

# THARUNKA

Issue 01

# vulnerability

Locked out /  
Locked down /  
What now?

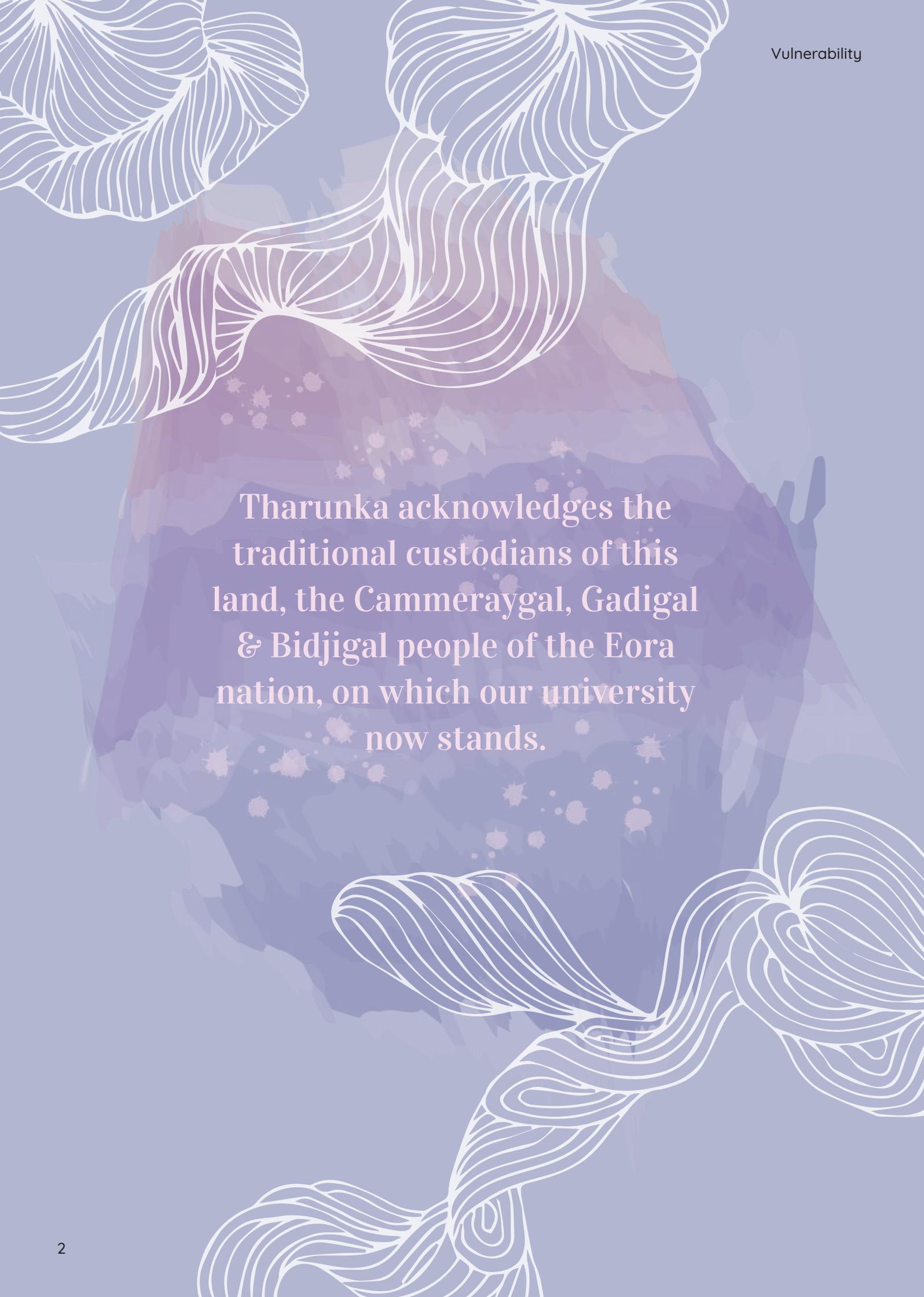
p.22

Australian Climate  
Policy Dragged Kicking  
and Screaming

p.26

The Boba Generation:  
A Portrait of Asian  
Australian Youth Culture

p.48



Tharunka acknowledges the traditional custodians of this land, the Cammeraygal, Gadigal & Bidjigal people of the Eora nation, on which our university now stands.

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# Welcome to Tharunka!

## What is Tharunka?

### Tharunka is UNSW's longest-running and spiciest student publication.

While we started as a student newspaper, we have since expanded our scope to include different styles of art and writing that capture the UNSW student experience.

In our issues, you'll see student opinion, personal reflections, comics, digital art, short stories, and poetry. And on our website, you'll find our juiciest articles, including student journalism, university critiques, current affairs, and political and cultural opinions. Like our Facebook page and follow us on Instagram (@tharunkaunsw) to stay updated.

## Interested in Contributing?

Is there anything you think the university should change? What makes you angry about the world? What is going on right now that everyone needs to hear about?

Tharunka is edited, designed, and written by students, so we thrive on student submissions. If you're interested in contributing to Tharunka's journalism and opinion section, or just looking for an outlet for your creative non-fiction, art, essays, poems, stories, reviews, or anything else that comes to mind, send a two-sentence pitch about your idea to:

tharunka@arc.unsw.edu.au.

## We're fully digital! Find us on:



Tharunka.com



@tharunkaunsw



Tharunka  
Contributors 2021

## Tip-Offs

Do you know about something that UNSW students need to hear about? Perhaps you have intel on a particular society or college? Maybe you work at the university and the administration is about to announce a big change?

Whatever it is, we would love to investigate. If you have any leads, let us know by scanning the QR code below, which will take you to an anonymous form.

## Volunteer Opening: Tharunka Reporters

If you want to get further involved with Tharunka, or if you're looking for an opportunity to gain experience in the media industry, build your portfolio, and develop your writing and editing skills; we are looking for volunteer reporters to join our team. Specifically, we want writers with a nose for current affairs, culture, and campus news.

In this role you would chase leads and write stories on the latest news, interview fascinating people from across UNSW and Sydney, contribute ideas for Tharunka's direction, and attend weekly meetings with our talented and welcoming crew of editors and designers. You will also receive AHEGS accreditation for your work.

If you are interested in becoming a reporter, scan this QR code and fill out the Volunteer Reporter Application form by 11:59pm Sunday 18th April.

Have questions about the role? Email us at [tharunka@arc.unsw.edu.au](mailto:tharunka@arc.unsw.edu.au)



## Scan the QR Code:

Submit your Tip-off  
for a Tharunka story

Apply for Tharunka  
Reporter role

# Dear Reader...



**Katherine Wong**

*Managing Editor*

It's a cliché to say, but 2020 was a hard year for all of us.

Like a riptide, it pulled us far from what we knew, into the depths of uncertainty, where we were helplessly drowning in wave after wave of anxiety, surrounded by unknown waters.

But, as we move into 2021, the shore has come back into sight. Vaccine distribution has begun, the economy is starting to stabilise, and UNSW is open. It's a weird period where we are returning to normalcy with a new sense of vulnerability from all the trials we faced before.

And this is the theme that runs throughout our first issue. Throughout the publication you'll see reflections and stories about lockdown, scathing critiques of government inaction, illuminating art on self-consciousness, and more.

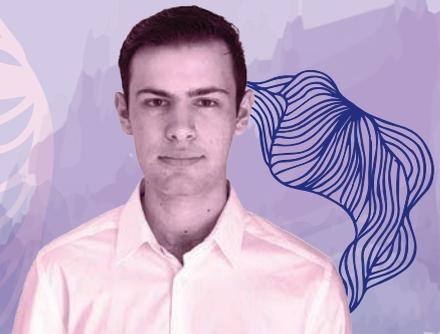
I hope this issue prompts you to reflect on your own vulnerabilities, to think about them in a new light; not as a burden, but as a starting point to launch into something new.



**Nadia Maunsell**  
Features & Creatives Editor

Working alongside the writers who have contributed to Tharunka's first edition of 2021 has been a privilege but also an experience that foregrounded my own vulnerabilities as an editor. I want to thank them all for trusting that I would do their work justice. They each navigated deeply personal realms of loss, liberation and their individual hopes for the future, as well as their desire to see vulnerability mobilised for wide-reaching change. It is this collective vision that I hope feeds and nourishes our readers, allowing them to partake in its healing effects. Ultimately, carving out space for our vulnerabilities is the cornerstone of any good writing, so I hope you enjoy reading these stories as much as I relished editing them.

Vulnerability is part of the human experience. It can appear in different shades, at different stages, and impact each one of us in unique ways. Vulnerability is often stigmatised as a sign of weakness or suffering; my hope is that the various articles, pieces, and essays contained within this issue can help change that view. Social pressures encourage people to mask their vulnerabilities. In such a world, it becomes incredibly difficult for individuals to expose themselves to society's harsh gaze. Through speaking in unison; about mental health, climate change, sexual assault, and racism – anything becomes possible. I hope this edition of Tharunka becomes a grain of sand in a sandstorm, and through reading it, you will become one too.



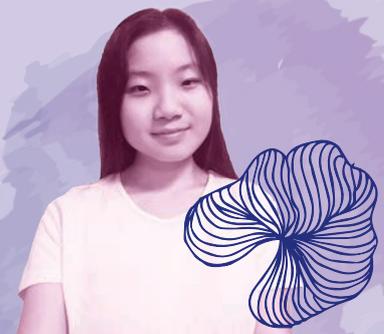
**Guy Suttner**  
News & Online Editor



**Ryan Jepson**  
Multimedia Editor

We are all still recovering from a year of isolation, which has left us vulnerable to this post-lockdown world. And although we are still learning to navigate this new Australia, there is comfort in knowing that finally we have some solid ground beneath our feet. As of 2021, there is now a physical space we can ascribe to our learning. A campus to walk on; a place to celebrate individuality with other real, authentic humans. There has never been a better time to seize this opportunity to safely explore our vulnerabilities, as showcased by the talented writers and artists who have generously shared their vulnerabilities in this edition of Tharunka.

The word "vulnerability" is often synonymous with images of weakness, exploitation and ruin. But vulnerability is much more than simply being physically defenceless. I think it means having the courage to express ourselves, to embrace uncertainty, to make mistakes, to empathise with others, to be seen or heard. Rather than equating vulnerability to feelings of shame or unworthiness, we should be redefining it as a prerequisite for empowerment. On this note, thank you to all the talented writers and artists who have shared their own vulnerabilities through their works, and for making this 2021 first print issue possible. Also, massive shout-out to **Roni Kwan** for the amazing illustrations!



**Stephanie Ung**  
Graphic Designer

# SRC President's Report

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by Tom Kennedy

To all new and returning students, welcome (back) to UNSW! Whether you're studying online or in person, in Australia or overseas, the SRC is here to advise, support and represent you. Please get in touch with us if you would like independent and confidential advice or assistance with anything uni-related, including enrolment, student fees, academic appeals, misconduct allegations, emergency support, and more.

## About the SRC

The SRC is the democratically elected representative body on campus for all students. Alongside providing direct advice and support to students, we represent student interests through large-scale campaigns and advocacy around broad issues at university. Some of the most recent things we have done include successfully pushing for the establishment of Flexibility Week, a full week of Stuvac in Week 11, expanded Special Consideration, and an expansion of UNSW's Counselling and Psychological Services. If you have any issues at UNSW, no matter how big or small, we are more than happy to help.

## Get Involved

We have SRC spaces around campus where you can relax, study, and socialize. These include the Welfare/Disabilities Room, Women's Room, Ethnocultural Room and the Queerspace. You are more than welcome to come and relax in the SRC spaces, and you can find out how to access these rooms on our website.

We also have collectives, which I would highly encourage you to join.

## SRC General Report

The SRC Collectives, led by their respective office bearers and the councillors, have strived to start on an equitable platform and will be running several campaigns and workshops in 2021.

## Women's Collective

The Women's Collective has aimed to make 2021 safer and responsive to the rights and requirements of women on campus. The current social climate has paved the way for change that the women's collective will be furthering through Reclaim the Night Sydney 2021, safety campaigns and, raising emergency and support packs for students.

## Welfare Collective

The Welfare Collective has aimed to tackle food instability amongst young people, especially university students. We will be running free breakfast in the coming months to support students on campus. The collective is also working on improving campus security responses and ensuring all members of the student body feel safe and secure.

## Queer Collective

The Queer Collective wants to remind students to remember what queer activists, especially BIPOC and trans/gender non-conforming activists, have sacrificed and accomplished. We ask you to foreground this acknowledgment no matter how you choose to celebrate Queer History and Pride, and being supportive allies.

## Environment Collective

The SRC Environment Collective advocates for climate justice, while fighting against fossil fuel corporations and the government. We collaborate with other groups on and off campus to take direct action, mobilize for large scale climate action, and promote education around the climate crisis in the UNSW community. We are a non-hierarchical space that welcomes and values new voices. The Environment Collective is also an active group: with weekly meetings and fortnightly reading groups, and social events on Tuesday at 4 pm on even weeks.

## Education Collective

The UNSW Education Collective is a democratic body of activists and volunteers seeking to improve education for students and staff at UNSW and across Australia. We are campaigning, with an on-campus presence, against the recent cuts in Staff and in Education funding to ensure a high quality education that's accessible to all students.

## Collective Meeting Times

**Welfare Collective:** Wednesday 2-3pm on Zoom

**Education Collective:** Friday 3-4pm on Zoom and in Goldstein G01

**Women's Collective:** Friday 2-3pm on Zoom

**Ethnocultural Collective:** Wednesday 12-1pm on Zoom

**Enviro Collective:** Wednesday 2-3pm in Matthews Building CATS Room 226

**Students with Disabilities Collective:** Wednesday 4-5pm on Zoom

**Indigenous Collective:** Friday 2-3pm on Zoom

**Queer Collective:** Thursday 1-2pm on Zoom

**International Students Collective:** Meeting times TBA



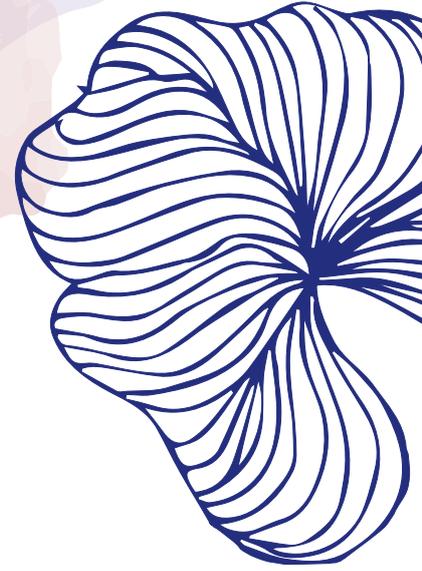
# PGC President's Report

by Jerry Ofor



## Hey UNSW Postgraduates!

The 2021 UNSW Postgraduate Council (PGC) welcomes all returning and new postgraduate students to UNSW for 2021. This year is a big one for PGC as we are passionate about our representation and increasing the level of transparency between the operations of PGC and the student community. So be ready to take advantage of the numerous support and services that PGC has to offer as well as many events that will be hosted by all office bearers throughout the 3 terms.



## About the PGC

The Postgraduate Council is the student representative body of all postgraduate and research students at UNSW. The PGC collaborate with UNSW, Arc and external stakeholders to actively support the postgraduate student community with the aim to uplift, provide information, support, and advice on issues that affect postgraduate students. As such, we support all kinds of postgraduates including:

- Research and coursework students
- International students
- Mature age students
- Students with family

The Postgraduate Council comprises of elected office bearers and Councillors. Visit our newly renovated Postgraduate lounge located right next to Arc Reception (Basser steps). The lounge includes a study, kitchen, and entertainment space just for you. To gain access all you need to do is to activate your student ID card at Arc Reception. The Lounge is a very comfortable and relaxing space that is fully stocked with a Nespresso coffee machine, bar fridge and plenty of snacks and drinks for you to enjoy. We want PGC to be for everyone: to create a lively, enjoyable and beneficial student experience that you'll always remember.

