

THARUNKA

Freedom

Issue. 06



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

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COVER ART BY TALICA

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Talica, from a poor translation of 'Талица' the name of a random Russian town, is a disillusioned International Studies & Media student, who draws to fill time. She hopes to one day get a job that pays money but, then, don't we all?



006. The Productivity Paradox: Entering
the Media Industry
Nidhi Daithankar

008. Parasite
Juliet Manolias

009. Brink and Scrawl
Liana Charles

010. Leafy Boy
Zakaa Zahir

011. Lilly
Phoebe Au

012. The Snowy Ranges
Nina Greenhill

013. Modern Imperialism in New
Caledonia
Issy Golding

015. Emancipate
Jiashi Li

016. The Murdoch Royal Commission: What
is the petition and why is it necessary?
Juwariya Malik

018. So, 'Freedom', What Is It?
Wen Yu Yang

019. Social Distancing: Notes on Self-
Delusion
George Raptis

021. The Ballad Beyond Reading Gaol:
Avenge Oscar Wilde
Genevieve Malloy

026. Life, Law and Liberty –
Reflections on Ruth Bader Ginsburg
Ashraf Olife

029. XIÀO
Wen Yu Yang

033. The Freedom of Being in Control:
How imposed social isolation connotes
the idea of loneliness
Aadrika Gupta

035. Living in Yesterday
Flyn Moss

038. SRC President's Report
Tom Kennedy

039. Meet Our Artists



DEAR READER,

Welcome to the final issue of *Tharunka* in 2020, 'Freedom'.

In this issue, our contributors explore the kaleidoscopic facets of freedom – the political, the personal, and everything in between. Numerous writers reflect on how social distancing and the looming prospect of graduation have affected their sense of who they are in this great big world.

At *Tharunka*, that just about sums up the year we've had. When COVID-19 hit in March, and we were told we'd no longer have print editions due to Arc's funding shortfall, we were gutted. But even in this most unusual of years, we have maintained our focus on the foremost mission of *Tharunka* – to make student voices heard. In this vein, we were able to secure a limited print run for this final issue.

This has been a year of firsts for *Tharunka*. We've brought back election reporting, and ruffled more than a few feathers doing it. In the coming year, *Tharunka* will be changing to a journal format, with three print issues and a larger online news presence. But whatever the future holds, *Tharunka* will always be a place where student writers endeavour to use their editorial freedom to push boundaries and tell important stories.

It's been an honour to take the reins of this decades-old publication, working alongside an immensely passionate and dedicated team. To Axel, Jo, Jack and Saafiyah, thank you for everything.



AXEL
Creatives Sub-Editor

Most of my editorial addresses this year have amounted to 'literature is so powerful, wow, there's never been a more important time for art'. Now I would like to add that there has never been a more important time for truth. As Creatives Subeditor, I've had little to do with citations and fact-checking. I've had a lot to do with personal language and experience, life contorted or recreated, the world reflected anew, alternative worlds dreamt into being. Subjectivity and the stories we tell are not enemies of truth; they are essential to it.

In a so-called 'marketplace of ideas', fiction and all creative writing can give as much freedom - of thought, imagination, and knowledge - as any non-fiction. The world is built on stories. Creative writing builds our capacity to identify and reconcile truth. So I end this year imploring: please keep reading creative works. If we have to live in a 'post-truth' world, make it a thousand worlds. Make it fictional worlds, and with each, see something new and truer in the world around you.

My thanks to Wen for her story of degradation, abuse, and duty; to Phoebe, for uniting flora and humanity in one poetic breath; to Juliet, for flipping the cultural script of birds as symbols of freedom; to Flynn, for a dystopia highlighting the fragility of life and personal connection; to Nina, for showing the Snowy Ranges through her eyes; and to Liana, for her poetic contrast of 'freedom' as she felt it at high school's and university's ends. My thanks to everyone who has read, written with, and contributed to the community of Tharunka this year. It has been a pleasure and a privilege to work with you.



JO
Online Sub-Editor

This year has been an exciting and terrifying time to be working in journalism. As someone who is particularly proud of Tharunka's long history of print issues, it was disappointing to lose our print issues for 2020. But with the downsides comes the upsides. It was fascinating to watch how our entire world (and specifically the media industry) shifted to become significantly more online. I moved home to Canberra and was emailing feedback to writers and sitting in zoom meetings remotely.

Just as the means of creating journalism changed, so too did the content of journalism. I edited thoughtful pieces about COVID-19, and the various effects of it across industries. I loved how Tharunka prompted debate, and enjoyed editing contrasting pieces, such as some about how remote learning was benefitting students with disabilities but disadvantaging those from lower socio-economic households. I have really valued my time at Tharunka and am particularly grateful to have worked with such enthusiastic writers and such a great team: Henry, Saafiyah, Axel and Jack. I will miss this.



JACK
Features Sub-Editor

As this chaotic year draws to a close, I'm astounded yet vindicated that we've made it so far. Our final issue for this year's run of Tharunka, Freedom, has rounded out 2020 with a series of erudite writers. Genevieve Malloy examines the political aspect of the work of Oscar Wilde from a Marxist lens. Ashraf Olife reflects on the life and career of the late Ruth Bader Ginsburg and her contributions to not only the law, but to the notion of an ethical life. Two more articles take a cerebral look at our response to the COVID-19 pandemic. George Raptis meditates on the relationship between the nomenclature of the crisis, especially the term 'social distancing', and the historical role of such language. Aadrika Gupta probes into the psychology of our reactions to quarantining and social isolation, calling on us to not forget the meaning of freedom.

These fine articles form something of a peroration for this year's edition of Tharunka, true to our tradition of challenging main currents of thought. It has been an unremitting pleasure to have played a small but hopefully meaningful role in that process. I would like to thank all our loyal readers, all our contributors, and all our supporters who have given us the drive to continue UNSW's oldest student magazine.

Starting out at Tharunka, I was a mediocre designer at best. As it always seems when looking at things in retrospect, however, I do think that Tharunka forced some of my best work out of me. It's been so exciting to do the things I haven't had the chance to in my 5 years of uni, and it'll be one of those experiences I'll look back fondly on in the years to come. I have the best team to thank for that.

To me, Tharunka was not only a place for me to develop my skills as a designer, but a place for me to meet new people, try new things and most importantly - visit the UNSW Paddington campus for the first time. Jokes aside, the most important thing I have come to realise is the agency us creatives have in a visually dependent world. Graphic design is more than just the aesthetics, and I'm so glad I got to explore that this year. Big thanks to everyone who contributed this year, hope to see many of you in issues to come!



SAAFIYAH
Graphic Designer

THE PRODUCTIVITY PARADOX: ENTERING THE MEDIA INDUSTRY

By Nidhi Daithankar

Just take one look at my current search history, and you'll find hundreds of 'How to Choose a Fulfilling Career' articles that I've sifted through in my 2am delirium in recent months.

For me, graduating always seemed like a distant event in the unforeseeable future. We have A.I. Instagram influencers (Lil Miquela anyone?), phones with storage the size of laptops, and an immersive online world that has truly transformed the course of life. But *actually* having to leave school? No, that always seemed far-fetched to me – indeed, if academics have taught me anything it's been to bask in the comfort of knowing that 30 years later, this one 30% assignment is going to be an infinitely minuscule moment in my life. However, this has since started to evolve into a sort of paradox in my mind – I call it the productivity paradox. In order to reach a point in my life when university goes from the present to just a collection of hand-picked memories, I will have to come to terms with the fact that one day I *will* have to turn the tassel, so to speak.

My earliest memories of my childhood were in school, where I was told I was a distraction to the class projecting my boredom onto others. My homework would nearly always be returned to me with tedious notes scrawled in the margins or questions marks scattered periodically, but always that one word at the end of my work – “careless”; scribbled in dangerously red, seriously bright, ballpoint. Seeing this word numerous times, my parents attempted to drill into me the age-old rhetoric (in a not-so-nice voice) that “you reap what you sow”.

For seven-year-old me this was just the everyday routine, but after getting older and seeing my parents embody this specific trait I started to seriously panic: when would I learn to actually grow up?

In the South Asian diaspora, a point of commonality between many ethnicities is the culture of filial piety – giving back to your parents the sacrifices they have made for you. This is not so much guilt – tripping as it is learning to show gratitude towards those around you. I grew up in Australia for much of my life, having arrived here as a first-generation migrant thirteen years ago. I personally witnessed the hardships my family went through as they uprooted their everyday life and starting a new one overseas. They did not let the fear of an alien country, a different language and a new job inhibit them; instead, they hid their worries like parents do, pretending that everything is merry. In my head they were Herculean. They persevered their whole life to make something of themselves so they would have something to show back home. Now on the brink of turning 21, my glorification turns into a weight of anxiety that travels with me. I start to worry that as the years go by, while I still struggle to find my place in my chosen communications degree, my parents will grow older without sharing any of my successes with me.

When I look at the social media driven communications industry today, I see such an emphasis on entrepreneurship, freelancing and influencing. And while I genuinely do appreciate how those industries that were once considered niche help cultivate a new online culture, I can't help but question our unending obsession with efficiency, productivity and the rhetoric of 'maximising opportunities'. What led me to this curiosity was when I really started to notice the small differences between university and the outside world. At university, we were always taught to create ethical and innovative content that pushed the boundaries of conversation. However, the growth of the online world of 2020 revealed to me a harsher reality: that public trust has always been a commodity.

Today, social media is constantly infiltrated by native advertising where the lines between real and performative are blurred, convincing us to buy certain products in subtle ways. Instagram influencers brand themselves as lifestyle content bloggers, often showcasing brand partnership products to convince their followers of their value and aesthetic but offering little evidence of their actual use. Even the monopoly on the news industry makes you question the agenda behind certain stories and how they try to shape your understanding of the world. And so, sometimes I fear that the pressures of 'making it' in the media industry are erasing our creativity and passion as we scramble to stock up on a 6 figure bank statement to prepare for the hypothetical future. Now with graduation looming over my head, I find myself walking a fine line between searching for a successful career in a world that has lost its glamour for me, or not living up to my full potential that my parents have always believed I have.

