in a drumming circle, a chanting crystal healer, or a sleazy record-label executive. But the idea that music can be used to heal the mind is increasingly grounded in scientific evidence – not theory.

2 Recent studies show how people 10 coping with Parkinson's can learn to walk more easily when rhythms assist their gait. Other research suggests autistic children find social interactions become easier when 15 accompanied by music, and that less anaesthetic is required when music is played to spinal surgery patients. Perhaps most astoundingly, premature babies gain weight more 20 quickly when they can hear music.

3 Scientific studies – ranging from investigations of the brain at a cellular level, to psychiatric

assessments of schizophrenics, to 25 linguistic scores in stroke patients – are all leading to the same conclusion: music isn't just a form of entertainment, it is evolutionarily significant. And the more we learn 30 about the impact of music on the brain, the more we understand how it can be employed as a therapeutic intervention.

## The power of music

4 35 Perhaps the most familiar notion of the power of music is the claim that listening to Mozart is good for your brain. Nevertheless, that only tells half the story. Listening to classical 40 music (or any kind of music, for that matter) does have quantifiable impacts on aspects of cognition, such as visual puzzle solving. But everything you do – solving puzzles, 45 playing sports, painting landscapes –

has an impact on your brain.

5 However, nothing seems to anatomically, chemically, and beneficially alter your brain the 50 way music can. The grey matter, which is the outer layer of the brain that contains the synapses – the ends of the neurones where signals are relayed – thickens with 55 musical training. Furthermore, the cerebellum, which is the wrinkly bulb at the back of the brain that's crucial for balance, movement, and motor control, is bigger in pianists.

6 60 Neuroscientists have documented many other anatomical changes that come with musical experience, but the most profound is thought to be the fact that the corpus callosum – a 65 band of nerve fibres that connect the left and right hemispheres to each other – thickens. No one is quite sure what helping the two sides of



the brain to communicate with each other accomplishes, but 20 years after this discovery, nobody has found anything else that does this.

What's more, MRI scans and EEG recordings show that playing – or even just listening to – music engages almost every region of the brain. From top to bottom, front to back, every part of the brain is involved in the process. The newest parts of the brain, such as the frontal cortex, which is associated with higher thinking, tune in. Older structures in the middle, such as the hippocampus (crucial for memory formation) and the amygdala (central to fear and emotion), are also stimulated by the sound. As are even older parts of the brain, such as the cerebellum. Even the brainstem, the most prehistoric part, responds to music – but not to spoken language. As far as we know, nothing engages as many parts of the brain as music, which suggests that it might have played an important role in our evolution.

### Lost for words

Not only does music engage parts of the brain that are not stimulated by language, it is possible to be musical and completely non-verbal. Aphasia – the loss of speech comprehension or production – frequently occurs following a stroke and can leave many people unable to speak and thus feeling isolated and depressed. Yet often those who can't speak can still appreciate and create music. The most famous example of this is the Russian composer Vissarion Shebalin (1902–1963), who developed aphasia after a series of strokes. He couldn't speak, yet he could still craft entire symphonies, completing his fifth and final one just three months before his death.

Worldwide, 15 million people suffer strokes every year and speech difficulties are one of the most common outcomes. Therapists in the 1940s began developing a technique known as melodic intonation therapy – using melodies and singing to help stroke victims regain speech. The idea

made sense; after all, young children learn the alphabet through song and 'motherese' – the sing-song language that parents coo to their babies that is found in every culture on Earth.

Music can 1 be used to help patients who have never been able to speak in the first place, such as people with Rett syndrome. 'Because they don't tend to speak at all, we struggle to understand what they may be thinking or feeling,' says Prof Christian Gold of the Grieg Academy Department of Music at the University of Bergen in Norway, whose own research has measured how music stimulates the brainstems of people with Rett syndrome.

### More therapies

Severe impairments such as Rett syndrome are not the only childhood conditions that music therapists target: 12 per cent of clinical work with autistic children in the UK involves music in some way, most commonly in helping them interact with others. 'It makes sense because music is ultimately about social interactions,' says Gold. 'In musical communication, if you improvise with somebody, there are subtle adjustments you have to make when you interact with them. Those social exchanges are the most important part of most forms of music therapy.'

Humans are social creatures that require social contact. Few experiences can be more isolating than the impairments of ageing, so it's not surprising that this is one

of the oldest and most established areas of research in music therapy.

Take, for example, the tremors and mobility problems that come with Parkinson's: 'People with disorders that cause tremors tend to fall. Though medication can help with the tremors, there is little that can be done to help them regain the ability to walk,' says Prof Simone Dalla Bella from the University of Montpellier.

With metronomes and percussive instruments, he studies how melodic gait therapy can help Parkinson's sufferers walk more steadily. Similar to the way that soldiers learn to march to a drumbeat, Parkinson's sufferers can improve their walking with the help of a rhythm.

This brings us back to what music, ultimately, is: a form of social navigation via sound. As it involves so many ancient brain regions, and can be used in so many therapeutic ways, is music something we are 'hardwired' for? 'I used to think so, but the more I learn about music, the more I think it's not something we inherited: I think it is an invention. Yes, our brains are pre-programmed to be able to produce music. But music didn't make us – we made it,' says psychologist Dr Victoria Williamson of the University of Sheffield. 'We began making music because it fulfilled so many useful purposes: communication, social bonding, teamwork, sexual attraction. It's a ball we just can't put down. This is the best invention we ever came up with.' ●