## What's on for Term 1-3

### PGC Ambassadors Program

The Postgraduate Council is proud to announce the formation of 11 committees for postgraduates who wish to experience first-hand what it is like at the Council, contribute to the delivery of PGC events, and gain valuable leadership experience. These committees are the building blocks of the PGC, and we want you to join. For more details and to apply, visit our PGC website. The committees include:

- Career Development and Women in STEM
- Educational, Health, Wellness & Community Programs
- Human Resources and Administration
- International Students Engagement
- Marketing, Editorial & Media
- Networking and Alumni
- PGC Events
- PGC Research
- Sponsorship and Finance
- Sport



## PGC Ambassador of the Month

The Postgraduate Council has launched its Ambassador of the Month series. Every month, this award acknowledges students who have significantly contributed to the enhancement of the UNSW postgraduate student experience in academia, social life, health and wellbeing. Awardees will be featured in Arc's PGC Newsletter and on the PGC website.

## 2021 Inaugural PGC Monthly Newsletter

The entire team at PGC and Arc @ UNSW are so excited to deliver monthly updates, information and resources directly to your inbox. The PGC newsletter is a chance for you to hear about what we're doing at the PGC.

## Arc PGC Ambassador and Course Coordinator Award 2021

The Arc PGC Ambassador and Course Co-ordinator of the Year Award will celebrate and recognise the outstanding contributions of master's students and Course Co-ordinators. Many Master's students and Course Co-ordinators have been great ambassadors and volunteers for UNSW, providing a vibrant and dynamic atmosphere for all students and staff. The Postgraduate Council is proud to celebrate the achievements of these outstanding students. This award will be given in conjunction with the Office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Education Experience. Their work will be celebrated in an award ceremony and a digital certificate will be presented on behalf of PGC and Arc by the Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor.

## The Research Student and Supervisor Awards

This is a flagship PGC event that is held in partnership with the support of the Graduate Research School (GRS). The PGC Supervisor Awards recognises supervisors who display exemplary supervisory behaviour, and to acknowledge their efforts in supervising research students. The PGC Research Student Awards recognises Higher Degree Research candidates who help to create a lively research environment and supportive social atmosphere among the student cohort. All awards are presented to successfully nominated supervisors and students at a reception ceremony. 30 supervisors and 20 students were awarded last year out of over more than 140 applications from both categories.

## Regular and monthly events

The PGC is completely changing how we engage with postgraduate students. Regular events that unite the postgraduate community are as follows:

- PGC Drop-in session (at Postgraduate Lounge)
- PGC Networking, Wine and Cheese Night
- Virtual Education series
- Virtual Games Night
- Monthly Movie Night
- Dance with Milli
- PGC Zodiac Coffee Catch up

## To stay updated

As always, feel free to contact any of the PGC members through social media, via email, or email the President's Office directly at: [Pgcpresident@arc.unsw.edu.au](mailto:Pgcpresident@arc.unsw.edu.au). The PGC also have a suggestion box available in the kitchen area inside the Postgraduate Lounge where you can give us anonymous suggestions or feedback.

## Key action points:

1. Check out of the PGC website for information on all PGC Committees and how to apply
2. Make sure you like us on Facebook and Instagram
3. Register with Arc to receive our monthly PGC Newsletter
4. Activate your student ID card to gain access to the Postgraduate Lounge
5. Attend our weekly drop-in sessions at the Postgraduate Lounge

## Important Links

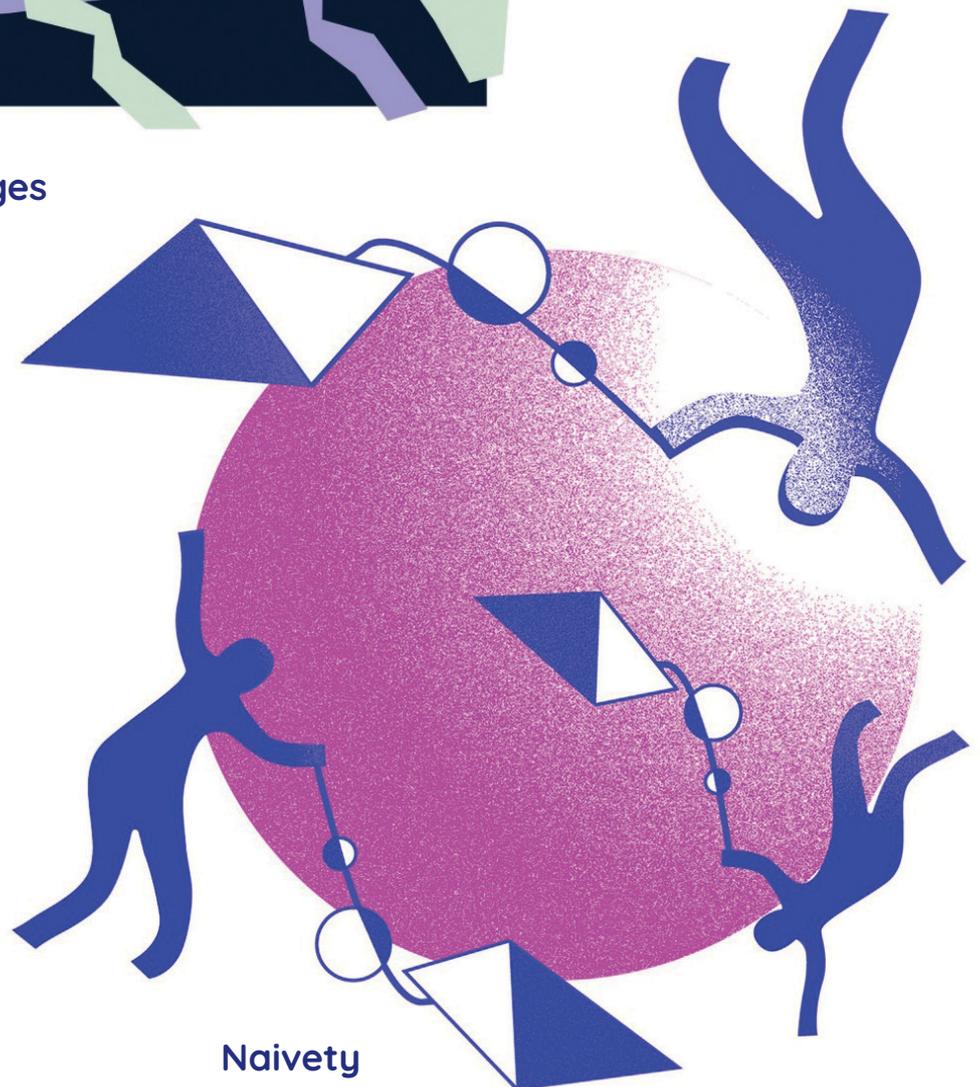
- **Website:** [arc.unsw.edu.au/voice/pgc](http://arc.unsw.edu.au/voice/pgc)
- **Ambassador Program:** [arc.unsw.edu.au/voice/pgc/ambassadors](http://arc.unsw.edu.au/voice/pgc/ambassadors)
- **Monthly Newsletter:** [arc.unsw.edu.au/voice/pgc/pgc-newsletter](http://arc.unsw.edu.au/voice/pgc/pgc-newsletter)
- **Upcoming Events:** [arc.unsw.edu.au/voice/pgc/events](http://arc.unsw.edu.au/voice/pgc/events)
- **Facebook:** [facebook.com/unswpgc](https://facebook.com/unswpgc)
- **Instagram:** [instagram.com/unswpgc](https://instagram.com/unswpgc)



Cycles



Dark Ages

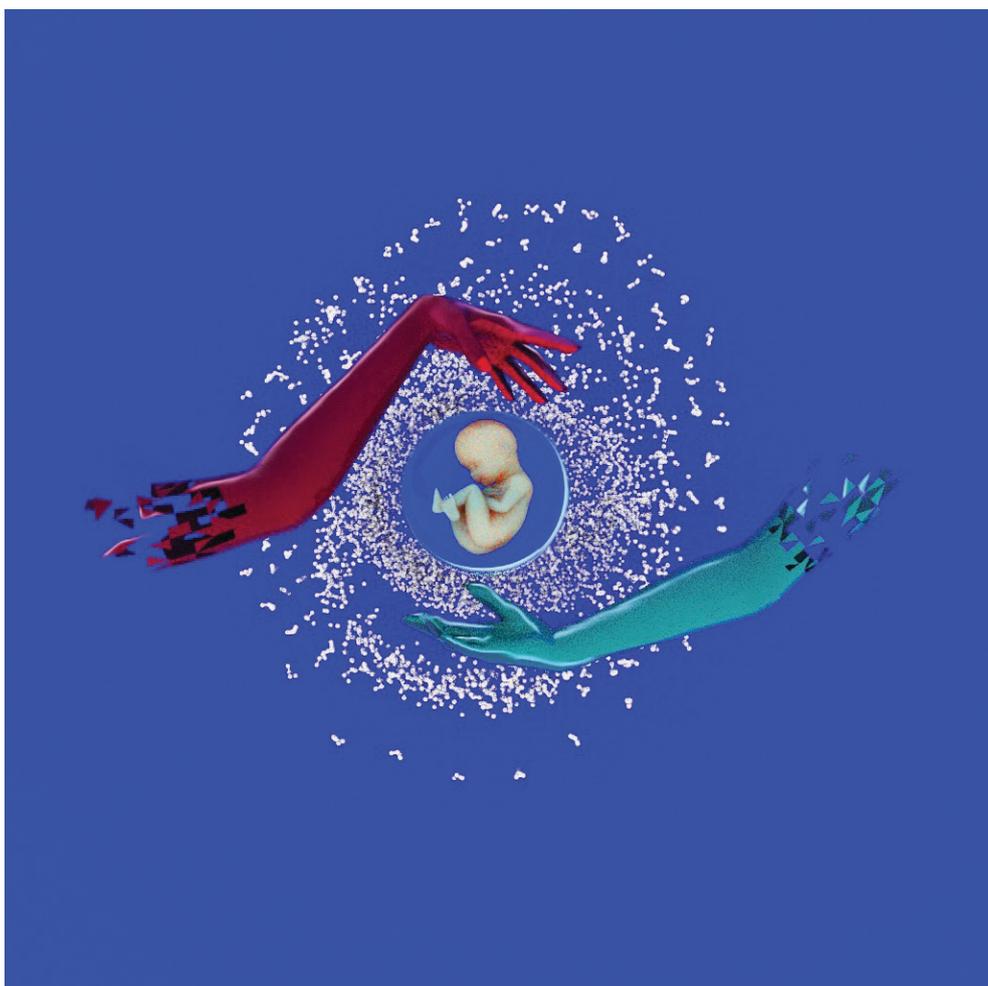


Naivety

Cycles



Discovery



Enlightenment





I'll just do what I always do: listen to music, watch some videos, read or draw. Even though I can't stand them anymore.



Because they have their own lives outside of mine.

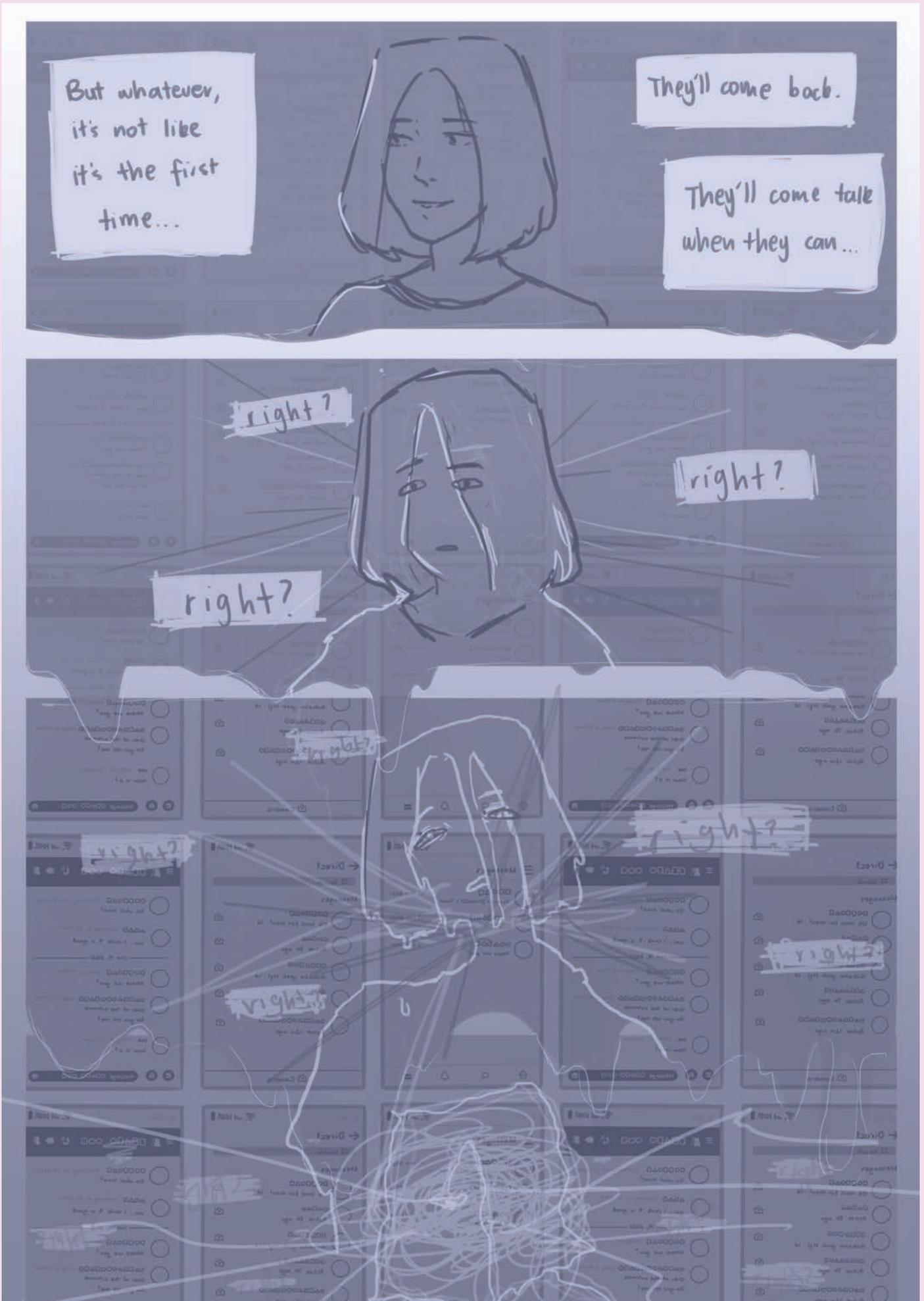
And as much as I want to hold onto them, I shouldn't.

Though... a reply would be nice...

Just one

or two

or several.





# Mememes, Misogyny and Medusa (and other Classic Tales of Twitter Trolls)

by Isobel Golding

*mimēma* 'that which is imitated'

*A Greek word taking on a classic trend of incorporating memorable tales of terror and distraction.*

Western culture has a long-standing issue with strong women. Portraying women as strong often results in painting them as the villain to man, such as the iconic Medusa, an antagonist from Greek mythology. This has been seen throughout modern western history, and as the wealth and the availability of political imagery have grown, thanks to the likes of Twitter and Instagram, this has only been expedited.

Mememes are a symbol of the values of the community they are shared in. The humble UNSW bin chicken holds no significance to those who do not have any knowledge or value in the shared understanding of its origins. Yet for many mememes, especially those aimed to be a mockery of those in the public eye, the shared understanding of its origins holds less significance; simply a vague idea of the tone is all that must be communicated. In particular, imagery, allusions and themes are taken from classics and blended into modern-day shitposts, politically persuasive mememes and public discourse - most prominently about women and leadership, and the simple dichotomies of good and bad.

The original mythology of Medusa<sup>i</sup>, an infamous character who has been reimagined in modern interpretations, was a beautiful mortal who served alongside the Goddess of knowledge and wisdom, Athena, and vowed to remain a virgin while serving Athena. However, she had an illicit affair with the god Poseidon and when Athena discovered this, cursed her by taking away her beauty. Her beautiful hair turned to snakes and her face became so ugly that whoever looked at her would turn to stone. Later on, the Greek hero Perseus retrieves her head as a gift for King Polydectes. Perseus beheading Medusa<sup>ii</sup> has become an iconic image from mythology and has since been reimagined throughout modern history as a representation of man's supposed power over women.