This is not to say that university graduates should be disillusioned upon entering the media industry. Social media has helped jumpstart some great initiatives such as sustainably driven small businesses, educational content about personal budgeting, and art and fashion career education that did not exist 10 years ago. However, with the traditional 9 to 5 slowly transforming into a 'whenever you're needed' schedule, it does make me question the obligation we feel to constantly be switched on. If it is true that if you persevere you shall prosper, then maybe it is time for me to just start my post-graduation journey and see where it takes me.



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Nidhi is a third year Bachelor of Media student who is curious about how the comms industry will evolve in the next 5 years. When she is not busy exploring the cultural dilemmas of growing up in a South Asian household or contemplating when travel will start up again, you can find her dabbling in art, music, and dance.



PARASITE

By *Juliet Manolias*

Over fifty species of cuckoo are brood parasites. They lay their eggs in another bird's nest and fly back home, while their non-cuckoo hosts are left to do all the work. The resulting chick is demanding. It quickly outgrows its foster parents in size, volume, appetite. It's a wonder how they keep up, forced into such a foreign situation, with no escape from the strict rules outlined by parental instinct. Are they stressed? I feel stressed just watching them. The shrill cries of the cuckoo chick can be heard from all corners of my house and I am reminded of how powerless I am in the world.

I don't believe that the host parents would harbour any kind of resentment towards the chick. I try to be aware of when animals are anthropomorphised to such an extreme degree, something that already occurs far too much for my liking. We say that they symbolise freedom, only because they can fly, but a bird is no freer than any other animal. They do what their instincts tell them to do. For the adult cuckoos, their instincts form a path of freedom. The host birds are trapped. But they don't feel trapped, and the cuckoos don't genuinely unburden themselves – this would require change, but none has occurred. One pair of birds continues to rear young, while the other consistently avoids doing so. I will not misrepresent these actions through the twisted lens of our ideals. I refuse to romanticise.

Instead, I stare. Every spring, a pair of cuckoos migrate here, where I assume they were born, and begin the ordeal of sneaking their eggs into the nests of local birds. My stomach churns. I listen to how they scream louder than any other bird here, as the currawongs, the miners, the magpies, in a feat of aerial magnificence, fuelled by a fearful, instinctual frenzy, mob the cuckoos in their desperate attempts to keep them away from their nests. I wonder how much they know about the cuckoos, the future they might bring. I love my local birds, and part of me wants to hate the cuckoos. Hate them for the panic they cause, the potential lives they take away to replace with more of their own. I know that I am lucky to be able to bear witness to such complex forces of nature in my own backyard. After all, it only happens a few weeks of the year. But the battle of empathies that takes place within me is too much to bear. There is no universe in which both parties succeed. All I can do is stare.

When I go back inside, my thoughts follow me. I long to be the migratory cuckoo, free to do as I please, but I will never grow past being the chick. Limited by overwhelming needs I can't control, forever helpless. Needing help isn't a bad thing, but I've struggled to convince myself of that fact. The bigger fear is the thought of leaving university, becoming the host parent desperately trying to live up to the pressures that have been placed upon me, while still being the same baby bird. No real control over the people and circumstances I face, fully aware that this freedom I'm told to look forward to is nothing more than an illusion. I can never live completely free of my burdens. I can only hope that it gets easier.



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Juliet is a Science/Arts student who likes to combine her autofictive style with her interest in biology. 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

BRINK

Life, stretching its wings
in two sunbound arcs from the heart,
cuts loose the clear breeze
which whips and whirls the world to sing
one high note: a dart
to crack the crust of childhood's freeze.

Breathe in, and step out,
for down below the soft world wakes.
Each fresh fingertip
yearns to trace the dawn's joyous shout;
Each feathered heart aches
to break the last of the past's dull grip.

Embrace the first flight
as freedom shines away the haze
which muffled the truth.
Cry the glory of morning light
soaring to bolder days:
behold the weightlessness of youth.
(On graduating high school, six years ago,
over the year before university)

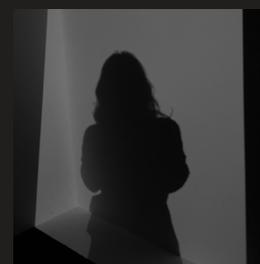
SCRAWL

Freedom is the fact that I can look down
at this pen and this ink and this scrawl
and think 'yes I will let someone read
this I will let someone think it is good
it is true' it is walking down my street
at dusk and feeling my shoulders lift
with purpose and strangers saying 'oh
you look so much like your mother' and
saying 'yes I am my mother's daughter'
with my father smiling at us and myself
in the mirror as someone I would like to
meet and at the end of school they said
I was 'nice' and at the end of university
they say I am 'quirky' and this difference
is the soul I have carved like in the story
I read once where each soul is a shape
with a symbol inside and my shape is a
circle and my symbol is a heart as twee
as that is for I will put people first and I
will not apologise and I will put myself
first and I will not apologise and this
is the end of the page but I will write
myself into the earth my skin the sky
forever

(On graduating university, almost drunk,
2:45am)

Liana Charles

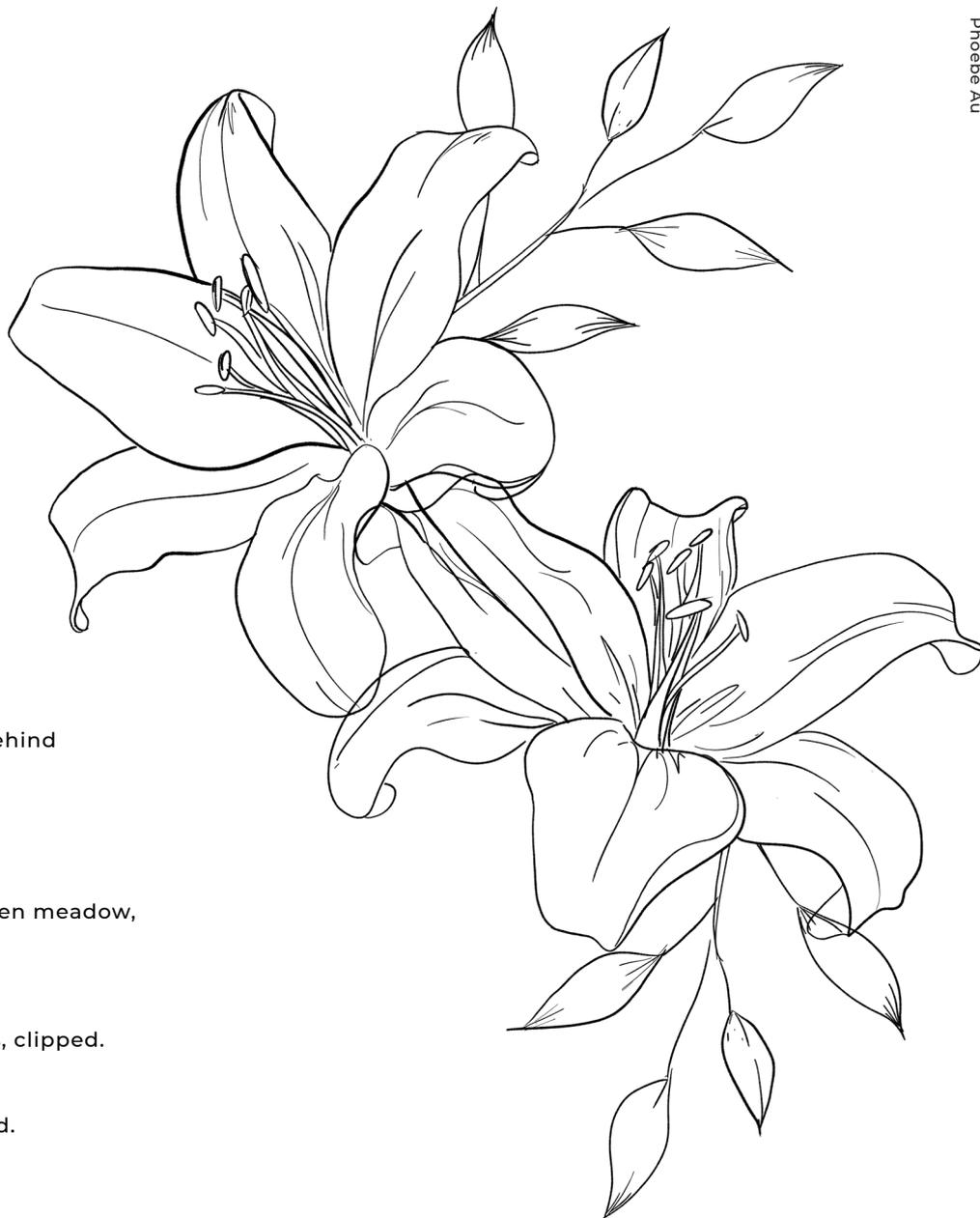
Since age seven, Liana has been keeping a diary in her own secret code: atrocious handwriting. Occasionally she looks back and deciphers enough to pick out a narrative and form a story, usually about travel and missed connections. Other writing includes poetry and short fiction.





LILLY

By Phoebe Au



Soft, frail and pretty,
she lies there, wilting behind
my father's window.

She was in bloom once,
plucked from a lush green meadow,
severed from her roots.

Leaves, like green wings, clipped.
Her cries, hastily stifled.
Stems, violently snapped.

Unable to speak.
A windowsill ornament,
unable to scream.

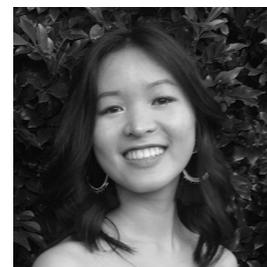
Left to watch the street
beyond the glass. They stare at
her fragile beauty.