The essay-manifesto **Women and Power**<sup>iii</sup> highlights the connection between classics and modern online commentary. 'The first recorded example of a man telling a woman to shut up', Beard explains in the first chapter, 'is Telemachus telling Penelope in Homer's Odyssey that her voice is not to be heard in public' connecting this with how women in the public light, especially those prominent on social media, are treated compared to their male counterparts. Her analysis exposes how the mechanisms used to silence women online are inherently a part of western culture and can be traced back to the ideas and themes of the classics.



The use of these characters and ideas to vilify publicly disliked entities, whether that be national enemies or online personalities, has a wrought history in mythology yet continues to be valuable to current social ideas. The example above shows 'The Contrast', which immortalises the religious, moral and national prosperity of Britain, shown through the imagery of justice and military and naval power. This is directly contrasted to that of France, which is embodied in a reinterpretation of Medusa, a villainous murderer who is innately associated with national ruin. These themes from the 18th century continue today, highlighting the continuous use of Medusa's storyline as a tool to create division and public hatred towards the latest public villain.

## SOURCES

- <sup>i</sup> Brittany Garcia, "Medusa," World History Encyclopedia, accessed March 3, 2021. <https://www.ancient.eu/Medusa/>.
- <sup>ii</sup> "Medusa in Ancient Greek Art," The Met, accessed February 28, 2021. [https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/medu/hd\\_medu.htm](https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/medu/hd_medu.htm).
- <sup>iii</sup> Mary Beard, *Women and Power* (London: Profile Books, 2017).
- <sup>iv</sup> "The Contrast," The British Museum, accessed February 26, 2021. [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P\\_J-4-50](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_J-4-50).
- <sup>v</sup> Douglas Haddow, "Meme warfare: how the power of mass replication has poisoned the US election," *The Guardian*, November 4, 2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/nov/04/political-memes-2016-election-hillary-clinton-donald-trump>.
- <sup>vi</sup> Joel B. Pollack, "The Naked Hillary Clinton Statues You've Never Seen – And Lived to Tell," *Breitbart*, August 21, 2016. <https://www.breitbart.com/local/2016/08/21/naked-hillary-clinton-statues-youve-never-seen/>.
- <sup>vii</sup> "Violent Misogyny, white nationalism, and anti-Clinton apparel." *Pharos*, accessed March 1, 2021. <https://pages.vassar.edu/pharos/2018/01/18/antiquity-in-support-of-violent-misogyny-in-anti-clinton-apparel/>.

The 2016 US election saw this exemplified like never before. The political influence of images has always been a contributing factor in who people vote for, yet the culmination of mass-produced political memes, often incorporating classical mythology, increased consumption of media online. The 2016 elections heavily featured mythology and ideas from the classics, such as the recurring image of the two candidates, Donald Trump and Hilary Clinton, portrayed as Perseus and Medusa which lent into the 'nasty woman' characterisation of Medusa. These ideas, which thrive on a fast understanding, not a good understanding, and a lack of background information have the potential to undermine the general understanding of the complicated topic<sup>v</sup>. The misuse of age-old stories to do so has also misguided the general understanding of the mythology itself.

Conservative political commentator Joel Pollack, when examining the rise in naked Trump statues throughout the US in 2016, commented 'No – the reason that no naked Hillary Clinton statues have appeared in public – thankfully! – is simply that anyone who saw them would instantly turn to stone.'<sup>vi</sup> The direct reference to Medusa refers to the evil quality of the mythological figure and highlights the social value of beauty both in antiquity and in contemporary politics.

The process of reimagining classical characters as modern public figures might seem to be an over-exaggeration of a cultural phenomenon, of reading 'too far' into memes and political cartoons as an influential way of communicating. However, this modern reinterpretation of mythologies brings ideals and values of an ancient society to our modern society, it devalues women and their power to that of a villainous status. As such, Western societies have successfully vilified powerful women, from the classical Roman mythologies to modern Twitter trolls, consistently silencing women through shame.

# Processing Grief Through a Zoom Screen

by Ava Lacon-Robinson

*Reflections from the night of February 18th  
2021 on my bedroom floor*

Tonight, I went to my fifth zoom funeral in the past six months. It was for a loved one I lost to COVID-19 in the United Kingdom. When I ended the call on the fourth funeral, I thought it would be my last. But it is only getting worse. I had to watch as one of my parents mourned their father and also their best friend through a television screen in our lounge room within half a year.

At my workplace, I deal with customers lecturing me about masks, trying to convince me that this pandemic is a hoax. But I know they think that because they are the lucky ones. They have not had the traumatic experience of watching livestreams of their friends and family crying, unable to sit on the pews with them and hold their hands. Because if they did, they would not argue with a retail worker over basic public safety.

Last year, my mum created a beautiful shrine in our kitchen to all the people we have lost in an attempt to grieve properly. We have now had to adorn two tables, each with pictures, lit candles and burning incense. We are clutching at straws for any comfort in rituals. Our beloved friend, who has also just passed, encouraged my family to collect the ash from the incense we burned for my grandfather and scatter it into the sea.

This is not something I would wish on my worst enemy. No one should have to rely on the Internet as their only connection to closure and grieving. There is no time to be filled with warmth while sharing memories of the deceased. When the live feed is cut, you are once again reminded that you are sitting on the floor of your home, left with nothing but damp tissues.

“  
**No one should  
have to rely on the  
Internet as their  
only connection  
to closure and  
grieving.**”

Throughout the service you find yourself translating your grief into frustration and anger towards the other people viewing via zoom. You are infuriated that people could be so inconsiderate as to forget to mute themselves, and block the only sound channel from the live cast of the ceremony. You find yourself agitated because you can see another person is lying down on their bed eating snacks, something which feels inherently disrespectful to the grieving family. It's an internal battle and incredibly wrong to judge each other's grieving processes, especially in a traumatic time. I hate that I found myself enraged at an 80-year-old woman for forgetting to mute her microphone. How is she meant to function when she is mourning her childhood best friend without anyone to provide her physical touch or comfort? I know this because my grandmother is in the process of mourning her husband of 30 years alone. Everyone is too worried to visit her, infect her and potentially lose her too. It is a tug of war between comfort in the present and preventing another funeral in the future; its gruesome but it's what runs through all our minds.

**It is a tug of war between comfort in the present and preventing another funeral in the future...**

In England right now, the government only permits thirty people to attend a funeral, or less for those who died from complications as a result of COVID-19. I have been privy to many conversations of family members trying to decide who is the 'most' deserving to attend a mutual loved one's funeral. Funerals are limited to no more than forty minutes. It is hard to avoid the guilt of cutting the celebration of a loved one's life short, as COVID-19 did the same to them.

There were so many deaths in the UK, that on the 18th of February 2021, the national health service listed COVID-19 as the cause of passing on 361 death certificates that day. When I talk to my friends in the UK, many of them have experienced the same losses. But no one in Australia seems to understand the everyday reality and anxiety of having loved ones in the UK.

It's scary thinking about the future and when my next zoom funeral will be. Who else won't be at the airport gate when I eventually go back to the UK, if I ever do?



Ava is a 2nd year Fine Arts/Arts student, who dips her toes in creative direction, styling, photography and writing when she isn't running around fulfilling her duties as the 2021 UNSW Queer Officer. If you need her, you'll likely find her at a drag shown on Oxford street on a Thursday.

Follow the author on Instagram @avalacoon

# Locked Out Locked Down What Now?

*An independent muso's take on where Sydney could be headed*

by Isobel Knight

When I tell people I'm a musician, the general response is laconic, sympathetic sarcasm; "You must have had a fun 2020." According to data from the Australia Council for the Arts<sup>1</sup>, 81% of arts workers are gig-based. By March 23rd last year, gigs were danger-zones and 50% of arts businesses had stopped trading entirely. In tandem with the federal government's merger of the arts portfolio with transport (of all things), morale has, from my limited surveillance, been rather low across arts communities.

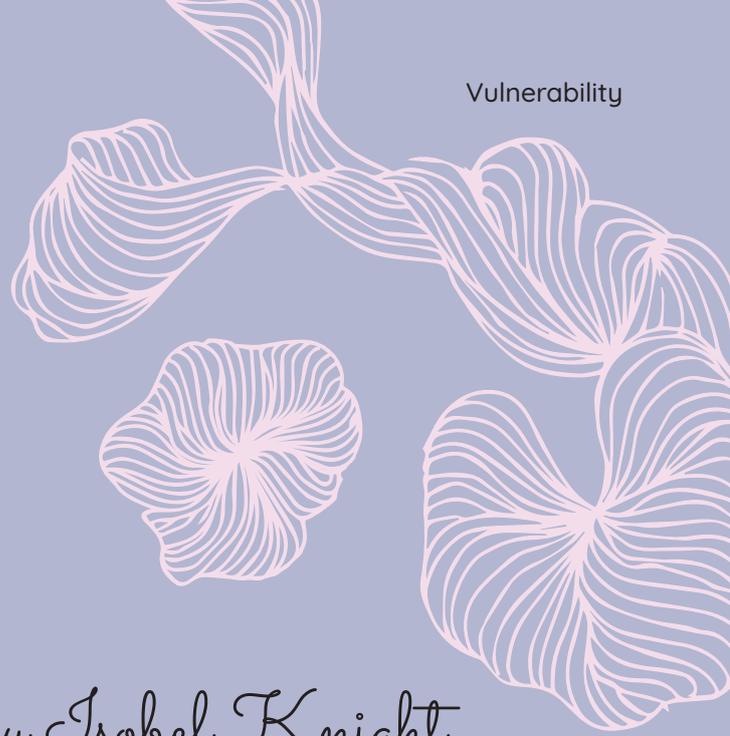
This comes for Sydney musicians after five years of lockout laws. Access Economics data<sup>2</sup> reveals that within this period, more than 270 venues closed. Foot traffic decreased by 20-40% in the city, and a whopping 80% in the Cross. In a concurrent but purely anecdotal turn, a number of my Sydney musician friends moved to Melbourne because they simply could not make a living in this city.

A bit of doom and gloom, lighting a candle for all that was lost, even if it's as frivolous as gigs in the midst of a global pandemic, is warranted.

It's also worth saying that the previous music landscape in Sydney was not at its most thriving nor inclusive peak. People were making cool stuff because diverse collections of people in concentrated space do that. But in the wake of the lock-outs and subsequent closures, it was hard to get in the cycle of getting booked, and the existing structural barriers for artists with disabilities, queer artists, artists who are BIPOC, and women, were amplified. It seemed like more people saw stadium shows than a band in their local bar.

Then corona happened. Continues to happen.

So what now?



Well, in keeping with my family's diagnosis that I have a severe case of optimism, I think there's huge potential for something good. It has felt extra precious to be in the room with other people while art happens. It misses the point entirely to place a monetary value on being able to commune over what is true, painful, happy, loving or awful about the world and our lives in it.

This can look a bunch of ways; I loved seeing Taylor Swift with 15,000 other people because it's exhilarating to dance and scream while fireworks go off. I love when my friend reads me her poetry from her phone. I love when a band I've never heard of shakes dust from the roof beams at the Vanguard, or when someone at a Sappho's open mic night plays "Zombie" again.

Stadiums won't return to full capacity for a long time, but small venues have been booking bands safely since last July. We can now have 50 people over to our houses. There has always been an abundance of gorgeous outdoor spaces and the presence of summer-adjacent weather that can stretch into May; the opportunity for a DIY revolution in Sydney is palpable. Investing in truth-telling in all its forms as we live through a globally traumatic event is arguably what will save us from being destroyed by it. The repression of pain, and falling back into systems that only invest time, energy and funds into that which gets labelled "economically reliable" is both dangerous and has been proven, especially in the past year, to be founded on a lie.

Something that recurred for me last year was a manifesto poster from the 1970's (and I know how that sounds). The Bread and Puppet Glover is a group of performers who put on shows and fed their audience in Vermont. In fact, they still do shows. Back then, they were responding to both the hardship caused by the stock market crash of that era, and to the commercialisation of art. The basic gist is summarised in two lines that I think about defensively every time someone recommends personal branding workshops: "Good art is cheap!" and "Art is the inside of the world!". It then proclaims that art sings hallelujah, feeds the hungry even if it is not food, and comforts the downtrodden.

**Investing in truth-telling in all its forms as we live through a globally traumatic event is arguably what will save us from being destroyed by it.**

This may sound overly idealistic because art scenes are still made of people who bring all the selfishness and power that comes with their positions of privilege. You could dismiss all of this as philosophising from a person who read Patti Smith's book "Just Kids" twice last year and is still lost in the image of her and Robert Mapplethorpe putting on art shows in hotel rooms and playing first gigs in church halls.

But doesn't Sydney have its fair share of old church halls and poets finding their voices? Don't we have people who want to explore love, sex and change? Is it such an idealistic stretch of the imagination that one of the few cities in the world where it is (comparatively) safe for people to gather together might lean into the things that make being alive and together not only fathomable but maybe even fun?

There are many groups and organisations that seem poised and ready to invest in a new era for Sydney and its arts. I sincerely hope we're ready too. If you haven't, I really recommend just dipping your toe in; going to see something, or hosting music/theatre/art at your place or in your space. You might be bored, or unimpressed at some points. That's to be expected. But you also might get to see Sydney become a city that truly breeds artists. You might get a glimpse of the inside of the world.

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Follow the author here:  
 Spotify: Isobel Knight  
 Facebook @IsobelKnightMusic  
 Instagram @knightizz.



I study a double Bachelor's Degree of Communications (Journalism) and International Studies (Development Studies), and also spend a lot of my time making embarrassingly earnest folk-rock. I volunteer with young people and could talk forever about politics, music and amateur theatre.

# Hope You're Well

by Thao Pham

It was another late night. The glare of the streetlights spilled from the edges of my blinds and, just outside, a cricket chirped away. The most unsettling part of all of this was the absence of joyful music, roars of celebration, and Vietnamese karaoke - but at least it showed that the community was following health orders.

Netflix was a poor distraction from the summer of sweat and social distancing; the faces of mask-less actors on-screen continuing their daily lives seemed ignorant to the status of the world around me. And Spotify only sought to sink me deeper into an upsetting lyrical world, as I felt inclined to select *Escapism* or *Nobody*.

That year I never remembered when one night ended and another one began, but I knew it was the beginning of a new year - no one could have missed the fireworks.

I heard soft movements in the other room followed by the whispers of my parents, perhaps awakened by the fireworks. Under the bed lay Rosie, the poor girl was startled by the noise. Her paws nudged her blanket before curling back comfortably to rest.

It didn't take long for everyone in the house to fall back into slumber.

But even though I was surrounded by loved ones, I felt so lonely.

I thought about all the people I could contact - my friends. They were the pillars in my mind palace that supported a structure soon to collapse. My platonic soulmate, the other side to my coin; an old childhood acquaintance who I reunited with at uni; and my soft-hearted friend I wished was my big sister.

Then, there was a sudden flash.

A bright light illuminated the bedroom ceiling and a high-pitched ding followed. I reached for my phone and glanced at the message.

*"Happy new year I hope youre well and 2021 is an amazing one for you :))"*

A sudden burst of joy lit up my entire body. A friend! But it was quickly overshadowed by unbearable shame, as I thought about how I'd unfairly ghosted everyone close to me. It had been months and months and months. I wanted to see them, to speak to them and bask in the endless warmth of their friendship. But I was reluctant to reach out. I longed for any connection back into the familiar, into a world before...but I couldn't. My absence was a cowardly act on my part to avoid confronting feelings I could not then decipher.

My eyes left the phone, the bright light replaced the dark of my room. My sweaty hands squeezed my thighs in an attempt to distract my thoughts.

As I brought my thumbs to the keyboard, I hesitated, then pushed my phone out of sight.

I surrendered to my thoughts, giving way to the anxiety and self-doubt that had manifested into a rotting meal within my mind. It was a banquet fit for a neurotic queen.

Yet there in front of me was a lifeline. A message to encourage conversation - a connection.

It was just one line of text amongst the many before it;

“hope your christmas was good and youre holding up okay!”

“hope youre okay all the best for exams, the term is almost over”

“I miss you lots, I hope you’re okay”

Hazy memories brought to surface feelings of peace and happiness. Thoughts of a soft-smile overflowing with an untouchable kindness gave me comfort. Her eyes always gleamed with a compassion that came from a place of deep understanding. It wasn't long ago that we had conversations about anything and everything. Conversations where our voices would get louder and louder, gestures bigger and bigger.

But the doubt remained ever present. I was convinced that the friendships I valued so dearly were built on lies and pity. There was no room for doubt in spaces where true friendship existed - at least that was what neurotypical culture said. I was still gripped by an intense desire to delete the whole conversation and let everyone forget.

*They must hate me. How awful must I be ignoring everyone for months? What kind of friend does that? How can I claim to be their friend? Awful! I am just awful. They are better off without me, of course they are better off.*

But I didn't want that! I don't want that!

An anguishing mental battle commenced. A battle between a relentless toxic persona convinced it was only trying to protect me, and a lonely voice seeking comfort.

I knew that if they would have me, if they would be willing to meet me where I am, if they would simply come see me, I would be the luckiest girl in the world.

What is but one text? What is but one message of a clear and honest love?

With shaky fingers and a drumming heart, I sent a reply before immediately slamming the phone back on the bed, faced downwards in a foolish effort to comfort myself. Words of unconfident reassurance echoed.

*It's okay, you're okay, it'll be fine*

I mean, I'm not really okay, but that's ok.

A light escaped from the bed's surface. I scrambled for the phone.

“Love you heaps Thao”

Love you too.

# Australian Climate Policy dragged kicking and screaming.

by Sacha Shaw



SOURCE: Curioso\_PhotoGraphy @ Pixabay

*How our climate and energy policies may be written by a rising tide of global climate commitments.*

Two events have captured international imaginations and headlines: China's announcement at the United Nations General Assembly that the country will be carbon neutral by 2060 and President Joe Biden's announcement that commits the United States to net-zero emissions by 2050. As the two biggest global economies, these declarations are significant. Australians ought to be paying attention.

The US may be a significant and strategic ally, but Biden's commitment is more the cherry on top of this wake-up call for Australia. Though it is bound to impact Australian markets, this policy shift signals more of a cultural and normative pressure.

However, China has leveraged its economic influence on the Australian export market. Their latest move has been to ban all Australian coal imports, marking a significant opportunity for Australia to reconsider its dependence on coal.

Other nation-states are also putting ink to paper and pledging net-zero emissions and carbon neutrality by 2050; and that list boasts some significant players, from Japan and Korea to the European Union. President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen in her 2020 State of the Union Address<sup>i</sup>, called for a carbon border adjustment mechanism, saying:

"Carbon must have its price - because nature cannot pay the price anymore. This Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism should motivate foreign producers and EU importers to reduce their carbon emissions while ensuring that we level the playing field in a WTO-compatible way."

Pricing carbon will disincentivise heavy emitting industries, instead favouring sectors and production processes that pollute less. This shift is also being reflected in global markets too. More and more companies are making pledges to decarbonise their operations. General Motors recently announced that they will be carbon neutral by 2040 and Apple has promised to be carbon neutral by 2030.

## So where is Australia on the path to climate justice?

Australia's per capita emissions are frequently ranked among the worst globally.<sup>ii</sup> Current policies advocated by the Australian Federal Government are only marginally changing this abysmal title. The Climate Change Performance Index<sup>iii</sup> scores Australia in the worst category, keeping company with Russia, Iran and Kazakhstan.

Climate and energy policy in Australia, especially at the federal government level, has long been fraught and toxic. The attempt to pass laws on climate and energy has been a critical catalyst for the coup-like removal of the last seven Prime Ministers; turning the past 17 years in Australian politics into a constant deluge of disappointment for those concerned that Australia is not acting on the planetary climate crisis.

**Climate and energy policy in Australia, especially at the federal government level, has long been fraught and toxic.**



Spanning the Labor/Liberal divide, past governments have and continue to maintain significant and widely criticised connections to the minerals sector. Described as a 'revolving door'<sup>iv</sup>, public servants and politicians move with impunity from positions within the government to private and vice versa in apparent disregard for parliamentary code of ethics.

Though not limited to the minerals industry, the conflict of interest is blaring. To highlight just one of many cases, take Brendan Pearson. Before entering government, he was CEO of Australia's top minerals lobby group, the Minerals Council of Australia (MCA). And prior to his position with the MCA, he was vice president of government relations at Peabody Energy<sup>v</sup>, one of the leading private coal companies in Australia, where he got the title of "chief lobbyist".<sup>vi</sup>

Pearson is now a senior advisor to the Prime Minister, working alongside former colleague from the MCA John Kunkel.<sup>vii</sup>

Against this background of government intransigence and denial of the climate science, occurred a catastrophic 2019/20 summer season. While well covered in the media, the severity of the fires remains difficult to describe - the overwhelming scope of the burning and death count are hard to grasp. Firefighting chiefs and health experts told the subsequent Royal Commission into Australian Preparedness that fires directly killed 33 people and smoke took the lives of 445 more.<sup>viii</sup> The death count for non-



**'Black Summer' was a moment for reflection and a wake-up call for Australians.**

human animals is truly difficult to fathom, the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) reported 3 billion vertebrates were negatively affected, either killed or displaced.<sup>ix</sup>

'Black Summer' was a moment for reflection and a wake-up call for Australians. As with the wildfires that covered much of the West Coast of the United States, people were frightened that this might herald the new normal of summertime, one dominated by catastrophic fires. The links to climate change now apparent, it was thought there would be no going back. No longer could politicians maintain positions that cast doubt on climate science.

But this transformation has not born out in any change in policy. The seismic shift so many expected did not transpire. What we have seen is business as usual. In response to the Covid-19 generated economic downturn, for example, the Government, with bipartisan support, released their so-called "gas-fired recovery plan". Proponents of the plan, notably in Government and the fossil fuel sector, suggest that gas would facilitate the phasing out of other, ostensibly more emissions-intensive fossil fuels, like coal.<sup>x</sup> Critics view the plan as yet another opportunistic venture that is profiteering at the expense of a safe climate.<sup>xi</sup>

Along with committing domestic energy grids to gas, the Australian Government is also continuing to approve new coal mines. One recently approved mine in Central Queensland is expected to have an 80-year working life, bringing Australian coal into the twenty-second century.<sup>xii</sup>

“ Will Australian policymakers dig in and continue to support and subsidise the fossil fuel sector, or could this signal the end of coal?

Though motivated more by political than ethical interests, this – and not the shock of the fires – may, in fact, be the turning point for Australian politics. True, the fires made excruciatingly clear the ethical reasons for action on climate change, but it is the policy shifts in the international community that are actively galvanising an argument for change. Australian politicians may be forced to act not because their electors want them to, but because their political donor’s (the fossil fuel lobby) economic viability is disintegrating.

Still there is an open question: will Australian policymakers dig in and continue to support and subsidise the fossil fuel sector, or could this signal the end of coal?

For people who advocate for climate justice and more substantial emissions reduction policies, in Australia at least, there has been a quiet optimism – dare, even hope – that this might be a turning point for the Australian economy and our relationship to the climate.

Could this be the moment Australia finally flips and joins the fight against the planetary climate crisis? Maybe. But this moment has also revealed a sad truth – that the Australian Government is moved more by an economic pressure than the moral conviction and duty to protect, not just the current and future generations of people, but also the non-human animals and ecosystems we share this world with. If it is hope I feel, it is certainly darkened by melancholy and bitter disappointment.

“ ...the Australian Government is moved more by an economic pressure than the moral conviction and duty to protect...

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Sacha is researching international norms dynamics with a focus on coal politics at the University of New South Wales Canberra Campus.

Follow the author here:  
Twitter: @sachshaw

# Nationalism & Trauma

by Abhranil Hazra

Far too often when we analyse historical trauma in its relationship to politics, we assume that marginalised groups are natural supporters of the Left or Liberal causes. This is likely because their trauma is so great, we think that they would lean on social justice campaigns as a collective way to alleviate it. But what if they turn to far-right movements and political parties instead?

When we look into the psychology of people supporting politics in the traditional left and right binary, often the same studies tend to pop up. They assert that people who support right wing parties have lower cognitive abilities and prefer ordered, rigid hierarchies. Individuals who identify as left leaning are cited as having more developed cognitive abilities and the desire to trust a variety of sources for information.<sup>1</sup>

So, what image pops up on your mind when reading this? A wealthy senior citizen of Anglo-Saxon descent watching Sky News After Dark? Perhaps on the other side, a young woman of colour reading her favourite Junkee Magazine?

Unfortunately, such dichotomies are far too simplistic and Western-centric when analysing the behaviour of nationalism in the world today. The Global South however provides us with an eye opener. Marginalised communities can also become a force and a strong voting base for nationalist movements around the world.

For example, the Mizrahi Jews in Israel are an ethnic group who fled the Middle East following anti-Semitic backlash in the 1950s.<sup>2</sup> <sup>3</sup> However, their expectations of liberation were largely met with disillusionment.<sup>4</sup> Instead, they faced increasing racial discrimination from the European Ashkenazim Jewish population, which had primary control over Israeli institutions.<sup>5 6</sup>

From 1950-70, Israel had a policy of tracking Mizrahi children and placing them in vocational schools while Ashkenazim children would enrol in regular high schools.<sup>6 7</sup> This was a process that continued the decades of historical segregation between the two ethnic groups.<sup>6</sup> <sup>7</sup> It was often justified by the ideological belief that Mizrahi children should not be sent to institutions of abstract learning because they were inferior to their Ashkenazim counterparts.<sup>7</sup> While the policy has since ceased, the segregation of Mizrahi and Ashkenazim children continues to this day.<sup>6 7</sup>

**Marginalised communities can also become a force and a strong voting base for nationalist movements around the world.** “

Many Mizrahi Jewish activists have highlighted how their culture has been completely wiped out and replaced with European Ashkenazim culture.<sup>7</sup> So why don't they vote or rally behind progressive movements for their rights? How did this marginalised minority end up supporting the Right-wing Likud party, which is part of the Ashkenazim establishment?<sup>7</sup>

The answer lies sadly in the failure of the Israeli Left bloc, which largely built the Ashkenazim privileges into the Israeli state.<sup>6</sup> Rather than take a stand against the racism and white supremacy permeating Israel's politics, they perpetuated it.<sup>6 8 9</sup> In Left-wing circles, both Zionist and Non-Zionist, many regard the Mizrahi people as primitive and unable to grasp the European ideals advocated by Marx and Hegel.<sup>9</sup> But it is the institutional racism fostered by the Ashkenazim-dominated Left bloc which pushed the Mizrahi toward the military and the right side of politics.<sup>8</sup> According to Israeli sociologist Professor Orna Sasson-Levy, the military was the pathway for economic stability for many Mizrahi Jews.<sup>8</sup> Current Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's anti-establishment rhetoric finds fertile ground amongst the working-class Mizrahi base and he continues to play into the resentment shared by them.<sup>10</sup>

In a recent example of this, Prime Minister Netanyahu labelled the people organising protests against his corruption as "anarchists" and "treasonous".<sup>10</sup> He also accused the protestors of being led by the so-called Ashkenazim liberal elite.<sup>10</sup> What can be classified as a kind of right-wing populism is in fact a form of resistance practiced by the Mizrahi communities against what they call a liberal Ashkenazim elite, who persecuted and harmed them in the 1950s.

A similar phenomenon is taking place in India, where Hindu Bangladeshi refugees are fleeing to. The Hindu Nationalist Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) has been appealing to the Namasudras, a low-caste refugee community. They want support for the elections in the Indian state of West Bengal.<sup>11 12</sup> In their latest manifesto, they promised socio-economic empowerment for the community. However, their main trump card has been the controversial Citizenship Amendment Act which has been opposed and slammed as anti-Muslim.<sup>12 15</sup>

To many Hindu Bangladeshi refugees, the BJP's promises of citizenship represent a ticket to safety and freedom from persecution. This sentiment, which was previously championed by the now near-extinct Left wing Communist Party in the state of West Bengal, has been the cornerstone of Narendra Modi's campaign.<sup>11 13</sup> In a 2014 rally, he promised to give citizenship to Hindu Bangladeshi refugees.<sup>13 16</sup> This effort has been met with a major improvement in the BJP's fortune in the State of West Bengal and they are banking on it for this year's upcoming election too.<sup>11 12</sup>

The reason for their success can be observed as two-fold. Bangladeshi Hindus have faced strong discrimination in Bangladesh, where the migration of Hindus out of the country has remained steady but growing.<sup>13 14</sup> Migration occurred in waves after British India was divided into India and Pakistan, which led to bloodshed between Hindus and Muslims as well as the largest global migration ever seen.<sup>13</sup> Approximately 6 million Hindus fled then East Pakistan for safety in India whilst 1.5 million Muslims fled to Bangladesh.<sup>14</sup>

However, this climate continued after partition where Hindus continued to migrate. In 1965, East Pakistan passed the Vested Property Act, which allowed the state to seize land from anyone deemed an 'enemy of the state.'<sup>13 14</sup> In a 1997 study, Professor Abdul Barkat found that 40% of the seized land belonged to Hindus, resulting in a weaker financial position.<sup>13</sup> This only increased in the 1971 Independence War in Bangladesh where the Pakistani Army attacked Hindus.<sup>13 14</sup> In Bangladesh's history, right wing Islamists parties like Bangladesh Nationalist Party and Jamaat-E-Islami are notorious for their anti-Hindu violence.<sup>13 14</sup>

It is this legacy which has led many to flee to India and allowed Modi to appeal to them for support. Unfortunately, it has also manifested anti-Muslim prejudice and sentiment in a country with rising Hindu Nationalism.<sup>11 13</sup>

The common theme observed from those supporting right wing parties is that of fear. In the Western context, this is often misinterpreted as ignorance or racism that needs to be addressed by society. However, in the Global South, it points to how trauma and violence against marginalised communities can often result in increased right-wing support and racism. If a shared sense of identity is perceived as being attacked, it can be shaped by dark and traumatic histories that need to be acknowledged. It is important to realise how these stories and their nuances show that politics is more complicated than it seems.

**If a shared sense of identity is perceived as being attacked, it can be shaped by dark and traumatic histories that need to be acknowledged.**

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*by Bella Ziade*

# I'm not a Garden



Credits to Brendan Iffland for  
illustration concept

I am going to keep the dead flowers in my room until I feel better  
That way I won't see my bed as a graveyard but rather as something that gives and lets go  
Blooms and buries

And though the smell of decay is not sweet  
Nor is it sour  
Perhaps it will serve as a reminder that I will always be followed by this stench that is my sadness  
And that there must be another place to mourn that isn't this body

I am not a garden I am just a girl  
I cannot water the trees if I am thirsty too

I often think back to when I began to thaw in the summer  
When the light forced itself onto my face  
And the grass in my backyard reached my knees  
I would sit in it for hours writing the same poem over and over  
A manifestation I hoped to plant within me  
Believing that I could write you out of existence with sentences that grew to overcome me  
And I would try to pick out the weeds next to my feet  
But end up with handfuls of dandelions and other beautiful things

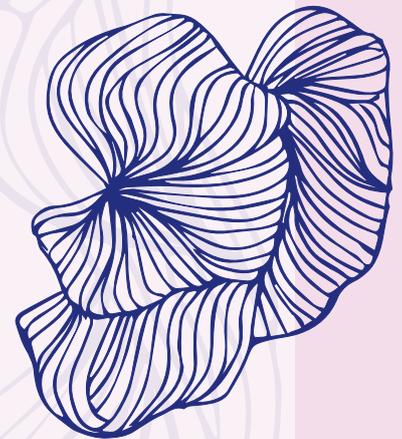
So when I realised I was hurting, and that there was nothing I could do to make it go away, I  
forced myself to stare at the naked body in my mirror  
All skin without soul  
All hands that don't want to let go

I felt you between my wrinkles  
And in the far corners of my eye

I depersonalised into an existence where I forgave you

Who am I if I don't love you?