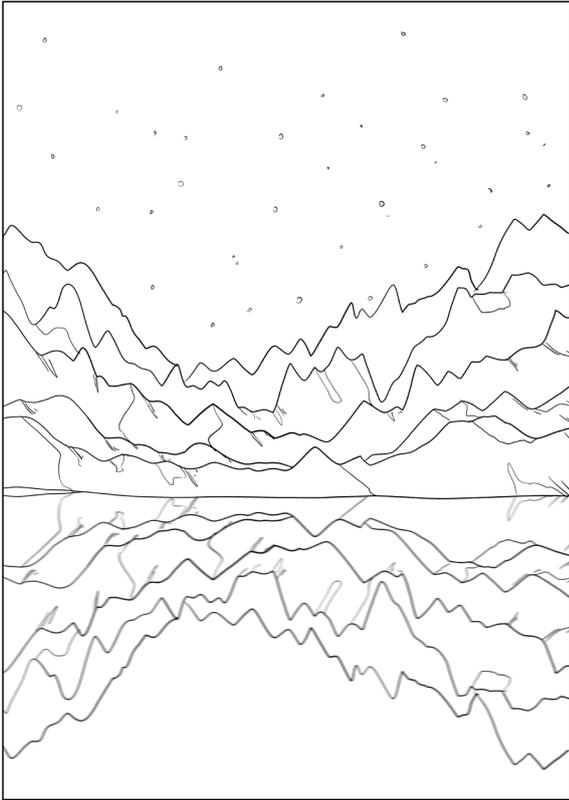
Her head bows further.
Submission, she's told, is an
act of survival.

Away from the glass,
she has turned her Maidenhead,
lest she dare hope for

A life beyond her window.

To Phoebe, writing has always been an important creative outlet and medium for self expression. Her work is heavily inspired by paintings and personal experiences.





THE SNOWY RANGES

By Nina Greenhill

To the place that calls me, where my heart finally beats, where my breath returns steady; where the quiet is real and strain is gone, where my self will rest, where my soul will live on.

It has my love free from duress. It waits and understands. It will call, and it will hope that I will trek back, that I will move tracing down its snowy track.

It is a silent affair twixt mountain and I, an understanding one - steady and constant.
It is a place I withdraw into though hundreds of kilometres away.

It is an ancient being, the mountain itself. It is a place where one can exist entirely as oneself. It calls for those who will watch from the summit, who will sit and enjoy it.

It is a place, nothing more and nothing less: it is crisp and it is cold and it sunburns terribly, but it sits and it lasts and it gives. It gives so much.

It is an environment to be feared and to be fearless. It is one to relish the peace, the solitude, the utter acceptance of those who take its way of life.

It summons strength and you push through.

Fresher air one can never find if one is not in the highland winds.

The bond of the mountain comes from the beginning of time but only those open to it will understand the moment where the meaning of life is clear.

I find it at the top of the double chair lift when strapping my board, my skis, my helmet.

The steps I take are these:

1. Sit
2. Take a breath
3. Fix your goggles and look around, the majesty over the drop, the rescinding ranges, the broken chain of mountains
4. Breathe. Repeat steps two and three until you throttle down the slope again.
5. Go down the ignored wonder of the world.
6. Get on the lift and do it again.



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Nina started writing when she was 8 years old and didn't really stop. Her first work was an auto-fiction series on an accident-prone girl who stood up to bullies. It will never see the light of day. What will is her writing about magical witches and mercenaries. That's what makes her happy.

The meaning of life then is to be, and to one who is up on the mountain, to that one, being is enough.

Living is simple - breathe in, breathe out.

On that mountain that calls each day, where rent is steeper than the run, truth evolves. Truth sees and truth breathes. Minds stand still and I can just be. It is the place that calls me, where my heart is beating, where I can breathe steady, where I can finally be quiet and everything loosens - where my thoughts just stop.

It is where my self is resting and where my soul lives on.

This is the place where I call home.

MODERN IMPERIALISM IN NEW CALEDONIA

By Issy Golding

'For us, independence is a question of dignity and dignity is non-negotiable'

- Yeiwéné Yeiwéné

The process of independence is long. New Caledonia is a unique example of the consequences of modern imperialism. Modern imperialism is characterised by soft power, for the commercial gain of the power. It is different from traditional imperialism as it is not entirely dependent on military oppression.¹ Violence of the 1980s accelerated the 'inevitable' journey to independence. Recent referendums show the complexities of independence and issues of modern imperialism.

New Caledonia is a dependent contingency of the French Republic. Colonised by the French in 1853, New Caledonia shares a similar history to that of other colonised states, New Caledonia's position and structure today is politically different to most other nations. The journey towards independence began in 1998.² Violent conflicts broke out in the 1980s, killing many Kanak activists and loyalists. This resulted in a 10-year peace program, supported by the French government. This system intended to restructure the administration systems to re-equalise the region.³ There is a clear social and economic divide between the North, South and Island regions. The division defined by the majority population, the South, the economic capital, is mostly European descendants.⁴ The North and Island regions are largely Kanak and are economically disadvantaged. The 1998 agreements resulted in around 75% of the budget being redistributed⁵. Thus, promoting the necessary social infrastructure in areas inhabited by majority Indigenous Kanak people. Indigenous, Kanak, people make up 40% of the New Caledonian population today.⁶ The policy ended in a series of referendums on independence. The intention was to convince New Caledonians of the benefits of French dependency.⁷ New Caledonia's independence process intentionally appears to be sponsored by its colonial oppressor.

The loyalist ideology suggests that New Caledonia cannot develop without France: "Who could be unaware that only France could support real reforms both by her will and by her means?"⁸. This is not shared by Kanak leaders highlighting the polarisation in New Caledonia. Jean-Marie Tijaou led independence movements through the 1980s civil conflicts. He declared that "Kanak can only count on themselves for decolonisation".⁹ This ideological division highlights the importance of the referendum.

¹ Sueres, Julien. 2020. "Is Aid A Contemporary Manifestation Of Colonialism?". Medium.

² "Land And Independence In New Caledonia". 1991. Culturalsurvival.Org.

³ Maclellan, Nic. 2019. "Thirty Years On, A Spirit Of Reconciliation In New Caledonia". Inside Story.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ "New Caledonia Rejects Independence From France For Second Time". 2020. The Guardian.

⁶ Srinivasan, Prianka. 2020. "New Caledonia Says No To Independence For A Second Time". Abc.Net.Au.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ "New Caledonia Referendum: South Pacific Territory Rejects Independence From France". 2020. BBC News.

⁹ Maclellan, Nic. 2019. "Thirty Years On, A Spirit Of Reconciliation In New Caledonia". Inside Story.

The movement towards independence began with the gradual shift of administration processes and governmental responsibilities. New Caledonia would control all of its administration, other than military and sovereignty.¹⁰ This saw a reduction in the need of French public servants. The first referendum was in 2014, the second in October 2020 and the final expected for 2022.¹¹ The October 2020 vote saw 85% of the country vote on fundamental changes of independence for New Caledonia.¹² It resulted in a slight win for loyalist parties. 52.5% voted 'no' to independence, and 46.7% voted 'yes'. This was up from 2018 which had a 43% vote.¹³ This highlights a greater voter turn out. 2022 will likely see a simple majority, beginning the process of independence.

The era of settler colonialism that dictated the history of New Caledonia has ended. An era of modern imperialism has begun, and it continues to show that New Caledonia remains dependent on France.¹⁴ Approximately one-fifth of New Caledonia's GDP is from France's aid through bilateral agreements. The French Republic utilises financial 'soft power' to develop the New Caledonian state. This appears an altruistic act for the benefit of the greater global community.¹⁵ It is clear that development aids global stability. Critics of this form of aid note that it is often given under manipulative presumptions.¹⁶ This presumes that alignment with Western style government are a sign of development. This global homogeneity perpetuates imperialist ideas. It assumes that Kanak should adhere to French spheres of influence and governmental norms. France's use of economic aid discourages New Caledonian innovation. It promotes economic dependency, propping itself on the finances of France. A popular New Caledonian song declares "Who's the one to pay? The French government pays!". New Caledonia is in a position where it is unlikely to develop whilst under the paternalistic care of France.

Emmanuel Macron said in response to the referendum that he sees a "sign of confidence in the Republic" in the result.¹⁷ Humbled by the increase in those supporting independence, he notes that if voters support independence, France will support them.¹⁸ New Caledonia is a unique example of the use of soft power to promote modern imperialism.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ "New Caledonia Rejects Independence From France For Second Time". 2020. The Guardian.

¹² "New Caledonia Rejects Independence From France For Second Time". 2020. The Guardian.; "New Caledonia Referendum: South Pacific Territory Rejects Independence From France". 2020. BBC News.

¹³ New Caledonia: French Pacific Territory Rejects Independence". 2018. BBC News; Srinivasan, Prianka. 2020. "New Caledonia Says No To Independence For A Second Time". Abc.Net.Au.

¹⁴ Sueres, Julien. 2020. "Is Aid A Contemporary Manifestation Of Colonialism?". Medium.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ "New Caledonia Referendum: South Pacific Territory Rejects Independence From France". 2020. BBC News.

¹⁸ "New Caledonia Referendum: South Pacific Territory Rejects Independence From France". 2020. BBC News; "New Caledonia Rejects Independence From France For Second Time". 2020. The Guardian.

"Land And Independence In New Caledonia". ¹⁹⁹¹. Culturalsurvival.Org. <https://www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/land-and-independence-new-caledonia>.

Maclellan, Nic. ²⁰¹⁹. "Thirty Years On, A Spirit Of Reconciliation In New Caledonia". Inside Story. <https://insidestory.org.au/thirty-years-on-a-spirit-of-reconciliation-in-new-caledonia/>.

"New Caledonia Referendum: South Pacific Territory Rejects Independence From France". ²⁰²⁰. BBC News. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-54410059>.

"New Caledonia Rejects Independence From France For Second Time". ²⁰²⁰. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/oct/05/new-caledonia-rejects-independence-from-france-for-second-time>.