My body is growing more secular every day  
And I can see that in my reflection  
So, I run myself a bath  
And watch my fingers prune until it I believe that they are just skin and not anything more  
than that



And I hear silly things in my meditations  
Affirmations like the way I love myself is the way I let others love me  
And only I can allow myself to let go  
But still, I grip the rough edges of the amethyst in my left palm  
My receiving hand has let go more than it has held  
Until I feel my muscles swell around the crooked rock  
Now my heartbeat is felt in each breath  
This is now the only way I know it's still there  
This is the only way I know I am feeling

I have no more hiding spots  
No more parks or rosemary bushes to sit in  
And so I go to empty car parks with dirt in my hands  
Trying to see myself as the garden they say I am

Instead I am settling into this self that others' use as a temporary home  
Where the guests lick their plates clean and always ask for more  
And I know that goodbyes are hard  
So, I don't ask them for one when they leave  
Instead, I frame photos of them on the walls I keep having to build  
Now my mind is a long hallway of faces I will never forget

I'm a haunted house with the windows open  
And the lights always on  
I'm a house fire waiting to burn  
A warmth is inside me that cannot be touched

I have tried to decorate the absence I live with  
Fairy lights and candles and art  
I have tried to find beauty in grief  
But it sits on the windowsill next to my dying flowers

I'm still learning how to not love you

When my hair gets oily and I leave it for a few days in a bun  
All grease and pillow sheets  
Kept secrets and chipped nail polish  
This is when I think of you the most  
And with the mirrors steamed in my bathroom  
I fingerprint a smile on my face  
And I watch myself bleach every strand on my hair that you may have touched

Unloving you is messy

Tonight, I am the dirty laundry sitting in the corner of my room  
But I'm telling myself it's okay  
I don't need to be clean right now  
I have nowhere to go  
I have no one to see  
I can't leave without a mask on anyways  
I can paint my skin  
I can hide this

I am so used to trying on new faces to keep up with the people I'm becoming

I know I'm not a garden because my soil is poisoned  
Nothing grows where I live  
I have never loved without getting hurt  
Even if I burn my skin in the sun just so that the light feeds you  
I will still have to carve and cut your roots out of me when you leave  
And stick band aids on the wounds that bleed

I am in an introverted war  
And I think I might lose

But I know that I will remake myself tomorrow morning  
I am planting seeds in the part of me that I have never met before

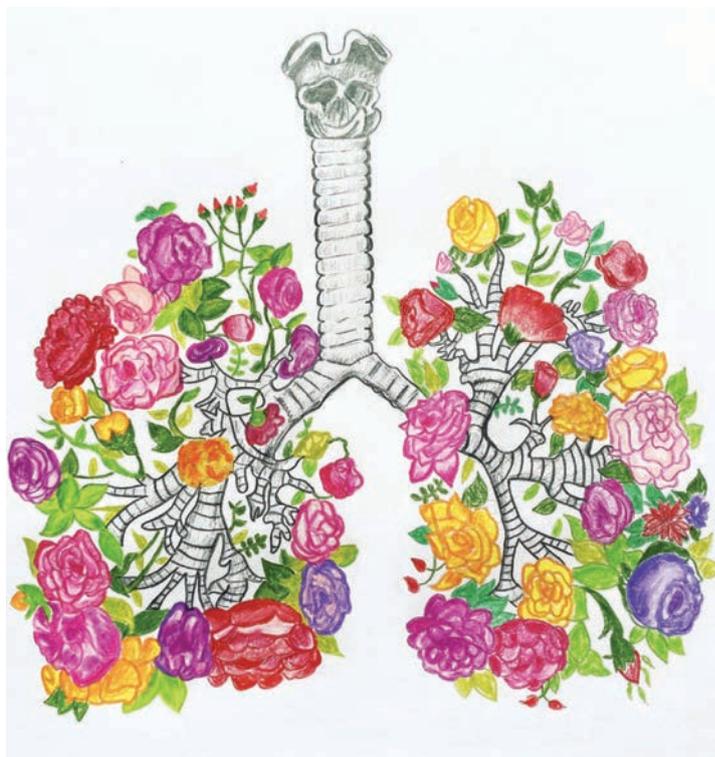
I will fold myself into origami and avoid the rain  
Just to hide the self that is too scared to face you



Isabella Ziade is an emerging writer and psychology student at UNSW. Her writing reflects her melancholy and gives her a branch to digest and communicate her experiences.

Follow her on Instagram  
[@BELLAZIADE](#)

Blooming





# 'Stripped'

by Eloise Griffiths Da Costa

# Body Horror



*by Juliet Manolias*

You extend your pinkie fingers first. A herculean task, but you manage it fine, and decide to toy with the idea of freeing the rest in succession. They were clenched into fists for so long that your joints are stiff, and each movement makes you far too aware of the sensation of bone scraping against bone, although it's hard to tell which parts you're imagining. Your mind projects a creaking sound as each joint, one after the other, locks into its final position. This is probably better than whatever sound they would make if you were ever able to hear it, you think. You'd much rather that your body was a well-oiled machine, as people like to joke, rather than this mass of meat, string, and bone that you are wholly unsatisfied with. You stare at your now-open palms, trying to pinpoint every vein that's forced you to stay alive through this. You wonder how they'd look with the skin peeled back.

You feel like you have taken a beating, but where from? Who from? Are there bruises on your skin or is your ego so inflated that it's become alive in its own sense? This feels too real to be an illusion, a magic eye picture stretched across your skin. Maybe you were wrong. The beating comes from the inside. The body, whole with the fragmented head, is a slave to the mind. A poorly played puppet in the performance of life.

Today feels oddly good. Is it reasonable to call it normal? A day that is normal for most isn't normal for you. But who gets to decide whether "normal" is relative or not, anyway? Maybe you do. You feel like you could accomplish anything today, but the freedom of motivation and energy is starting to feel crippling. Having so much choice has become foreign to you, and your decision-making muscles are so underworked that you feel the opportunities slipping away. The paralysis doesn't leave you until you are already well into the night and so exhausted from disappointment that your body asks to be paralysed in a different way; sleep. It arrives somewhat easily but the feeling you get as you sink into slumber feels much too similar to that of guilt.

The clock is constantly ticking. This shouldn't be a surprise to you, but somehow it always is. The passage of time both eludes you and manifests itself as a constant worry. It makes sense, right? To fear something so constant and unavoidable, something so far out of your control. Always running out. You just need more. If only you had more. What would you even do with more? Waste it, probably.

Microscopic waves rush along your limbs, their energies colliding in a well that makes your sternum ache with its weight. Each wave leaves a trace, as skin changes texture from smooth to rough and becomes alive with scattered sensation. A cascade of hairs standing on end, like a constant wind has suddenly stopped, having received the message that something is deeply wrong. Your skin cells agitate in succession. Unsettled, bracing for attack, as they are unable to move in toward the safety and warmth of the body. A fragile armour is forced into being. To protect against... what?

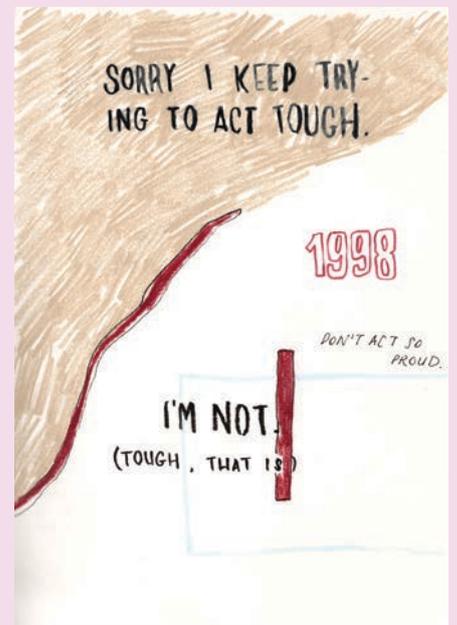
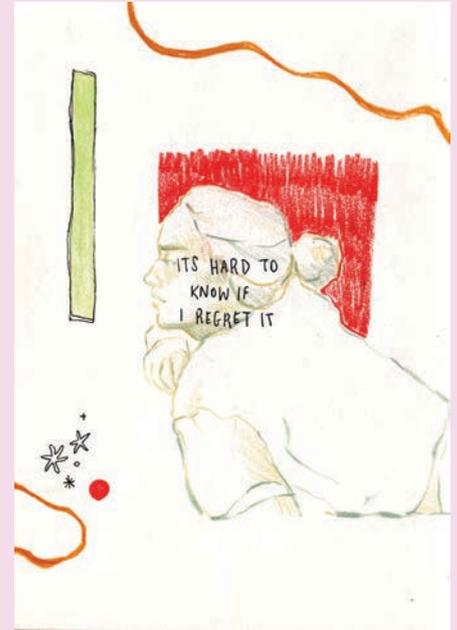
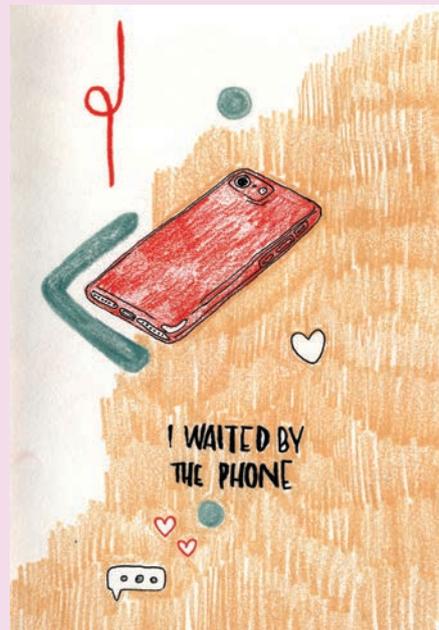
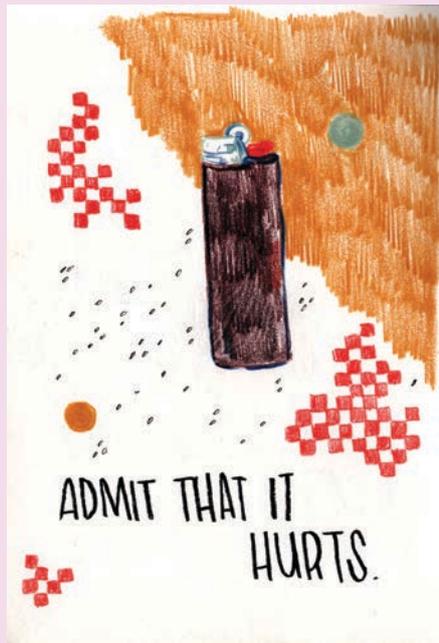
Your quick breaths whistle out through gritted teeth. Your blood boils but the air being pulled and pushed out of you is an icy rapid that collects no heat to cool your head. All you want is some sense of control. You try to slow your breathing; you make yourself choke. An immense weight is crushing from all sides, enveloping and constricting you. It becomes harder to stand as your light-headedness drags you to the floor. You curl your body into a tight ball and bury your head in the middle. You block out the world and attempt to regress far into your mind, past any coherent thought and emotion to find the centre, the most innermost of inner peace. It becomes darker and darker, fading from quiet to silent. The only sensation you register is that of your burning clenched fists. They are your connection to the outside world, a recognition of reality, so that you don't get lost.



Juliet is a Science/Arts student studying Biology and Creative Writing. Her need to finish creative works quickly has combined with a lack of an ability to complete large personal projects, resulting in a habit of writing microfiction. She is also a visual artist and hopes to work all three of these interests into parts of her career.

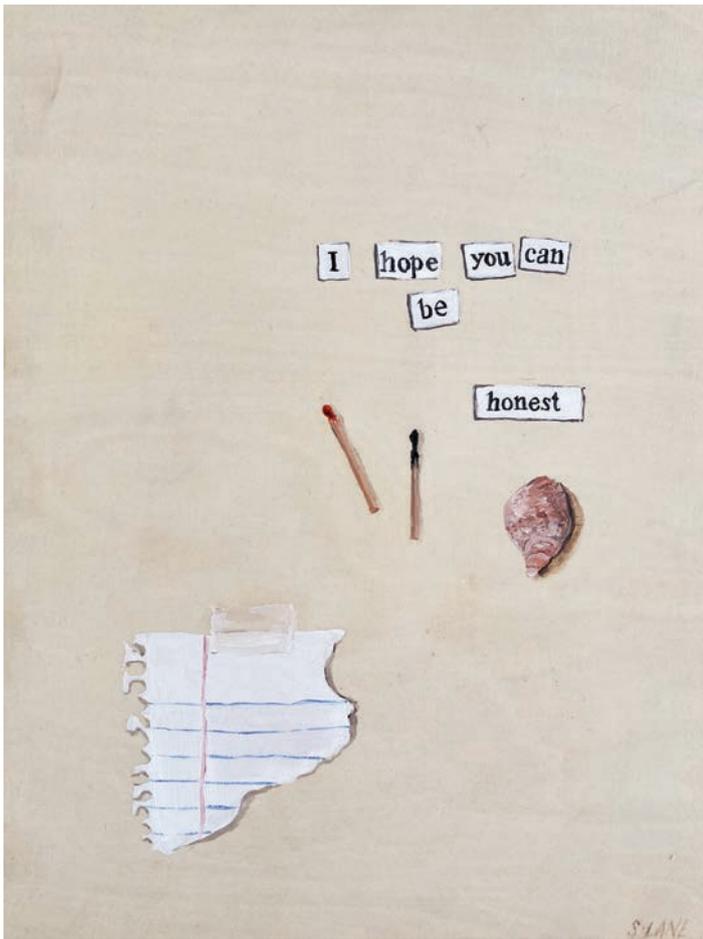
Follow the author here: Instagram [@julietmanolias](#)

I thought you lacked emotion; You didn't think of me at all.

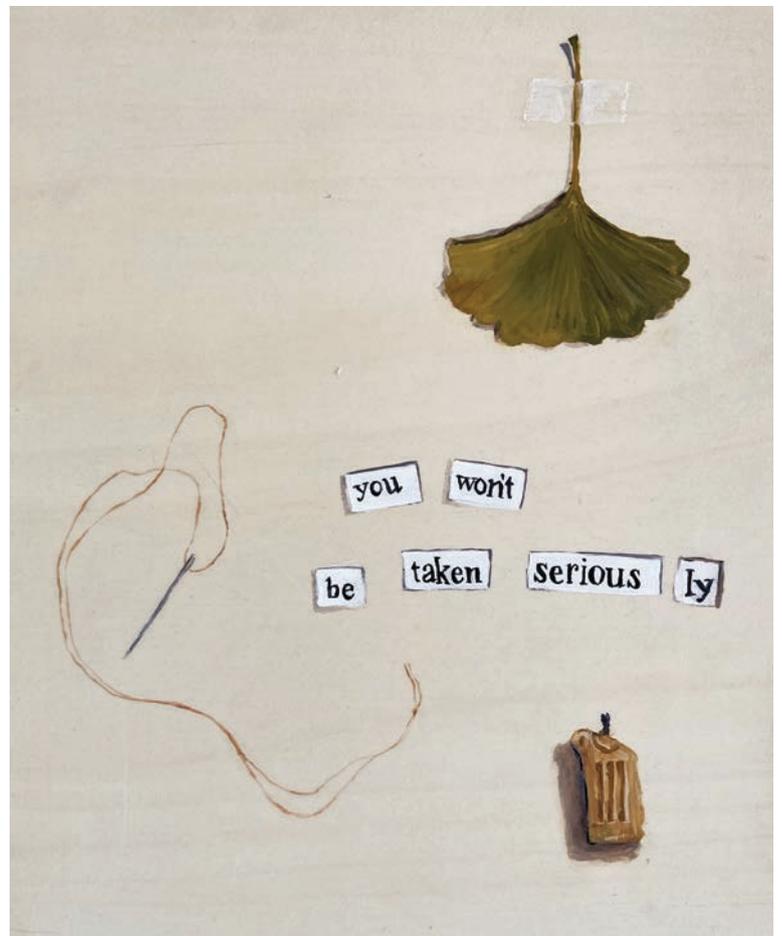


I thought you lacked emotion; You didn't think of me at all.

I thought you lacked emotion



You didn't think of me at all



Metamorphosis





# Amateur Filmmakers Breaking World Records:

A film review of *Hi Mom!* and *Nomadland*



by Nadia Maunsell

In a year punctuated by hits to film revenue across the board, Chinese comedian Jia Ling's *Hi Mom!* is an outlier that managed the impossible; it broke the world record for highest grossing film by a single female director. And made over \$1 billion Australian dollars in the process.