"New Caledonia: French Pacific Territory Rejects Independence". ²⁰¹⁸. BBC News. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-46087053>.

"Non-Self-Governing Territories | The United Nations And Decolonization". ²⁰²⁰. Un.Org. <https://www.un.org/dppa/decolonization/en/nsqt>.

Srinivasan, Prianka. ²⁰²⁰. "New Caledonia Says No To Independence For A Second Time". Abc.Net.Au. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-10-05/new-caledonia-votes-no-to-independence-from-france/12730060>.

Sueres, Julien. ²⁰²⁰. "Is Aid A Contemporary Manifestation Of Colonialism?". Medium. <https://medium.com/@juliansueres/is-aid-a-contemporary-manifestation-of-colonialism-ec362fd7fc4>.



+ Issy is a non fiction writer, poetry enthusiast and avid user of a thesaurus. Loves collecting too many houseplants and dismantling the patriarchy.



7L
28.09.20

Artwork



Art By Dylan Kelly

THE MURDOCH ROYAL COMMISSION, EXPLAINED

By Juwariya Malik

While the United States (US) election has come to dominate much popular discourse over the past month, a historic development has occurred in Australian politics. Kevin Rudd’s petition seeking a Royal Commission into Murdoch media surpassed 500,000 signatures just before its deadline on the 4th of November,¹ making it the Parliamentary petition with the most recorded signatures in Australian history. So, what exactly does the petition entail and what could it mean for Australian media if it comes to fruition?

What is the petition?

The petition is concerned with media diversity, specifically a critique of the growing monopoly of Murdoch family-owned News Corporation (‘News Corp’), a mass media company. The petition is founded on a concern that Australian media ownership is becoming more concentrated alongside business models encouraging “deliberately polarising and politically manipulated news”.² These concerns of the petition regarding undermined public debate, free speech and democracy stem from factors including the high percentage of Australian media ownership by News Corp as well as mass media sackings, regional and local news closures and acquisitions, and defunding the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC).³

¹ “Petition EN1938 – Royal Commission to ensure a strong, diverse Australian news media,” Petitions List, Parliament of Australia, accessed 8 November, 2020, https://www.aph.gov.au/petition_list?id=EN1938

² Parliament of Australia, Petition.

³ Parliament of Australia, Petition.

The Murdoch Media empire

Rupert Murdoch boasts a personal \$7.35 billion dollar fortune and is notorious for his entrenchment within international politics, through media. He inherited a regional Australian newspaper from his father and built a media empire that spans Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States. He uses his media holdings to sway elections, enabling, promoting and profiting from the right-wing populist wave in the last half-century.⁴

In Australia, Murdoch's media empire includes News Corp Australia, which is the country's biggest newspaper owner including the sole national broadsheet *The Australian*, and state papers including *The Daily Telegraph*, *Herald Sun*, *The Courier Mail*, *The Advertiser*, *The NT News and Mercury*. Along with these newspapers in large capital cities, News Corp owns a large number of online suburban and regional titles, the second-biggest national website (*news.com.au*) and is the controlling shareholder of Foxtel. News Corp also owns Sky News, known for conservative commentators such as Alan Jones. It is estimated that as of 2016, News Corp owned 65% of Australian print newspaper readership. News Corp asserts it reaches 16 million Australians each month through its news outlets.⁵

According to Johan Lidberg, Murdoch has been accused of a political mono-culture in editorial staff, which has allegedly resulted in similar editing and reporting styles across their multiple national and global outlets, effectively labelled 'Murdoch editor clones'.⁶ Lidberg argues that Murdoch's immense influence is demonstrated by multiple Murdoch outlets supporting the 2003 Iraq War, and failing to issue an apology when no weapons of mass destructions were found. This is in sharp contrast to *The New York Times*, which apologised to the public for its lack of critical reporting.⁷

While generally swaying behind conservative politicians, Murdoch papers have supported left-wing politicians including Paul Keating, Bob Hawke and Bob Carr. The Murdoch papers initially supported Kevin Rudd and Malcolm Turnbull. However, both politicians claim that a contributing factor to their 'oustings' from their Prime Minister roles was the Murdoch empire shifting against them.

What does it all mean?

Enabling the petition will likely not spur a Royal Commission inquiring specifically into Murdoch, but rather an examination of the complete field of journalism in Australia.⁸ According to the petition itself, it will look at the effect of media concentration in Australia, the impact of Australian media ownership laws and significant changes to the media landscape with emerging social media monoliths of Google, Facebook and Twitter.⁹ Given the impact of such platforms particularly in the dissemination of political discourse and likelihood of misinformation, such an inquiry feels overdue to ensure truth-telling and avoid unsubstantiated and false claims which were predominant in the 2020 US election.¹⁰

Along with astounding public support, the petition has received support from notable figures including former Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull, as well as celebrities such as Hugh Grant and Bette Midler. Australia does not have a threshold of signatures that requires a petition to be debated in parliament, so until it receives political support from the Liberal-National Coalition or the Australian Labor Party, the possibility of a Royal Commission occurring will be unlikely.¹¹ Recently, through a Labor, Greens and minor parties backed motion, a Senate inquiry was established into media diversity, which is a useful step to a full Royal Commission in the future.¹²

Generally, the more the public supports an issue garners, the more likely it is to receive political support to be addressed. However, the irony remains that increased public awareness generally occurs through media scrutiny and reporting, and in this case, the lack of unbiased news is the very subject of the petition, creating a Catch-22 paradox.

Though the petition has regardless amassed significant popularity, largely through social media, it is ultimately at the behest of one of the major political parties to recognise the public interest and create a platform to address it at the heart of government.

⁴ Jonathan Mahler and Jim Rutenberg, "How Rupert Murdoch's empire of influence remade the world," NY Times, April 3, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/04/03/magazine/rupert-murdoch-fox-news-trump.html>

⁵ Zoe Samios, "How much influence does the Murdoch media have in Australia," The Sydney Morning Herald, October 15, 2020, <https://www.smh.com.au/business/companies/how-much-influence-does-the-murdoch-media-have-in-australia-20201015-p565dk.html>

⁶ Johan Lidberg, "The distortion of the Australian public sphere: Media ownership concentration in Australia." *The Australian Quarterly* 90, no. 1 (2019): 16.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Tom Stayner, "Senate votes to hold media diversity inquiry after record-breaking Murdoch petition," SBS News, November 11, 2020, <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/senate-votes-to-hold-media-diversity-inquiry-after-record-breaking-murdoch-petition>.

⁹ Stayner, "Inquiry".

¹⁰ Associated Press, "False Claims of Voting Fraud, Pushed by Trump," Snopes, November 10, 2020, <https://www.snopes.com/ap/2020/11/10/false-claims-of-voting-fraud-pushed-by-trump-thrive-online/>

¹¹ Amanda Meader, "Kevin Rudd petition seeking royal commission into Murdoch media nears 500 000 signatures," The Guardian, November 3, 2020 <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2020/nov/03/kevin-rudd-petition-seeking-royal-commission-into-murdoch-media-nears-500000-signatures>

¹² Stayner, "Inquiry".



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LIBERTY EASE SECURITY PURITY

PEACE LICENSE LATITUDE TIE



LEEWAY LEISURE SHACKLE REST

INDEPENDENCE SIMPLICITY RUN

Source: Reverse Dictionary - Freedom

S O C I A L D I S T A N C I N G : NOTES ON SELF-DELUSION

By George Raptis

Many people have written on the COVID-19 experience, mostly because it seems so inexpressible. It is easy to become lost for words when the world as you had once known it changes overnight, shuts itself off, locks itself in. During the lockdown period, I too found myself trying to make sense of this very much incomprehensible time by clutching at words, attempting to piece my thoughts together. On April 6th I typed a note on my phone:

“People playing hopscotch in the grocery store stuck to the “X’s” marked out on the floor, frozen by some unspoken law. Masks on, eyes scanning empty aisles, side-stepping/back-stepping around the frail man reaching for the box of cereal.”

I could only compare what I was seeing before me to child’s play. I dug deep into language and I could not find a better way to express how different everything had become.

But a new vocabulary multiplied and spread following the outbreak of COVID-19. Our very own state premier was televised daily, urging the people of NSW to stay indoors, to remain vigilant, to “socially distance.” This term, “social distance,” is one that confused me. In my mind, the two words did not fit together. It painted simultaneous images of intimacy and isolation that repelled one another like a child forcing two opposite ends of a pair of fridge magnets against each other. Writer and social commentator Fran Lebowitz voiced her own irritation about the new phrase whilst isolating in her New York apartment: “To me, the word ‘social’ should not be in there.”¹ I too had the same hiccup. The phrase was a plain contradiction.

But it was effortlessly and persistently used by all. It became one of the ways we could prevent the spread of COVID-19; wash your hands, maintain a social distance, stay at home if unwell (I recite these now like a kindergartener reciting their ABCs). The phrase was brandished everywhere; NSW Health advertisements, social media posts, television programs. We began to use it in our daily dialogue in Zoom meetings and phone calls as though the reality of the situation did not already make it clear to us that we were in fact distancing. By the end of the first wave in mid-April, we all came to know and agreed on what it meant to “social distance.”

¹ Michael Schulman, “Fran Lebowitz is Never Leaving New York,” *The New Yorker*, accessed 20 April, 2020, <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/the-new-yorker-interview/fran-lebowitz-is-never-leaving-new-york>.

However, I never got over the hiccup I had with the new phrase despite the world and its people facing much larger and less trivial problems than my own semantic confusion. Only now do I see the artifice in the term or, better yet, the trick I played on myself. The new phrase gave me the illusion that I had control of a situation that was very much beyond my control.

By giving something a name, we're able to confront it head on. We relate phenomena to words and thus give ourselves a way of structuring our experiences in our minds. It functions like a diagnosis; I can say X is the cause of my headaches and therefore I will do everything in my power to stop X. The same can be said for the phrase "social distance." Without a vaccine, we could prevent the spread of the virus by keeping 1.5 metres apart. The very utterance of the phrase "social distancing" became a way that I could grasp some sort of control or at least believe I had any control on the viral outbreak.

I first began to understand this when I would speak to my yiyia via FaceTime. She believed in the essentiality of social distancing almost as though its very power could rid the world of COVID-19. She was convinced that despite the confusion the daily news dispensed, we had control because we could socially distance and this was mandated by health officials and the government. The very utterance of the phrase gave her a great sense of comfort.

Of course I have never doubted the utility of the act of social distancing; leaving roughly 1.5 metres between myself and a stranger on my walk home from work seems to be an easy and practical thing to do to prevent the spread of the virus. But our incessant use of the phrase does illuminate the way we as people can make certainty of a very much uncertain time through language. This is perhaps best understood by looking to the various ways the term was used throughout history. In an article written for Cabinet Magazine, doctoral student Lily Scherlis traced the political and scientific origins of the phrase and found its first iteration in a French memoir written by a friend of Napoleon Bonaparte.² The memoirist wrote that he felt "a great social distance" between himself and Napoleon after the notorious statesman had conquered Venice.³ In this sense, the term described the unspoken divide between the old friends whose social ranks had suddenly changed.

The term took on a different tone in the United States where it was used as a veneer for racist attitudes against African American slaves. A pro-secession article written in 1856 described the anxieties of white farmers in their need to keep African Americans at "a greater social distance."⁴ I don't doubt that the term has been used in this belligerent way across time and space, even in ongoing racial struggles.

Only much later did the term enter the medical discourse. The AIDS epidemic in the 1990s brought with it a palpable yet false stigma about contagion. There was an omnipresent belief that by touching a HIV-positive carrier it could transmit the virus from person to person.⁵ Here the term "social distancing" not only functioned as a way of perpetuating harmful prejudice within communities, particularly against the gay community; the term also became a presumably effective way to protect oneself against the epidemic.

Despite the chameleonic nature of the phrase, it seems that at every stage of its historical usage there was a need for people to acquire some semblance of control. Napoleon's friend felt the need to name what was the all too familiar divide between classes. White America sought to abate their anxieties about soon-to-be emancipated slaves by finding a euphemism to turn them away, deny them land and rid them of opportunity. The world found a way to politely not shake someone's hand in the fear that they would contract HIV using the label "social distancing." Nowadays, we do the same, using both the language and the act of social distancing like a shield against the virus. It seems that at every stage of its usage, the term provided relief in the mind of its utterer. It gave people a means of identifying their problem and taking control of it through both action and thought.

At least for me, this simple trick worked. In believing I had control, even just by saying the phrase "social distance," I could make some sense of this very much senseless time. The new vocabulary meant that I could put into words what was happening around me and therefore gain some control in my own life. If there is ever another time we find ourselves in a year of uncertainty (I don't doubt that there will be many ahead), I'm certain these tricks with language we play on ourselves are bound to be repeated.

² Lily Scherlis, "Distantiated Communities; A social history of social distancing," Cabinet Magazine, accessed 2 November, 2020, http://cabinetmagazine.org/kiosk/scherlis_lily_30_april_2020.php.

³ Louis Antoine Fauvelet de Bourrienne, *Private Memoirs of Napoleon Bonaparte, during the Periods of the Directory, the Consulate, and the Empire* (Philadelphia: Carey & Lea, 1831), p. 61.

⁴ "The Compact Conservatism: A United South.," *The Richmond Enquirer*, 12 September 1856.

⁵ Lily Scherlis, "Distantiated Communities; A social history of social distancing," Cabinet Magazine, accessed 2 November, 2020, http://cabinetmagazine.org/kiosk/scherlis_lily_30_april_2020.php.



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THE BALLAD BEYOND READING GAOL: AVENGE OSCAR WILDE

By Genevieve Malloy

Oscar Wilde is one of the most famous writers of the English language. A leading proponent of aestheticism, he wrote some of the most celebrated works to come out of Victorian England (including *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *The Importance of Being Earnest*) as well as a number of short stories and poems. Perhaps lesser known, however, is Wilde's advocacy for libertarian socialism. He authored "The Soul of Man under Socialism" in 1891 (after he read works by the anarchist Peter Kropotkin), an essay in which he made a case for why true freedom and individualism cannot be realised for people, especially the poor and the working class, under capitalism. This political perspective was unfortunately quite prescient, as he was convicted of 'gross indecency' in 1895 and sentenced to two years hard labour in prison. Upon leaving prison he went straight to France, where for the remaining three years of his life he lived in poverty and exile. It was under these conditions that Wilde wrote "The Ballad of Reading Gaol" (1897).

This essay is an attempt to describe Wilde's politics, especially his views on freedom and individualism as they relate to socialism. It is also an opportunity to explore how Wilde's observations during imprisonment remains relevant to the brutalisation and exploitation of prisoners, and to the oppression of LGBTQI+ people, in the modern day. Finally, in reflection of this, we must work towards avenging him and all who have been brutalised by this system. We must actively fight to destroy capitalism and look towards a socialist post-state society in which we can all realise true individualism

The Soul of Man Under Socialism

Wilde came from a family of Irish intellectuals, and, having achieved great acclaim for his literary work, moved very comfortably amongst bourgeois social circles. At the time of writing *The Soul of Man under Socialism* and other essays, he was concerned with individualism as it related to art but also to freedom. While remaining trapped in some liberal notions of art as a redemptive venture in and of itself, it led to him reaching important conclusions about the failure of industrial capitalism to offer any real avenue to individualism and personal freedom.

He identified that individualism under the current economic conditions was false and represented a pursuit for a limited, wealthy few:

“For the recognition of private property has really harmed Individualism, and obscured it, by confusing a man with what he possesses... Indeed, so completely has man’s personality been absorbed by his possessions that the English law has always treated offences against a man’s property with far more severity than offences against his person.”¹

This is not incompatible with Marx’s reflection on bourgeois freedom:

“By freedom is meant, under the present bourgeois conditions of production, free trade, free selling and buying... when individual property can no longer be transformed into bourgeois property, into capital, from that moment, you say, individuality vanishes. You must, therefore, confess that by “individual” you mean no other person than the bourgeois, than the middle-class owner of property.”²

Furthermore, Wilde identifies charity as an insulting substitute for self-determination of ordinary people. He reflects that institutionalised and private forms charity only “prolongs the disease. Indeed, their remedies are part of the disease.” In answer to this, he looks to socialism as a means by which society can be altogether reconstructed so that poverty would be “impossible.”³

Socialism for Wilde was somewhat utopian but he nevertheless identified the opportunities represented by abolishing private property: “Socialism... by converting property into public wealth, and substituting co-operation for competition, will restore society to its proper condition of a thoroughly healthy organism, and ensure the material well-being of each member of the community.”⁴ Socialism has other implications; it would also mean abolishing the institution of the family, as “with the abolition of private property, marriage in its present form must disappear.”⁵

In Wilde’s view, technological progress that had been made thus far was not being used to make ordinary people’s lives easier: “This is the result of our property system and our system of competition. One man owns a machine which does the work of five hundred men. One man secures the produce of the machine and keeps it.... Were that machine the property of all, everybody would benefit from it.”⁶ Wilde even goes on to say that socialism would allow faster innovation and increased automation to relieve humanity of some areas of labour. It is only under the economic model of socialism that this would be possible.

But his perspective has limitations: while praising the superior qualities of a socialist society in the same breath, he offers no basis or power structure to transition from capitalism into this next phase. This can be accounted for by his anarchist reading and otherwise liberal tendencies, such as a distrust of not only the state under capitalism but of a workers’ state, which he feared would be an “industrial tyranny”⁷. He also tended to look to individual “agitators” more than the working class fighting for self-emancipation. This outlook is somewhat reflective of his class position and also of anarchist tendencies (especially during the 19th Century) to task an enlightened few with liberating the masses through agitation, rather than examining material conditions and the necessity of a worker’s revolution and worker’s power to combat the highly organised ruling class and to begin removing the class antagonisms. Communism is the point at which the worker’s state can wither away as the apparatus is no longer necessary to defend against counter-revolutionary forces, nor necessary to support the fair distribution of resources. Wilde’s vision is Utopian as it looks to the ultimate goal without a realistic framework to reach it. Despite this, he had an admirable commitment to the cause and, as we can see, offered insights of how a world could be when the people have power over their own lives.

¹ Wilde, O. ‘The Soul of Man Under Socialism’, *De Profundis and Other Writings*. Penguin Books, Great Britain 1986, pp.31

² Marx, K. *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Manifesto.pdf> p.24

³ Wilde, O. ‘The Soul of Man Under Socialism’, *De Profundis and Other Writings*. Penguin Books, Great Britain 1986, pp.20

⁴ op. cit.

⁵ Wilde, O. ‘The Soul of Man Under Socialism’, *De Profundis and Other Writings*. Penguin Books, Great Britain 1986, pp.29

⁶ *ibid.* pp.33

⁷ *ibid.* pp.23

Prisoner C.33 & Reading Gaol

In the late 19th Century, homosexuality was both a societal taboo and a criminal offence. Wilde had at times been very secretive about his affairs but at others attempted to gain a measure of public acceptance. Wilde's personal life and affairs with men were brought to public attention when he sued the Marquess of Queensberry, John Douglas (whose son had an intimate relationship with Wilde), for libel - Douglas had publicly accused him of being a "sodomite" [sic].⁸

⁸ 'Oscar Wilde sent to prison for indecency', History.com May 2020. Accessed Nov 19 2020, <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/oscar-wilde-is-sent-to-prison-for-indecency>

⁹ Wilde, O. 'The Ballad of Reading Gaol', *De Profundis and other Writings*. Penguin Books, Great Britain 1986, pp.238

As part of his legal defence, Douglas was able to prove that Wilde had solicited sex with men. As a great deal of evidence emerged, Wilde's lawyer withdrew the suit. Instead of fleeing the country, Wilde remained and was himself prosecuted by the Crown. At his trial, he was cross-examined over 'a love that dare not speak its name.' His responses only strengthened the case that he had engaged in homosexual acts and so he was sentenced to two years imprisonment & hard labour for 'gross indecency' in 1895.