This feat is even more sensational because it was Jia's first time directing, writing and playing the lead actress for a feature film. The story is based on her 2016 sketch comedy titled 'Ni hao, Li Huanying.'

*Hi Mom!* is a wholly original take on a simple question; 'If you could choose not to be born to give your mother the chance at life-long happiness, would you do it?' The cliché of a time-travelling protagonist trying to rewrite their life has been done many times over. But Ling's story is underpinned by the loss of her own mother in 2001. She intersperses comedy and heart-wrenching drama in equal measure. She gently coaxes out an intimate relationship between mother and daughter, illuminating their moments of joy together before time is inevitably up.

In a global pandemic that has made people painfully aware of the importance of family and relationships, it is unsurprising that films centring stories of vulnerability have enticed cinemagoers.

**Cast:** Jia Ling, Zhang Xiaofei, Shen Teng, Chen He

**Director:** Jia Ling

**Screenwriters:** Jia Ling, Bu Yu

**Language:** Mandarin with English subtitles

**Rating:** 5/5

**Verdict:** *Hi Mom!* is a personal reckoning with the loss of a mother, shaped by heartfelt memories and brilliant comedic timing.



<sup>1</sup> Bechdel Test Movie List 2021.

<sup>2</sup> Oscars 2021, '93rd Oscars Nominations'.

<sup>3</sup> Oliver, D 'Percentage of women working as film directors, producers hasn't budged much in 20 years, report says', USA Today, December 8.

<sup>4</sup> Verhoeven, D. Coate, B. Zemaityte, V. 2019, 'Redistributing Gender in the global film industry: Beyond #MeToo and #MeThree', Media Industries, vol. 6, no. 1.

Winner of Best Picture at the Golden Globes this year, Chloe Zhao's *Nomadland* is an ode to the American West. It is also one woman's profound take on the way that friendship is not beholden to any one time or place, but can be returned to, like a home. Similar to *Hi Mom!*, the film is part of an increasing number that pass the Bechdel test, a measure of the way in which women are represented as three-dimensional characters onscreen.<sup>i</sup>

Incredibly, *Nomadland* is only Chloe Zhao's third feature film. Yet, she is the first woman to be nominated across four categories at the Oscar's, including Best Picture, Best Director, Best Screenplay and Best Editor.<sup>ii</sup> Female directors, who make up only 13% of the staff of top-grossing films, have historically struggled to have their stories funded by big production companies and win awards for behind-the-screen roles.<sup>iii</sup>

Powerhouses like Jia and Zhao are smashing the prevalent myth that women-driven films represent a greater fiscal risk to the industry.<sup>iv</sup> Zhao has been slated to direct *The Eternals*, a Marvel film that will be released in November 2021. It has been allotted a budget of AUD\$258 million, a 40-fold increase on the budget of *Nomadland*.

Perhaps this is the beginning of a wider trend. As production companies slowly capitalise on the talents of many up-and-coming directors like Taika Waititi and Lu Yang, audiences are responding in kind. In a post-COVID economy, one can only hope that small-time directors are not lost in the milieu.

You can catch both films this week at Event Cinemas or Hoyts Cinemas.

**Cast:** Frances McDormand, David Strathairn, Swankie

**Director:** Chloe Zhao

**Screenwriters:** Chloe Zhao

**Language:** English

**Rating:** 5/5

**Verdict:** *Nomadland* is a technical and emotional masterpiece, touching on the singular gaze of an American nomad.

# Territorial Surfers:

## How Surf Culture Speaks to Broader Issues about Inclusivity in Australia

by George Raptis

If you get the chance to visit the beach I live close to, you will see that on its northern cliff face, painted in thick white lines now faded by the sun but nevertheless visible, someone has written the words ‘LOCALS ONLY.’

I first noticed it last summer. I swam out far enough from the shore, past boogie-boarders and sun-screened swimmers, to reach the part of calm water before the waves begin to break. From there I turned to see the words which branded the coastline - LOCALS ONLY. Immediately, I felt intimidated. This wasn't the work of some kid who tagged bus stops with penises because they find it funny. No. This felt like a warning. I swam back to shore and left the beach before I even had time to dry off.

“...I felt completely alienated by the sign not because I didn't feel like a 'local,' but because I refused to accept that the enjoyment of this very much public beach was to the exclusion of others.

Since reading the sign, I became to understand that the phrase 'locals only' is common amongst surf culture. Google told me that surfers guard desirable breaks with zeal — apparently good surf is supposedly hard to come by on the 26 000 kilometres of coastline which makes up the eastern border of Australia. I found photos of beaches along the shores of sunny California and the islands of Hawaii bearing the same sign too. If the sign was meant to be aggressive, it certainly served its purpose. I have been fortunate enough to never question my idea of locality; I have lived in the same area my entire life, I have gone to school in the same area, I have friends and family that live here too. Despite this, I felt completely alienated by the sign not because I didn't feel like a 'local,' but because I refused to accept that the enjoyment of this very much public beach was to the exclusion of others. The shame I had for the very existence of the sign was riveled by its aggressive words.

This territorial aggression exhibited by the sign seems commonplace amongst surf communities. While surfing communities project a laidback image, a study undertaken in Southern California revealed that the limited amount of coveted surf breaks, as well as perceptions of localism and territoriality, positively contributed to surf-related aggression.<sup>1</sup> This hostility manifests in things like the LOCALS ONLY sign or, as a more extreme example, a surf group in 1960s San Diego painting swastikas on their boards to ward of 'non-locals' (these surfers crudely referred to themselves as 'surf Nazis').<sup>2</sup>

Of course, the study undertaken by sociologist Dr Cassie Comley does not speak to all surfers and their attitudes; I don't doubt that there are many friendly surfers out there. But I could not find a justification for the 'LOCALS ONLY' sign despite the reasons Comley listed as being the cause of surfer territorialism.

In hindsight, I view this small surf beach as a microcosm for Australia, where the LOCALS ONLY sign speaks to the many boundaries which divide the people of this country. To me, the idea of a community functions by exclusion just as much as it does inclusion. It's like building a fence. We can build fences to demarcate those within it, call them locals, share in a collective identity. But we also build fences to separate ourselves from those who live outside our idea of what our community is. And by excluding others or 'non-locals,' we find a way to secure our positions within our own communities.

I saw this in the way my neighbour spoke to me one morning. She had stopped me on my way to work to tell me how busy the beach was at 7 am.

"I couldn't find a place to sit. Everyone from out West has set up tent for the day."

She seemed irate. Ridiculously territorial over a place she laid claim too simply because she lived close to it. Who was she to say that people from whichever part of Sydney weren't allowed to enjoy this very much public beach? She distinguished herself from those 'out West' and re-established herself as a 'local' with certain entitlements.

"You better head down their quickly," she said, like a child scrambling for their toys.

This speaks to a larger problem amongst Australians in a nation where we are particularly concerned with building a national identity founded on togetherness. In primary school we would celebrate Harmony Day (now Harmony Week, an initiative run by the Australian Government's Department of Home Affairs), a day where we embraced Australia as a multicultural nation. We spent the day writing messages to one another on pieces of coloured paper and cut out chain-linked people with craft scissors, hanging them like garlands across the classroom. Nowadays I can no longer buy into this idea of harmony, one which we were taught was a reality, a fixed part of the Australia identity rather than an ideal. As much as I want to believe in our multicultural unity, this ideal seems far-fetched when Australians continue to celebrate the day this land was invaded, where friends are told to 'gobacktowheretheycamefrom' as they step off a bus, where cultural sites are demolished to make way for coal mines and highways, where racist accusations flare during the Covid-19 pandemic, where Indigenous people are 11 times more likely to go to prison than non-Indigenous people,<sup>3</sup> where refugees and asylum seekers are continually locked-up in indefinite off-shore detention, and where a place as public and open as a beach becomes territorialised to the exclusion of many.

I went back to the same beach this summer, forgetting about the sign after the year that had been, and found that someone had crossed out the word LOCAL and wrote LOVE to the right of ONLY. Now the message read ONLY LOVE. It seemed oddly heart-warming. I can imagine the determined artist who scaled the cliff with spray-paint in hand and thought to write something reminiscent of a Beatles' song. What I didn't see was that someone had merely scaled the cliff a bit further along, found an almost unreachable place and rewrote LOCALS ONLY. Something told me that this sign would not be altered nor fade away for some time.



George is a fourth-year Arts/Law student majoring in English Literary Studies. He writes because he tends to forget things and because he was never good at playing sport.

<sup>1</sup> Cassie Comley, Fall in Line: How Surfers' Perceptions of Localism, Territoriality and Waves as Limited Resources Influence Surf-related Aggression," *McNair Scholars Research Journal* 15, no. 1 (2016).

<sup>2</sup> "Surf Culture," Wikipedia, last modified 2 February, 2021, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Surf\\_culture](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Surf_culture).

<sup>3</sup> Elias Visontay, "Indigenous prison population continues to increase, while non-Indigenous incarceration rate falls," *The Guardian*, January 22, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/australianews/2021/jan/22/indigenous-prison-population-continues-to-increase-while-non-indigenous-incarceration-rate-falls>.

# The Boba Generation: A portrait of Asian — Australian youth culture

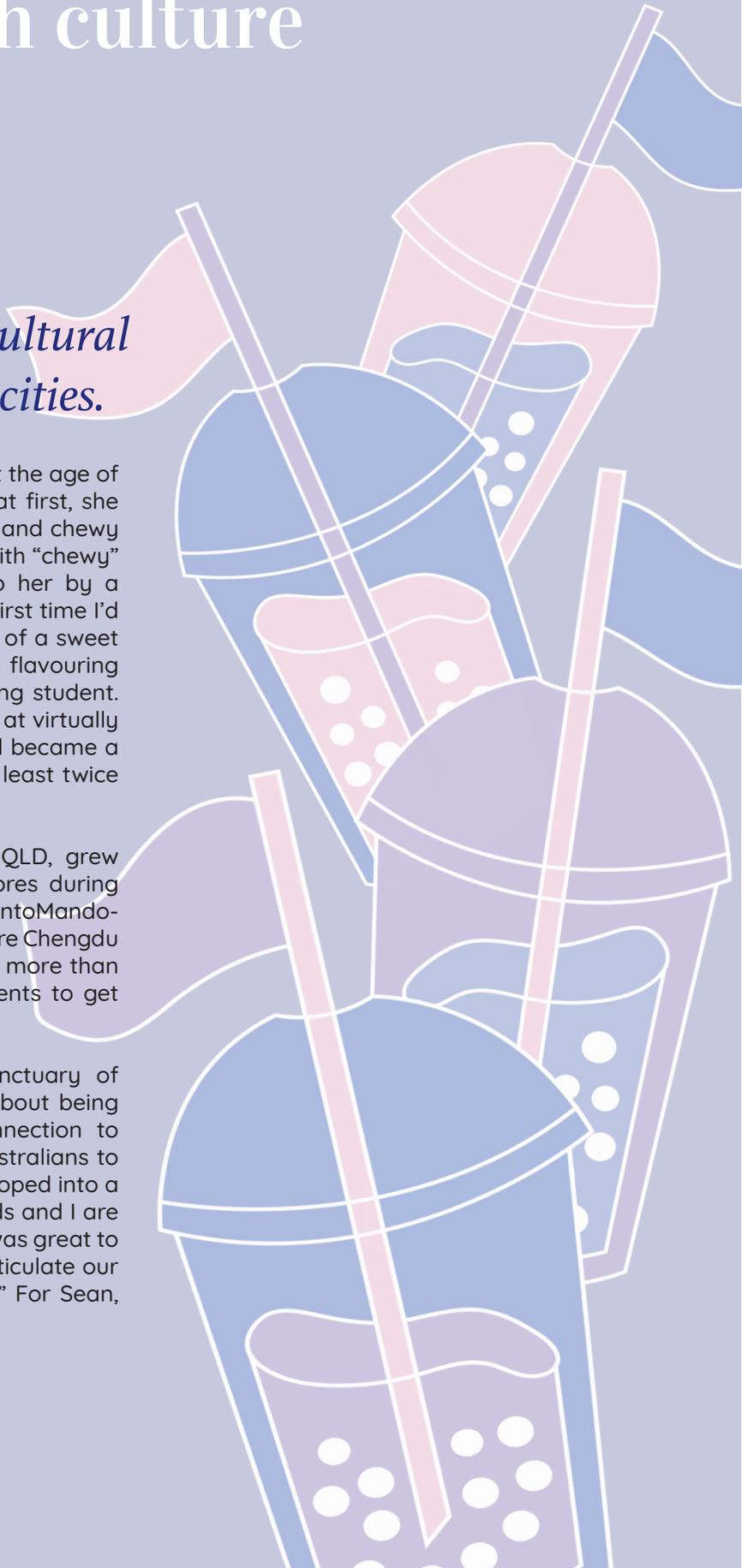
by Regina Wang

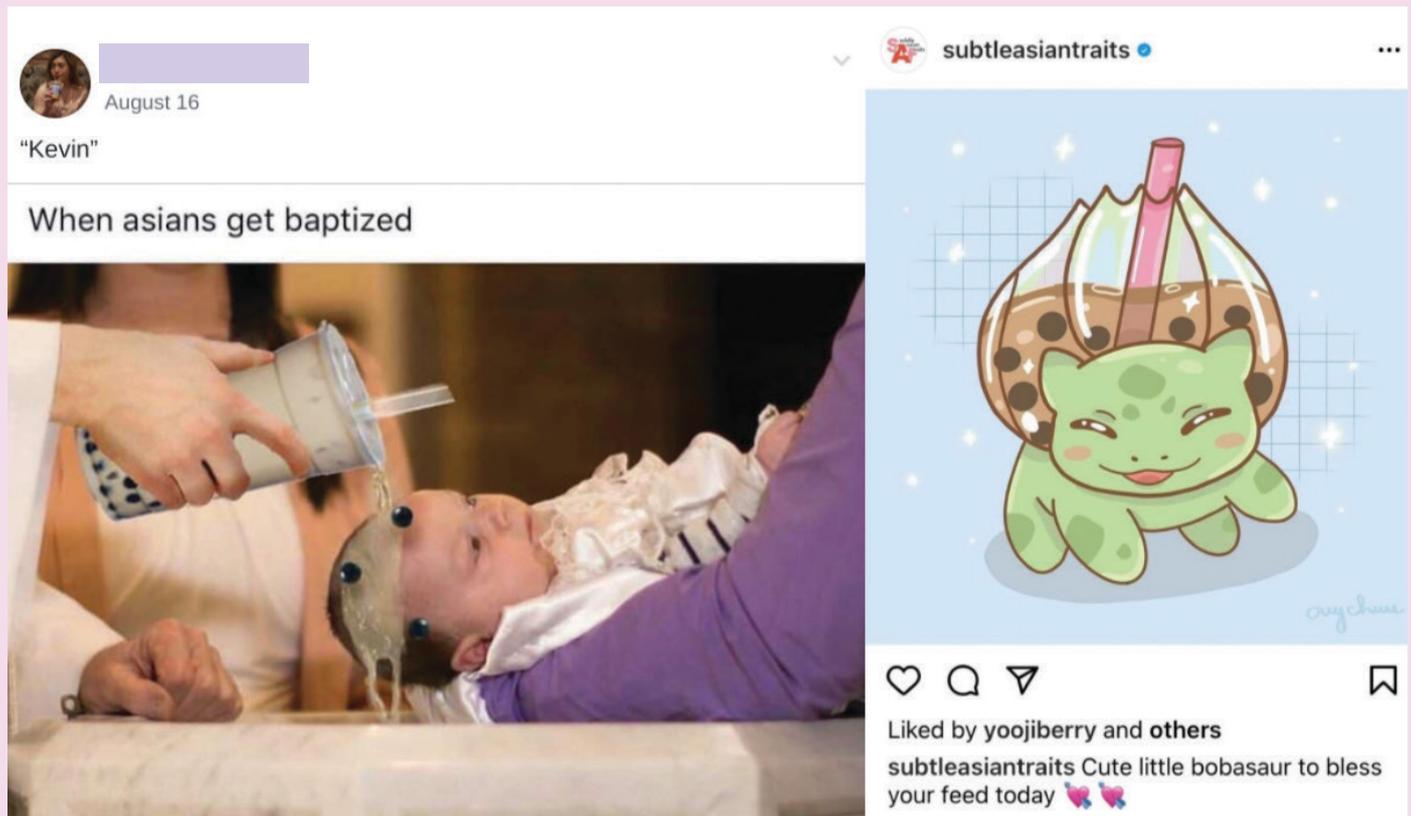
*How bubble tea unifies the cultural values of diverse Asian ethnicities.*

Renee Wang took her first sip of bubble tea at the age of ten. Despite having a bad experience with boba at first, she began to grow an obsession over its unique taste and chewy texture. The strawberry-flavoured milk tea filled with “chewy” but relatively tasteless pearls was first given to her by a friend at an Asian street food festival. “It was the first time I’d ever seen the black tapioca pearls. I wasn’t much of a sweet tooth and the strawberry tasted like the artificial flavouring in confectionery,” says Renee, a UNSW engineering student. But after taste testing different flavoured milk tea at virtually every single boba store in Sydney, the 21-year-old became a diehard bubble tea addict slurping down boba at least twice a week.