Hard labour in Victorian England consisted of exploiting prisoners as a workforce in quarrying, building roads or dockwork. Wilde was sent to a few different prisons before he arrived at Reading Gaol and so would have experienced some of these. However Reading Gaol followed the 'separate system', where prisoners laboured, sometimes uselessly, in isolation from other prisoners. It's likely that Wilde took some artistic licence in describing exactly the work that took place in Reading Gaol itself, yet he expresses on the gruelling and dehumanising experience of incarceration:

"We tore the tarry rope to shreds
With blunt and bleeding nails;
We rubbed the doors, and scrubbed the floors,
And cleaned the shining rails:
And, rank by rank, we soaped the plank,
And clattered with the pails.

We sewed the sacks, we broke the stones,
We turned the dusty drill:
We banged the tins, and bawled the hymns,
And sweated on the mill:
But in the heart of every man
Terror was lying still."⁹

These stanzas give us a sense of the relentless and painful work enforced for prison labour - the description feels 'loud' with onomatopoeic action, which is driven by the feeling of the ballad form extended from the usual 4 lines to an enduring 6 lines (with an ABCBDB rhyme scheme). His use of the first-person plural "we" stands out to me. The repetition of that word, and the listing of the types of labour they perform, signals that despite his previous position in society, he is now aligned with the 'criminal class', with ordinary people, the class of people who stand to benefit from the socialist ideas he had advocated for.

¹⁰ *ibid.* pp.233

¹¹ *ibid.* pp.239

In *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*, Wilde reflected on the cruel indignity of being constantly surveilled:

"He does not sit with silent men
Who watch him night and day;
Who watch him when he tries to weep,
And when he tries to pray;
Who watch him lest himself should rob
The prison of its prey."¹⁰

Wilde like the others would be watched hawkishly and yet had their identities stripped from them, an anonymity that emerged from the dehumanising experience:

"I trembled as I groped my way
Into my numbered tomb."¹¹

Fear and pain run deep through the poem. While Wilde manages to weave in some of his signature dark humour, it still serves to show how the experience of cruelty, indignity and loneliness of incarceration is all-encompassing.

“It is sweet to dance to violins
When Love and Life are fair:
To dance to flutes, to dance to lutes
Is delicate and rare:
But it is not sweet with nimble feet
To dance upon the air!”¹²

Towards Liberation from Oppression & Incarceration

As Oscar Wilde rightly said: “A community is infinitely more brutalized by the habitual employment of punishment than it is by the occasional occurrence of crime.”¹³ In the present day we still have a justice system which acts as a repressive arm of the state. Overcrowded and underfunded, prisons are often sold off and run privately, creating even greater conditions of exploitation of prison populaces. The U.S. is perhaps most famous for the extent to which they continue to use prison labour as legalised slavery: this year during the California bushfires, the government ran out of prisoners which they would have usually forced to fight the fires as too many had been infected with COVID-19. In Australia, prisons pay their prison labourers as little as 82 cents per hour of work.¹⁴ There is a huge over-representation of Indigenous people present in every level of the criminal justice system: 28% of the adult prison population are Indigenous while accounting for just over 3% of the general population. Almost 37% of Australian women in prison identify as lesbian or bisexual, and in the U.S. there is also a trend towards disproportionate incarceration of LGBTQ+ people.¹⁵

While the state of LGBTQ+ rights has changed a lot over the last century, some features of oppression have remained, and in some places worsened. Colonialism has created conditions in which Indigenous understandings of gender have been forced to assimilate into a Western gender binary system. Countries like Russia and its neighbour Ukraine have created laws to prevent any distribution of educational materials or ‘propaganda’ attempting to argue for equality across ‘traditional or non-traditional’ sexual relationships, while in Iran homosexuality is punishable by death.¹⁶ In Australia, same-sex marriage was banned explicitly by an amendment to the Marriage Act during the Howard Government, which remained for 13 years. It took a mass movement in Australia, and years of campaigning, for a plebiscite to eventually be held, fought for, and for the ‘yes’ vote to succeed triumphantly. Yet the LGBTQ+ rights that have been won face consistent attempts to undermine them. This past year it has taken the form of the Religious Discrimination Bill, and most recently an Education Legislation Amendment tabled by Mark Latham & One Nation, which seeks to remove any mention of gender fluidity in NSW schools.¹⁷

The state needs its repressive arm to function, just as capitalism needs oppression to sow discord and to divide the only group capable of destroying it. We must turn up again and again to fight injustice against LGBTQ+ people, to fight the repression of all targeted by the police, prisons and courts. But we won’t be able to liberate and find true freedom until we destroy capitalism itself. I think of Wilde’s understanding of the strategy for change: “Disobedience, in the eyes of anyone who has read history, is man’s original virtue. It is through disobedience that progress has been made, through disobedience and through rebellion.”¹⁸ To avenge him and the countless others whose lives and liberties have been dictated by our cruel system, rebellion and revolution must be our resolve.

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¹² *ibid.* pp.235-6

¹³ Wilde, O. ‘The Soul of Man Under Socialism’, *De Profundis and Other Writings*. Penguin Books, Great Britain 1986, pp.31

¹⁴ Brook, B. ‘Bed linen and boomerangs - the surprising products made by prisoners’, *news.com.au*, March 2017. Accessed Nov 20 2020, <https://www.news.com.au/finance/business/other-industries/bed-linen-and-boomerangs-the-surprising-products-made-by-prisoners/news-story/d9cfbb0e9414fd00c0ef764ce8002982>

¹⁵ Simpson PL et.al. ‘Understanding the over-representation of lesbian or bisexual women in the Australian prisoner population’, *Current Issues in Criminal Justice* Vol.31 2019, Issue 3.

¹⁶ Saner, E. ‘Gay rights around the world: the best and worst countries for equality’, *theguardian.com*, July 2013. Accessed Nov 20 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jul/30/gay-rights-world-best-worst-countries>

¹⁷ Rice, S. ‘Government’s religious discrimination bill enshrines the right to harm others in the name of faith’, *theconversation.com*, February 2020. Accessed Nov 20 2020, <https://theconversation.com/governments-religious-discrimination-bill-enshrines-the-right-to-harm-others-in-the-name-of-faith-131206>

¹⁸ Wilde, O. ‘The Soul of Man Under Socialism’, *De Profundis and Other Writings*. Penguin Books, Great Britain 1986, pp.22

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LIFE, LAW AND LIBERTY – REFLECTIONS ON RUTH BADER GINSBURG

By Ashraf Olife ¹

Absolutely extraordinary. I have never met Ruth Bader Ginsburg (RBG). I have read her writings, watched her lectures and listened to her wisdom. However, when her passing was announced, I confess I could feel a tear well up inside.² You may perhaps be surprised. What could a 20-year-old in Australia possibly celebrate about this octogenarian? But like others across the world, this octogenarian is a rock star to me. By revisiting the chapters of her story, I hope to illuminate an approach to life that we can aspire towards. Her story centres on extraordinary empathy for others, developed across her listening, friendships and embracing of others. Perhaps in writing and reading this story, by imagining it come to life, we may develop our own sense of empathy. That is why we read stories, to discover something new and profound about ourselves. And that, is RBG's legacy.

The Listener

This American Dream began on the 15th of March 1933 in Brooklyn, New York. RBG excelled at everything growing up. Cello, piano, baton-twirling, science, economics, literature to just name a few.³ She also served on the law review at two universities (Harvard and Columbia), became a mother and graduated first in her class.⁴ I am jealous of these achievements. However, those in 1950s America did not feel that way. On entering university, the law school dean asked “why [she] was taking a man's place”.⁵ She was rejected from 41 firms because of her gender.⁶ Even the Supreme Court rejected her application for clerkship because she was a woman.⁷

Undeterred, RBG decided to enter academia, becoming the first tenured female professor at Columbia Law School.⁸ But, by 1972, Professor Ginsburg received the call.⁹ RBG had joined the ACLU, where she “achieved greatness before

¹ Written by Ashraf Olife, student of Law and International Studies at the University of New South Wales, Sydney. I thank my friends, Aroon Parthasarathy, Brienne Perera and Jack Zhou, who were kind enough to review this essay. However, all views expressed and mistakes are mine alone.

² “Press Release – Death of Ruth Bader Ginsburg”, Supreme Court of the United States, accessed October 26, 2020, https://www.supremecourt.gov/publicinfo/press/pressreleases/pr_09-18-20.

³ Michelle Ruiz, “15 Things I Learned About Ruth Bader Ginsburg From Notorious RBG”, *Vogue*, October 29, 2020, <https://www.vogue.com/article/ruth-bader-ginsburg-notorious-rbg-book>.

⁴ Jeffrey Toobin, *The Nine: Inside the Secret World of the Supreme Court* (New York: Doubleday, 2007), 82.

⁵ “Some Highlights of the U.S. Supreme Court's 2012-2013 Term” by Mary Elizabeth Magill, Stanford Lawyer, September 17, 2013, <https://law.stanford.edu/stanford-lawyer/articles/legal-matters/>.

⁶ Tez Clark, “Notorious RBG: Ruth Bader Ginsburg's journey from ACLU lawyer to pop culture icon”, *Vox*, June 29, 2015, <https://www.vox.com/2015/6/29/8853365/rbg-ginsburg-gay-marriage>.

⁷ Neil Lewis, “The Supreme Court: Woman in the News; Rejected as a Clerk, Chosen as Justice: Ruth Joan Bader Ginsburg”, *The New York Times*, June 15, 1993, <https://www.nytimes.com/1993/06/15/us/supreme-court-woman-rejected-clerk-chosen-justice-ruth-joan-bader-ginsburg.html>.

⁸ Clark, “Notorious RBG: Ruth Bader Ginsburg's journey from ACLU lawyer to pop culture icon”.

⁹ Jeffrey Rosen, *Conversations with Ruth Bader Ginsburg on Life, Love, Liberty and Law* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2019): 19.

becoming great”.¹⁰ It was in her experiences as an attorney that we learn the most about her example. The traditional narrative goes that she chose to litigate cases where men were facing sexual discrimination.¹¹ Quite clever. It illustrated to the aging judges that placing women on a pedestal, in fact, demeans men who choose to undertake those same roles. However, many quarters in America asked how was it possible for *this* middle-class woman to understand men? Or poorer women? Or those of a different race?¹²

It is easy to forget that the names of legal cases represent real people. In her conversations with clients she would listen and ask about the particular injury they suffered. Yet, she would also ask and listen about their life story. Where did they come from? How was growing up? What did this discrimination mean for their children? This process was important to RBG because through eliciting detail, she could try to recreate the feeling of discrimination and live the experience.¹³ Understanding how a person suffers discrimination is only a start but understanding its practical and daily implications is a step into empathy. Discrimination's true meaning is only grasped when understood as part of a life story, not a moment in life. Through living, imagining, these stories, she narrated a pathway for judges to arrive at the now taken-for-granted value that all are equal before the law. It worked. Almost every single time.¹⁴

The Flaming Friendship

When President Carter assumed office, he took one look at the judiciary and thought they looked too much like him.¹⁵ Intent on diversifying the bench, he nominated Professor Ginsburg to the DC Circuit Appeals Court in 1980.¹⁶ There she became known as a “judge’s judge”, meticulous in detail and unafraid to uphold the letter of the law, which inevitably meant she moved slowly on expanding civil liberties.¹⁷ She was no longer the “flaming feminist” she had been during her years as an advocate. However, she did create flaming friendships – the best of whom was Antonin Scalia.

Then-Judge Scalia was a firestorm. He refreshed the practice of asking questions in oral arguments.¹⁸ He sent “Ninograms” to his colleagues, criticising their grammar, citations and syntax.¹⁹ But most surprising of all, he argued that statutory interpretation begins with the text.²⁰ Although these practices deterred other judges, it did not deter Judge Ginsburg. As former academics, they began to exchange draft opinions, go out to lunch together and they shared a common interest in opera.²¹ Over time, the two would exchange roses, have their families spend Christmas together and they went on holiday with each other.²² However, at work, the two regularly disagreed on whether the Constitution should be interpreted as originally enacted or as an evolving document.²³

These friends were so different yet they remain the posterchild of civility. It is not easy to have a calm conversation with someone we may strongly disagree with. Indeed, finding common ground in these polarising times seems out of reach. But RBG would start with the principle that each of her colleagues were coming in good faith, that each shared a reverence for their shared purpose.²⁴ In addition to that assumption, RBG would often humour and joke with colleagues. It is difficult to dislike someone you laugh and make bread with. Nevertheless, Scalia’s writing and orations tested RBG.²⁵ When asked how she could tolerate his unkind language, RBG relayed a nugget of wisdom from her mother, “it helps in life to be a little deaf”.²⁶ But most important, as the Scalia example shows, is that they spent time away from work – learning more about each other. Indeed, Justice Scalia once said “What’s there not to like? Except her views of the law!”²⁷ She felt the same way of him, I have no doubt. And so should we, of those whom we disagree with intellectually.

¹⁰ David Souter, “Statements from the Supreme Court Regarding the Death of Associate Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg”, Supreme Court of the United States, accessed October 26, 2020, https://www.supremecourt.gov/publicinfo/press/pressreleases/pr_09-19-20.

¹¹ Rosen, *Conversations with RBG*, 20.

¹² “Conversations with RBG: A Book Talk and Signing with Jeffrey Rosen”, by Dahlia Lithwick, *YouTube*, February 14, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lKx_TgbIN8M&t=35655.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Reed v Reed*, 404 U.S. 71 (1971); *Frontiero v Richardson*, 411 U.S. 677 (1973); *Weinberger v Wiesenfeld*, 420 U.S. 636 (1975); *Craig v Boren*, 429 U.S. 190 (1976); *Duren v Missouri*, 439 U.S. 357 (1979).

¹⁵ Nancy Scherer, “Diversifying the Federal Bench: Is Universal Legitimacy for the U.S. Justice System Possible?”, *Northwestern University Law Review* 105, no. 2 (2011): 588.

¹⁶ “Ruth Bader Ginsburg”, Federal Judicial Center, accessed October 26, 2020, <https://www.fjc.gov/history/judges/ginsburg-ruth-bader>.

¹⁷ Rosen, *Conversations with RBG*, 168.

¹⁸ “Justice Scalia on Oral Arguments & Personal Relationships on the Court”, by Brian Lamb, *YouTube*, July 26, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wDq4cbdoRzE>.

¹⁹ James Staab, *The Political Thought of Justice Antonin Scalia: A Hamiltonian on the Supreme Court* (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2006): 27.

²⁰ Antonin Scalia and Bryan Garner, *Reading Law: The Interpretation of Legal Texts* (West, 2012).

²¹ Rosen, *Conversations with RBG*, 106.

²² Ruth Bader Ginsburg, “Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg Eulogy at Justice Scalia Memorial Service” (speech, Washington, DC, March 1, 2016), *YouTube*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jb_2GgE564A&feature=youtu.be

²³ Nina Totenberg, “Justices Ginsburg and Scalia: A Perfect Match Except For Their Views On The Law”, *npr*, February 13, 2016, <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2015-02/13/38608534-2/justice-ginsberg-admits-to-being-tipsy-during-state-of-the-union-nap>.

²⁴ Rosen, *Conversations with RBG*, 117.

²⁵ Robert Schapiro, “Justice Antonin Scalia: more quotable than influential”, *The Conversation*, February 15, 2016, <https://theconversation.com/justice-antonin-scalia-more-quotable-than-influential-54721>.

²⁶ Jeffrey Rosen, “RBG’s Life, in Her Own Words”, *The Atlantic*, September 19, 2020, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/09/rbgs-life-her-own-words/616414/>.



The Embracing Principle

In 1993, Judge Ginsburg became Justice Ginsburg. She was confirmed to the U.S. Supreme Court with a now unachievable vote of 96-3 in the U.S. Senate.²⁸ Over the next 27 years, she authored 483 opinions.²⁹ Her ameliorative approach to work developed in the earlier chapters of her life continued onto the Court. However, after Justice O'Connor's retirement in 2006, the Court lunged to the right. The basic issues Justice Ginsburg fought so hard for were aggressively being chipped away.³⁰ Now a frequent dissenting voice, Justice Ginsburg strove to write opinions that spoke for the ages.

These opinions are rooted in a theme intrinsic to her view of life, law and liberty: the principle of embracing all. As an advocate and on the bench, RBG argued that the remedy for discrimination is to extend the benefits for all.³¹ This extension, in her view, achieves equal freedom because it grants *all* the same opportunity. And, where discrimination is so malign, that law should promote platforms for opportunity. She realised that access to law and justice in today's America depended on how much money you had.³² Equal justice means giving the opportunity and choice to the poorest of our society – those without money, power or even the right race and gender.³³ She underscored that justice was not "just for us". In her words, the law requires that we embrace those left out and not in a cautious way:

"Embracing means not just accepting those left out grudgingly but with open arms".³⁴

No doubt if we opened our arms in our Australia, we may see the kind of change which needs to be seen. If we opened our arms for those fleeing persecution. If we opened our arms for those languishing in poverty. If we truly open our arms to our own Indigenous peoples. That theme is central in Justice Ginsburg's approach to life, law and liberty; by embracing each other, we empower one another to freely find our destiny through the very system that may discriminate against us.

A Path Ahead

By exploring these few chapters of her extraordinary life, there is much we can use for our path ahead into the future. Whether we are lawyers or not, these principles are universal: we must genuinely listen to each other, make friendships and embrace one another. These are qualities RBG carried her entire life to keep alive her sense of empathy. We must do the same if we are to truly achieve equal freedom for each other and ourselves. Although she passed before her vision of equal freedom came to life, she left a legacy we all can share. This legacy is the best of inheritances.

I respectfully celebrate this well-lived life.

²⁷ Totenberg, "Views of the Law".

²⁸ "Roll Call Vote 103rd Congress – 1st Session", United States Senate, accessed October 27 2020, https://www.senate.gov/legislative/LIS/roll_call_lists/roll_call_vote_cfm.cfm?congress=103&session=1&vote=00232.

²⁹ John Roberts, "Memorial Speech for Ruth Bader Ginsburg" (speech, Washington, DC, September 23, 2020), Rev, <https://www.rev.com/blog/transcripts/john-roberts-memorial-speech-for-ruth-bader-ginsburg-transcript-september-23>.

³⁰ Dahlia Lithwick, "Justice LOLZ Grumpy Cat Notorious R.G.B.", Slate, March 16, 2015, <https://slate.com/human-interest/2015/03/notorious-r-b-g-history-the-origins-and-meaning-of-ruth-bader-ginsburgs-badass-internet-meme.html>.

³¹ Rosen, *Conversations with RBG*, 4.

³² *Ibid* 57.

³³ *Burwell v Hobby Lobby*, 573 U.S. 682, 739 (Ginsburg J) (2014); *Shelby County v Holder*, 570 U.S. 529, 559 (Ginsburg J) (2013); *Ibid*.

³⁴ Rosen, "RBG's Life, in Her Own Words".



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XIÀO

by Wen Yu Yang

Content warning: emotional abuse

The consequence of Shae surviving the car crash is the permanent absence of her parents. Out of obligation rather than love or pity, her Auntie Hua takes her in. Auntie Hua, distant relative, poor and out of luck, is already a single parent raising her son, five-year-old Kai. Nine-year-old Shae is now her responsibility.

Kai is a bundle of laughter, lopsided grins, and mischief wrapped in a skinny body. Tanned and freckled from the many hours under sunlight; bruised and cut from his adventures—they are landmarks and roads that map his small limbs (not that he notices or cares); callused and scarred with former blisters from afternoons roaming barefoot on summer pavements.