Sean, whose parents are from Gold Coast QLD, grew up hanging around Broadbeach’s bubble tea stores during holidays with school mates. Blasting out the latest CantoMandopop hits from Jay Chou and raps from counterculture Chengdu trap group Higher Brothers, the outlets presented more than just a relaxing spot for the third-culture adolescents to get their daily boba drink.

The boba shop has become a snacky sanctuary of belonging. “There’s certainly something special about being in the boba shop, perhaps an inextricable connection to Asian culture or a space provided for us Asian Australians to freely express our identity and values. It had developed into a social club for Asian youth,” says Sean. “My friends and I are immigrants, and I never felt Australian or Asian. It was great to have this physical space for us where we could articulate our Asian identities while still growing up in Australia.” For Sean, food and drink are the “best way to bind people”.





(Courtesy of Subtle Asian Traits on Facebook and Instagram)

As an Asian Australian myself, I have the potential to drink literally 5 large-sized bubble tea with extra toppings and 120% sugar within a day. I believe that there are so many young Asian Australians out there like myself who adores the continual “hype” for boba.

According to Fortune Business Insights, the global bubble tea market size was estimated to be of USD 2.02 billion in 2019 and is expected to reach USD 3.39 billion by the end of 2027 with an annual growth rate of 7.2%.<sup>i</sup> As bubble tea continues to expand nationwide, a bubble tea generation has emerged, ‘The Boba Generation’, a multi-racial youth culture that represents a portrait of Asian Australian identity.

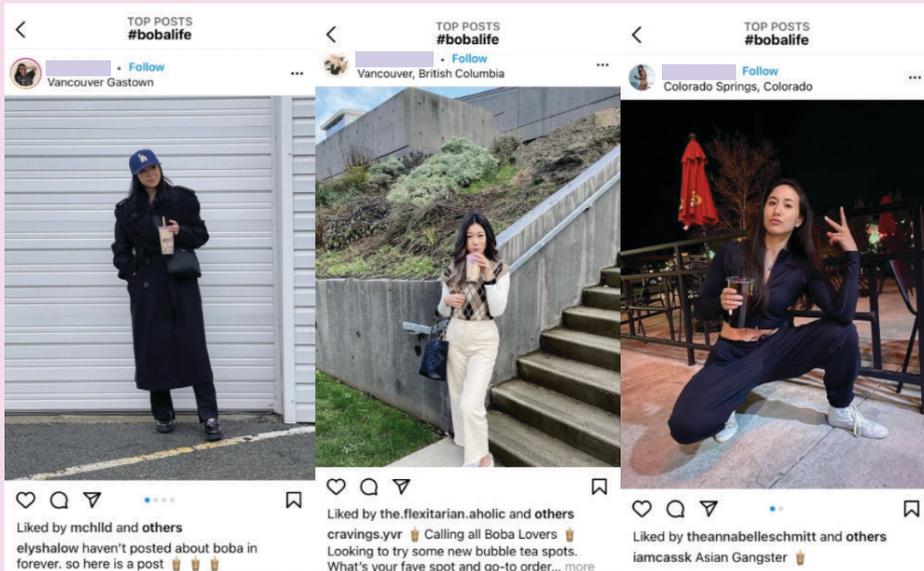
You can see examples of this viral boba trend on Subtle Asian Traits, one of the largest online social media groups representing Asian diasporas.

Jenny G. Zhang, author of Eater’s ‘The Rise (and Stall) of the Boba Generation’, says the group is like a virtual bubble tea shop. “Border-transcending virtual bubble tea shops filled with an endless stream of memes, of memes, jokes and confessions about boba, strict parents, and other markers of what is often imagined as the universal experience of children of Asian immigrants in the West.”<sup>ii</sup>

Scrolling through Subtle Asian Traits’ feed, I feel overwhelmed by the amount of boba memes and how hungry young Asians were to find a recognisable, unifying language of their shared experience. For once, these publicised quirks, punchlines and TikTok videos did not have to be explained as they were relatable and could resonate with my own culture and identity as a young Asian Australian.

Bubble tea is popular almost exclusively in Asian societies and there’s a lack of understanding and appreciation of that amongst white society. I experienced this when I first encountered a group meeting where the students there couldn’t speak or understand Chinese. My friends and I decided unanimously to offer bubble tea as a way of sharing our Asian Australian heritage to the non-Asian Australians. But their reactions surprised us, it was all along the line of: “All sugar, no substance, is this even real tea?”

Whilst celebrating the bonding of Asian identities, bubble tea has also been criticised for flattening many Asian cultures into one. Grievances can be seen through the new term “boba liberalism,” which refers to someone whose Asian identity is centred around trendy cultural artifacts and “trend-chasing spectacle,” but is unable to express their inner Asian identity in a way that represents the diversity of Asian cultural backgrounds. Like individuals who can’t stop talking about Crazy Rich Asians as a breakthrough in Asian representation, and who post selfies purposely holding boba drinks as fashion accessories to prove their Asian self to seek acceptance within white culture.



“If you search the hashtag #bobalife on Instagram and Facebook, you’ll see hundreds and thousands of aesthetically pleasing, filtered and photoshopped posts with people of Asian ethnicities holding bubble tea,” says Fiona Ma, a UNSW international student from Nanjing.

Bubble tea became a ubiquitous accessory for the new generation of young Asian-Australians in the digital age. Social media platforms like Instagram, Twitter and Tumblr have a rich array of posts from foodies and influencers featuring aesthetic boba drinks, with locations like Chatime Kensington. Food delivery platforms like Zomato, HungryPanda, Ubereats and The DoorDash app even have their own “bubble tea” search icon.

Talitha Angelica Acaylar Trazo in her thesis *Wanna Get Boba?* says that online marketing of boba drinks and boba desserts foster digital solidarity, as well as the bonding of different Asian identities. “Some shops sell boba hot pot while others display glitter-infused, multi-coloured teas on their social media feeds. These online boba feeds provide a safe space for Asian Australian youth to freely express themselves and offers them opportunities to socialise among the Asian community.”<sup>iii</sup>

We are now in the midst of a large-scale multicultural food movement and boba has become one of the representative tokens of the Asian Australian youth culture. For me, boba is like my perfect going-out buddy and a great treat for once-in-a-while indulgence that cannot be replaced by morning coffee or evening cocktail. Boba marketed itself to a culturally globalised youth appearing in every corner of Australia where Asians emigrated. It should be recognised as something that shapes the cultural identity of Asian Australians. Bubble tea allows us to dissolve the divide between ‘Asianness’ and ‘Australianness’, and create a hybrid identity where we can celebrate both cultures as one.

“Bubble tea became a ubiquitous accessory for the new generation of young Asian-Australians in the digital age.”



Hi, my name is Regina and I’m in my third year of international studies and media (journalism and communication) at UNSW. I spend most of my time reading, cooking, traveling and watching TikTok videos. I love creating media content, ranging from podcasts to writing news, opinion pieces and media releases. I’m also intrigued by the power of the media and its role in disseminating information so people stay aware of the things that are going on around them.

Follow the author here:  
Facebook - Regina Wang

<sup>i</sup> “Bubble Tea Market Size, Share & COVID-19 Impact Analysis, By Type, Flavour, and Regional Forecast, 2020-2027,” Fortune Business Insights, accessed March 3, 2021, <https://www.fortunebusinessinsights.com/industry-reports/bubble-tea-market-101564>.

<sup>ii</sup> Jenny G. Zhang, “The Rise (and Stall) of the Boba Generation,” Eater, November 5, 2019, <https://www.eater.com/2019/11/5/20942192/bubble-tea-boba-asian-american-diaspora>.

<sup>iii</sup> Talitha Angelica Acaylar Trazo, “Wanna Get Boba?” (MA diss., University of California Los Angeles, 2020), 56.

# Violence on Oxford Street: Can you heal among the people who hurt you?

by Chantel Henwood

*Sydney's Mardi Gras has a violent history and this violence remains entangled within the lives of LGBTIQ+ people to this day.*



SOURCE: Fairfax

## Police brutality, political injustice and violence.

These things are not often associated with the festival that sprinkles biodegradable glitter through Sydney's streets each year.

However, Sydney's Mardi Gras festival has deep roots in protest, and these three themes remain entangled within the lives of LGBTIQ+ people to this day.

The origins of Mardi Gras have a historical significance in the fight for LGBTIQ+ equality. With the first march in June 1978, 26 years before homosexuality would be legal in Australia. The group marched in solidarity with the San Francisco Freedom Day Committee fighting a bill that would allow schools to fire LGBTIQ+ teachers in Californian state schools for "advocating, imposing, encouraging or promoting" homosexual activity. However, when their parade permit was revoked, attendees were met with violence at the hands of police, brutally beating and arresting 53 demonstrators.

If this seems familiar, you may be aware of the group Pride in Protest who have been vocal about their rejection of the bill submitted by One Nation NSW leader Mark Latham. If passed, the Bill will prevent teachers from educating students on the existence of trans and gender diverse identities, and could revoke the teaching license of those who support trans and gender diverse students.

The group made headlines when NSW Police revoked a permit for a Mardi Gras alternative event bringing the festival back to its protests roots. After pressure from the LGBTIQ+ community, an appearance in court, and overwhelming public support from The Greens, Labor and Independent MP's, NSW Health granted an exemption allowing the event to go forward. Despite a strong and intimidating police presence, an estimated 3,000+ people attended and marched through Oxford Street, demanding an end to LGBTIQ+ injustice.

For me, seeing the similarities between the first Mardi Gras protest movement and current events, solidifies Pride in Protest as the answer for the new generation of Queers who feel unseen within the celebratory tones of

Mardi Gras. For them, there is still so much left to fight for.

SOURCE: Pride in Protest Facebook, provided by Channel 7



The past year has been challenging at best, and utterly devastating at worst. I have experienced loss on a scale I did not know was possible. I have lost friends, employment, housing and, for a while, my dignity. The economic and social impacts of COVID-19 have highlighted disastrous structural problems within

our social services and according to a recent study from Rainbow Health Victoria, COVID-19 created a disproportionate set of challenges for the LGBTQ+ community.

During the past year, I have also seen a significant increase in divisive public discourse (read: hate speech) and legislative change (read: human rights violations) threatening the rights and protections of LGBTQ+ people, specifically children.

The political party One Nation, who seem to have taken advantage of an out of touch Prime Minister, have made it their mission to insert their bigotry throughout Australia's major legislation and infrastructure. Now with the loss of the Family Court System and the threat of erasure from our education

“ **Mardi Gras has woven itself into Australia's cultural fabric...the parade and festival play a crucial role in Australia's re-emergence.**

system looming, the concerning statistics surrounding the mental health of the LGBTQ+ community do not seem surprising at all.

Mardi Gras has woven itself into Australia's cultural fabric. As an internationally recognised tourist destination with an overall economic impact estimated at over \$50 million, the parade and festival play a crucial role in Australia's re-emergence. As the country attempts to readjust the economy in this post-pandemic period, Mardi Gras' significant contribution to tourism, hospitality, and the arts are needed now, more than ever.



While Mardi Gras' contribution to Sydney's culture and the economy remains significant, the lack of acknowledgement to the very real challenges faced by the LGBTIQ+ community for many, is not good enough.

This year's parade took on a new format within the confines of the Sydney Cricket Grounds, the day was not without incident. Last year's radical protest group, Department of Homo Affairs, made a brief return, storming the field as the NSW Police took centre stage. Dressed as cricket umpires with the slogan "cops are out" on their backs, the daring foursome stretched out a bright blue banner in front of the NSW Police preventing the float from moving forward and showcasing their support for the belief that the glorification of an institution responsible for causing so much death, destruction and violence towards the LGBTIQ+ community has no place in the parade.



SOURCE: Pride in Protest Facebook

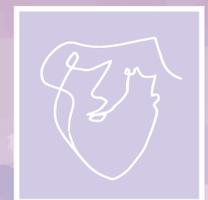
Discussions of complacency, loss of meaning and an out of touch corporate board within the Mardi Gras organisation have long existed with criticisms from every facet of the community, including myself. However, the fact that I can critique an organisation whose sole purpose is to elevate the visibility of the LGBTIQ+ community must not go unnoticed. Organisations like Mardi Gras simply did not exist 50 years ago. To this day, they remain the only major organisation with unfounded government, corporate and community support with a global platform. The critique lies in the question of what exactly they are doing with that platform.

Of Course, Mardi Gras will tell you that their corporate sponsorships go towards their float, event and performers scholarships - and they aren't wrong. This year in the hopes of regenerating the hospitality and arts scene, Mardi Gras announced a nation wide grant for venues to hire and support their local queer artists and host a parade viewing party.

Maybe Sydney's Mardi Gras has reached the peak of its evolution? As an organisation that has paved the way for LGBTIQ+ reform, they have survived and thrived by working within the margins of their allowed existence. There is hope that with a new CEO and partnerships with organisations such as Equality Australia, the festival is showing signs of reinvigorating its protests roots. However, I will not be looking at Mardi Gras to lead the change and nor should you.

It is my hope that Mardi Gras has found a new home in the Sydney Cricket Ground, a symbolic gesture, leaving Oxford Street available for those ready and willing to take it back.

**Discussions of complacency, loss of meaning and an out of touch corporate board within the Mardi Gras organisation have long existed with criticisms from every facet of the community...**



Chantel Henwood  
(they/them)  
Queer writer, Arts student and plant parent.  
Follow the author here:  
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# Sometimes, coming out isn't the hardest thing you'll do

by Jeremy Ellis



**DISCLAIMER:** I write from an incredibly privileged position and have intentionally chosen to focus on issues of validating and exploring the sexual or romantic self post-coming out rather than discrimination or harassment, as I feel this has less discussion. Those are separate and substantial issues. I cannot speak for the queer experience in its entirety, or for anyone and everyone, especially not the lesbian or transgender experience. I only seek to convey the experiences of myself and friends over time.

## Part One

It's no secret that being part of the LGBTQI+ community is rife with challenge and obstacles. It's hard to know where to begin; marriage equality, harassment and discrimination, microaggressions socially and professionally, identity issues, legislative disempowerment or family dismissal... it feels like a never-ending list.

One event close to the heart of any queer person, is coming out. Often the ideal society where you never have to come out (straight people don't, why should we?) is discussed and even lived by some. However, it's still common, and incredibly difficult for most. Upon coming out, my first thoughts to you would be 'Congratulations!' You've put aside struggles, doubt and are ready to start living openly. It should be smooth sailing from here - right?

You may be eager to explore sex, dating or love. It's the part you've been excluded from. You're excited! Is there someone at school where that might happen? Probably not. That's okay, you'll meet other people! Now you're going to a party with some straight friends. Maybe tonight's the night. You walk in, and your straight friends have endless opportunities - is there even anyone queer at the party? If so, are they interested? Let alone, are you?

To be a young, queer adolescent or early adult, you'd be 'lucky' to have had a relationship, flirtations or casual involvement. That as a standard experience for young queers, is 'unheard of' (especially without online facilitation). In a society dominated by heteronormativity, labels and categorisation... this is isolating. It leaves you vulnerable. Your straight friends can go off into countless experiences while you're left standing there, wondering if something is wrong with you.

That sexual and romantic exploration as you develop is foundational to recognising your identity, developing healthy relationships and gaining insights into those things. To feel like you're excluded from it by virtue of who you are, simply due to what at first seems a lack of people but then becomes an entire self-doubting mechanism, can really hurt you.

Even for those who have had relationships its not some miracle exception. To draw on my own context, the only queer friends who have been in relationships involved one long-distance, and one taken away by COVID-19 right before it began. When it feels like your only chances at sexual or romantic exploration are in what's considered 'exceptional' circumstances for straight people, it only solidifies pain and invalidation. Your straight friends may not understand this, but that's because they have it.

Online dating: something once described to me as 'my only choice'. Online dating can work for some people, and when it does that is nothing but excellent. However, for queer people it facilitates many toxic behaviours. At least in Sydney, the community has far too many normalised problems. Massive age gaps in sex lacking mutual capacity/autonomy; attacking of feminine personalities; racial exclusion or fetishism. Probably most of the queer people you've met have been assaulted, discriminated against or taken advantage of. This doesn't mean positive experiences cannot happen online – not at all. However, it certainly acts as a tool for employing the more toxic of behaviours in a community you'd think would be unified against shared challenges.

If you consistently struggle to meet anyone face-to-face, and then miss out again in online dating – what does that leave you with? Feelings of desperation, alienation... there are many potential reactions.

Now, count yourself lucky if you do have supportive friends. However, you may hear consistent reassurances like 'You're attractive! It's not you! You're smart, funny, you'll find something eventually!' If time starts to pass and you keep hearing these comments with no experiences arising, no matter how good the support is – you start to wonder if any of that is true. It invites foundational self-doubt.

Over the last year, this was all exacerbated by COVID-19. This was unilateral, yes, but it heightens the queer struggles when you're literally incapable of meeting new people. For anyone who had freshly come out, left school or turned 18 – it was a dream and a hope taken away.

So yes, unfortunately obstacles don't disappear after coming out. Letting yourself be vulnerable after you've been forced into it by virtue of who you are, feeling like you're missing out on basic experiences that you don't even know if you deserve is tough. It's easy to consider these emotions juvenile but they hold such developmental importance.

Remember a couple things; put yourself first and rely on the right friends and family. If you engage in sex, ensure it's safe – speak to your doctor if you're unsure. Don't get involved with someone still figuring themselves out; it takes time, is something they need to do on their own and is a trap you cannot fall into. Finally, recognise that you are not alone. This is a collective experience for a reason.

Despite it all, you might find you'd change very little. Allowing yourself to be vulnerable will lead you to make mistakes, yes – but it can be incredible too. You may fall in love, meet amazing people, foster deeper connections with friends and family...another never-ending list, but a good one.

“  
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“  
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Jeremy is a second-year Law/ Arts (French and linguistics) student at UNSW. He enjoys writing, foreign languages, classical music and a drink with friends.

# A Family Heirloom: Trauma

by Shajara Khan

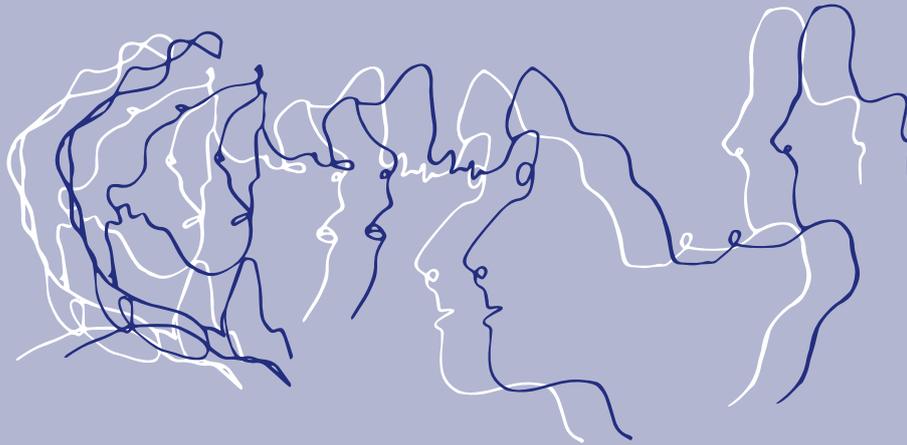


Illustration Credits: Roni Kwan

*Reflecting on the trauma society faces as it learns to articulate the concept.*

Since I began my master's degree last February, I have found myself fixated on Riz Ahmed's latest album, *The Long Goodbye*. It is a fresh exploration of the effects of partition<sup>1</sup> on the diaspora of the Indian sub-continent.

In the grand scheme of things, finding new music is typically a matter of broadening your artistic palette. But this album is a true masterpiece. I replayed the entire track list for two weeks straight, dancing in my room with the songs blasting in my ears. Each song lyrically elucidated Ahmed's feelings of disconnection with his nationality as he tries to uphold his cultural identity - a struggle that every person in the diaspora has faced at some point. It was poetic but catchy, a real rumination on our time.

Eventually I found the buried treasure trove of Ahmed's oeuvre. He has also produced a short film by the same name *The Long Goodbye*. This time, it was a visual breakdown of the permanent 'otherness' that migrant children and children of the diaspora experience.

But perhaps the most impactful piece of media he gifted to the cultural stratosphere was his 2020 feature film *Mogul Mowgli*, co-written and directed by Bassam Tariq. The film explores Zed's (Ahmed's) journey as he faces the challenges of battling a degenerative autoimmune condition while struggling to reconcile with his father. As a consequence, it is both protagonists who are emotionally disconnected from one another and their community.

As I watched the movie, I found myself reliving so many of the emotions that I had been busy suppressing. I soon realised that if unresolved trauma was something I was suffering from, it was bound to be affecting my mum and grandma too. The trauma we have may differ in its contextual background, but it is something we share, like a messed-up family heirloom.

Strangely, it was only through my Instagram explore page that I discovered the term for this experience that so many others' shared. Intergenerational trauma.

<sup>1</sup> Perkins, C.R. 1947. Partition of India and Pakistan. The 1947 Partition Archive, Stanford Libraries.

<sup>2</sup> Sigal, J.J. Dinicola, V.F Buonvino, M. 1988. Grandchildren of survivors: Can negative effects of prolonged exposure to excessive stress be observed two generations later? SAGE Journals.

<sup>3</sup> Ritman, A. 2021. British Independent Film Awards: 'Rocks' named Best Film, Anthony Hopkins wins Best Actor. The Hollywood Reporter.

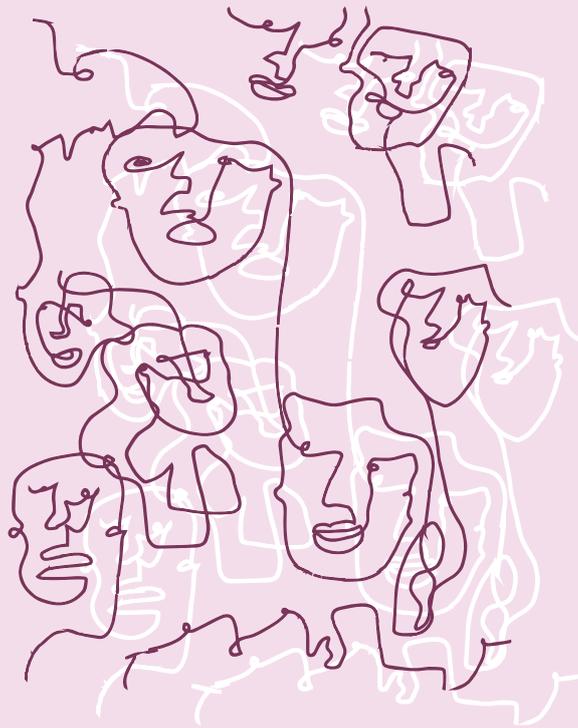


Illustration Credits: Roni Kwan



The term was first used in connection to a 1988 Canadian study<sup>2</sup> which found that the grandchildren of Holocaust survivors accessed mental health services at a rate 300% above the rest of the population. Intergenerational trauma now applies to a vast web of communities who have articulated their inheritance of traumatic experiences. I can look back at the grief I experienced losing my dad at age three, and how dismissive my mum was when I tried to address it with her as I grew older. It was only after she started divulging the events she had undergone in her life and how turbulent her relationship was with my grandma that I understood. Trauma and grief are so easily dismissed in our families and communities.

There are plenty of memes on social media that touch on the casual manner in which a lot of diasporic children discuss the harmful things that our parents did to us, like the psychological and physical abuse. There is some release in making jokes as a coping mechanism to distract from the trauma, but our cultural landscape is on a trajectory to the point where we are going to have to stop and reflect at some point.

It is only within the last four to five years that the discussion has pivoted from, "lol isn't it funny how casually our parents just damaged us?" to "I am still dealing with what my parents did to me and I will make sure it doesn't happen to my kids." There is a growing acceptance for counselling and support networks that are necessary to reckon with mental health issues. More people are utilising artistic outlets to process their trauma - some of us are even making award-winning movies.<sup>3</sup>

Trauma manifests itself in many different ways but being traumatised does not define us. There is so much strength, creativity, knowledge, and wisdom in our communities. Those are the traits I would like to use to narrate the characters of myself, my mum, and my grandma.



Shajara is in her final year of her master's in international relations. Usually, you'll find her reading and writing about the state of global politics bringing about daily existential crises. In the hours she can find time to tear herself away from her studies, she is bingeing let's plays of horror games on YouTube that will without a doubt give her nightmares.

Follow the author here: Instagram @dream\_fallen.

# Vulnerability Through My Less Lived Years

by Aadrika Gupta

Illustration Credits: Roni Kwan



“ Every moment, I needed to engross myself in some kind of distraction. I had stopped being my vulnerable self in order to be tougher - like everyone expected me to be.

I came to Australia in February 2020, as an international student. Back then, I was told that I needed to be strong. And for the month and a half the university was operating, I was.

But the weekend UNSW stopped, it felt as if everything had come to a halt.

Like many others, I felt disgruntled and confused. But I had never felt this way before.

I realized this was because I kept reminding myself to be strong, when in actuality, I failed at it.

I stopped feeling my emotions, I avoided talking to people back home. Every moment, I needed to engross myself in some kind of distraction. I had stopped being my vulnerable self in order to be tougher - like everyone expected me to be.

According to Google, vulnerability can be defined as "the quality or state of being exposed to the possibility of being attacked or harmed, either physically or emotionally."

However, I think this is a very negative definition. Instead, I want to look at vulnerability as the core of human existence.

Personally, I have just always felt emotionally vulnerable, and whenever somebody would use the term "toughen-up", I would be left extremely puzzled. It felt as if I had to purposely restrain from feeling emotions and expressing myself in the most natural way.

As a kid, I would cry almost instantaneously. I would be prodded with questions and suggestions on how to control it to ensure my emotions did not overflow. But I didn't get it. It was impossible to understand how bottling-up emotions was better than expressing myself by shedding tears. If someone had hurt me, wasn't it their right to know?

If I ever questioned anybody about this, the only answer I would get is that, 'it's safer this way.'

By not being vulnerable we're protecting ourselves from the harm that people can cause by encroaching on our emotions. But I disagree.

An important thing that 2020 has taught is that we owe it to ourselves to be honest and upfront about our feelings.

It's not as if nobody ever feels anything, we just choose to open up to select people. Usually, it is the people we're most comfortable around, such as our best friends, other times, it's complete strangers like somebody we just met on a train.

However, if we are choosy about who we show our true selves to then isn't it an act of depriving everybody of our natural aura and deceiving those around us, including ourselves? It was surprising, even for me, to witness how I had changed in a matter of a couple of weeks from being somebody who could always be herself, to somebody forced into a tough exterior.

Vulnerability is not really a concept that needs to be grasped, rather it's a state you need to learn to be comfortable in. It is the art of learning to let go and teaching ourselves to learn to feel our emotions. It needs to be perfected over time.

For me, it's my ability to open up to someone without being judged for my flaws, my mistakes, and my thoughts. It's an advocacy for more listening and acceptance, from all. My perception may differ since it comes from the view of an avid overthinker, but perhaps you may resonate with it and find solace in vulnerability.

**Vulnerability is not really a concept that needs to be grasped, rather it's a state you need to learn to be comfortable in.**



Illustration Credits: Roni Kwan



Aadrika is currently a final-year Masters of Commerce student who is fascinated by human emotions way more than she should be. When she's not stuck in a rut of procrastinating the endless burden of her assignments, she often broods in the quietness of her surroundings and pens down her thoughts.

Follow the author here:  
Facebook @ Aadrika Gupta  
Instagram @modestexceptions\_



Isobel Golding



Ava Lacoon-Robinson



Isobel Knight



Thao Pham



Sacha Shaw



Abhranil Hazra



Bella Ziade



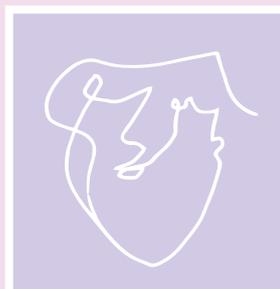
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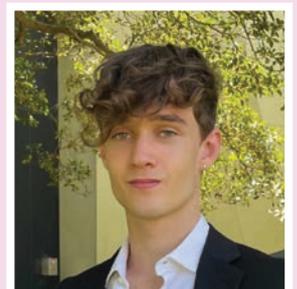
George Raptis



Regina Wang



Chantel Henwood



Jeremy Ellis



Shajara Khan



Aadrika Gupta

# Writers





Katelin is a second year Fine Arts student working as an Illustrator. When she's not drawing, you can find her reading books, making spaghetti and appreciating her friends immensely. Her work is inspired by the love that herself and her friends have for one another and their late night conversations that feel like magic.

Dana is a 4th year Commerce & Design student. She enjoys experimenting with different mediums, abstract forms and exploring a range of techniques in the digital and analogue form. For the Cycles artwork, she was heavily influenced by the abstract and geometric forms from Joan Miro and Juan Angel Cotta.



Yanti loves bus hopping within suburbs that have no other feasible transport, driving excluded. She also enjoys warm afternoons perfect for weeding the garden. She is currently focused on bridging and exploring the hybridity of 3D works and textile.



Eloise is a first year student studying Fine Arts/Arts. She is a self-taught artist from the Mid North Coast who loves to capture the beauty of the world through her art. She loves to use her work to tell beautiful and important stories that, she hopes, can help shift the world into something more innovative, empathetic, and environmentally aware.



Damla is a third year industrial design student at UNSW. She is interested in sustainable living and activism. She's passionate about self expression through art and is currently pursuing making products that help create social and environmental change. You can follow her creative journey on instagram @dh.creations

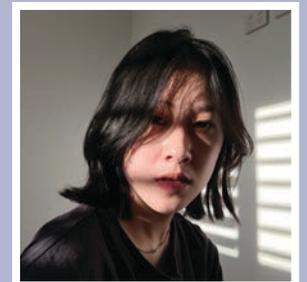


Maha is a second year law/arts student and she loves to draw. The mediums used in her artworks are graphite pencil, pen, watercolours & prisma colour pencils. She has an art tiktok account where she posts her artworks, as well as process videos, tutorials and time lapses. (@insidemahassketchbook)



Christine is a fifth-year design & commerce student that specialises in illustration and graphic design. In her artwork, "Metamorphosis", she explores themes of physical vulnerability by utilising people and insect imagery - emphasising how our bodies in their most vulnerable state can incite growth or even metamorphosis.

Instagram: @speclee



Cursed with a name two words too long, self-proclaimed 'artist' Felicity often spends her time not drawing. Instead, she opts to drool over Houseki no Kuni and think too hard about the little things.



Sophie Lane uses meditative and diaristic writing practices which create a safe space for emotion, denying the binaries and hierarchies of patriarchy which have defined 'vulnerability' as 'feminine' as 'less than'. She utilises language and writing as a key element in both care and artistic practices, and investigates how vulnerability manifests in writing and how language can hold emotion and interact with care toward self and others. Instagram: @soph.lane



# Artists

# GET INVOLVED





vulnerability



**THARUNKA**

— Issue 01 —

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