He is the light in the dingy hole that is apartment number 231, Second Alley. Life there is somewhat tolerable with him in it.

'Parasite'. Shae hears Auntie Hua say it over the phone, in the kitchen when other Aunties and their friends are over, in hallways when their neighbours pass by. She knows they are talking about her.

Kai calls her jiě jie¹ even though he isn't supposed to. Auntie Hua took Shae in as a tongyangx²—a dowry-saver, a maybe-playmate, a never-sister. Kai may fear his mother, but his rebellious spirit stands its ground. "Jiě jie" becomes their secret.

1 Older sister. Sometimes it's used as a casual name for elder females who are too young to be "Aunts" but also too old to be mere peers. However, in this case, "jiě jie" is meant in the most traditional sense—a sister, bound by blood.

2 Child-raised-as-bride. A tradition that was discovered back in the Song dynasty; the practice started disappearing in Taiwan during the late-1970s—in most places.

Kai loves the monkey bars. He whoops and cheers as he swings from one bar to next, his scrawny form three feet from the ground; the equipment was clearly for adults. Shae usually takes Kai to the park, but she had ventured into a pond on their last adventure at Kai's insistence—a feat that ended with them both covered in mud. Shae had been in the middle of cleaning Kai up when Auntie Hua walked in on them. Auntie Hua watches them guilefully now. Auntie Hua takes any justification for her distrust against Shae. Kai laughs while Shae and Auntie Hua stand on the ground in silence: one in heels, looming, the other folding herself in as if she could disappear that way.

"I'm coming down," Kai says finally, wheezing in laughter. Shae steps forward. Auntie Hua bumps her out of the way.

"I'll catch you, son. You can let go."

Kai blinks and casts a look at Shae. Blood drains from Shae's face as Auntie Hua catches the exchange and turns to her—Kai's fingers are already slipping, oblivious and giggling. Shae will remember the look in her Auntie's eyes: the rage, incredulity, and underneath all that—fear. Shae takes a step forward. She's too far away.

Kai's wrist is broken. He doesn't go on the monkey bars anymore unless Shae is around and his mother isn't.

Shae drops the pot of soup meant for dinner. It spills on Auntie Hua's clothes, the pale stockings stained brown, over the mould hiding in the cracks of tiled floor. She had come out of nowhere into Shae's path.

Auntie Hua tells her to lick off every last drop.

Potatoes and rot linger on her tongue for the rest of the week.

Shae is quiet. She is quiet when Auntie Hua hands her second-hand uniforms from their neighbours, shirt yellowed, skirt fraying and coming undone. She is quiet when she watches from the other side of the school gate as parents and grandparents fuss over their children's hair and stockings and shoelaces before they pass the gates. She is quiet when the others open their lunchboxes at noon, chatter rising in the classroom around her as she buries herself in another book and tries not to focus on her groaning stomach. She does not understand. She thought she's been good. She must be mistaken. She does not know how to fix it.

On their way back from school, Shae bribes Kai with a taro ice cream, using the money she's scraped together from collecting recycled trash. Today's her graduation from primary school—phoenix flowers bloom, red as the corsages pinned on her uniform—but it doesn't feel different than any other day. Kai's tongue races the summer but fails epically. Taro goo creeps down the cone to his fingers and gives him a lilac moustache.

"Why does your ma hate me?"

Kai frowns as he tries to recover the escaping taro. "I don't know."

"There must be something."

Kai glances at his ice cream and releases a remorseful sigh. "I don't think she liked your mother a lot. You might remind my ma of her."

Shae feels like she should feel better after knowing this—proof that she didn't bring all the misery onto herself. But she doesn't.

Shae thinks it is almost unfortunate that she and Kai resemble each other. There are more curls in their hair than most, like multiple fur balls after being attacked by a cat. Their eyes share a light shade of brown, like the outlying-islanders and not mainlander-rich. They even have the same smile, dimpled on both sides. She thinks it is unfortunate only because he does not look like his mother.

Shae is surprised when Auntie Hua consents to allowing her “friends” over. (They're coming to quench their curiosity, and Shae is desperate.) In that moment, she is glad how obedient she's been despite everything Auntie Hua has done to her over the years.

When her friends come over, Auntie Hua prepares snacks and drinks. They are enjoying themselves until Shae comes back from the toilet to an unsteady silence.

“What is it?” Shae asks. Her friends need to leave all of a sudden.

“What did you say to them?” she manages to say, breathless from the tightness in her chest.

“Nothing that isn't true,” Auntie Hua says, her eyes gleaming with vicious glee, before she turns her back to Shae. Shae's tears spill, thick as blood. Kai sits in the corner. His lanky limbs are flung over the worn armchair; earphones plugged in, eyes on his phone, but body tense, fingers unmoving. She thinks: good, he's paying attention.

Things change over the years. The laundry will be done, but misplaced. Keys will disappear. Mail will end up in the trash. If Shae is going to get a scolding by the end of each day, she might as well make it worth her while. She is still quiet.

Shae starts ‘borrowing’ from Hua's wardrobe. She will check herself in the mirror: not a strand of her straightened, black hair out of place, her eyes shadowed in rich purple and most importantly, the black qipao³ of violet azaleas. She's seen the way eyes follow Hua in it and the matching black heels that went *clop, clop, clop* down the street. She will smile at herself in the reflection of store displays as she strolls around town and giggle when she catches people staring.

Shae will later savour the taste of violation and outrage in Hua's eyes as the silk sighs against her skin. She loves being caught.

Shae comes home to find that the money she stashed under her mattress is gone; in its

³ Qipao: a type of silken dress that hugs the body—one might refer to them as women's armour.

place is a note. Hands trembling, she reads Hua's harsh handwriting: *The money is in your account now.* The account Hua controls, just like she controls Shae.

The room tilts. All of her savings, gone. All hopes of scraping together just enough to rent an apartment of her own, gone. All chances of freedom, gone. Her fingernails dig into her palms, clearing her head. She will have to wait a little longer, until she is of age to open her own bank account—by then, she will be untouchable.

Kai is at that age when 'cigs', 'tattoos', and 'motorcycles' sound particularly appealing. Shae is careful to stoke that appeal just enough so as to not get him hurt. He spends more time with the uncle of theirs, Uncle Ming Hao. She doesn't like their Uncle because she knows he's shady and thinks he's a bad influence on Kai, but she tries to be fair because she doesn't think he'd ever harm them intentionally.

Kai and Hua start getting into fights. Shae will take the blunt of Hua's anger and soothe Kai's confusion. Muffled sobbing will come through the thin walls between her and Auntie Hua's rooms, and she will drift asleep to that sound.

Hua is yelling at her and pounding at the barricaded door when Shae notices the flashing blue light from her phone.

Kai: *Im moving out*

Shae releases a breath she's been holding for years, thrills of victory tingling her fingers as she reads on, posing to type.

Kai: *Ive found a place with Uncle. Come with me?*

Kai: *it's just a temporary thing. I promise.*

Kai: *You don't have to marry me unless you want to. You do know its a joke right. This tonyangxi business.*

Shae wants to smile in Hua's raging face. But Hua is already commanding her to get Kai back home, taking the scooter keys, slamming the front door, and out in search for her missing son.

Shae: *Pick me up in 10.*

Kai: *As you wish.*

There's a story told once by Confucius, well-known by many:

"Have you not heard the story of Shun?" Confucius said to his disciples. "Shun's father was violent, he always had this urge to kill his son. Still, whenever Shun's father bade him to do the chores, he'd be there. However, he'd manage to disappear whenever his father was out to kill him. His father had never been able to find him. This is *Xiào*. If Shun had let his father kill him, he wouldn't have upheld the virtue of *Xiào*, now would he?"

Xiào (virtue) — a commitment to one's parents, elders, and ancestors. The concept of Xiào has shifted over the years; in ancient times, Xiào meant doing good by the seniors of one's family in all conceivable aspects, regardless of the cost to oneself.

THE FREEDOM OF BEING IN CONTROL: HOW IMPOSED SOCIAL ISOLATION CONNOTES THE IDEA OF LONELINESS

By Aadrika Gupta

How many times have you justified your behaviour by blaming certain personality traits, according to specific personality theories?

We human beings, unknowingly, are a figure of excuses and explanations. Wherever possible, even in the smallest of situations, we try to escape accountability to get a good night's sleep. However, there are times we are stuck in situations where there is no escape. In those circumstances, do our personalities really define our actions?

Some people claim to be go-getters, while others claim to 'go with the flow'. But is it really true? I don't think so, for in the end, we all are a victim of our own decisions. These actions, irrespective of how small or big, are a consequence of our love with being in control. The idea that somebody dare dictate to us is nothing but an insult to our existence. So, getting caught in the midst of a pandemic is synonymous to being stuck in situations where you have no control and also see no escape. You're confined to the four walls of your room, on the pretext of self-isolation and social-distancing. You're 'glued to your mobile phones' thanks to living in the 21st century. You're given all the means but choose to live in your head and let your thoughts guide your life.

For most of our lives, teaching has always been an in-person experience, but with the onset of a pandemic it changed to remote learning. While universities were drowned in the helter-skelter of making this transition successful and effective, we students rejoiced about not having to go for classes. Concurrently, the daily news gave us regular updates on the absurd speed at which the level of cases roses, coined new terms, implemented new measures, and soon all this merriment turned into a state of constant worrying.

To protect ourselves and others around us, we practised “social distancing” as a part of “community containment”. Social distancing can be defined as an activity in which individuals, who may have a chance of being infectious, reduce their interactions with other community members to stop the spread of a disease.¹ In Australia, there were strict rules when it came to stepping outside, especially in public premises. For instance, there was shutting down of businesses, education facilities, restaurants and recreational places, to name a few. Suddenly your home became everything and your only opportunity to mingle with the outside world was that of shopping for necessities – groceries or medicines. Moreover, there was an unexpected feeling of losing control. Nobody had anticipated the occurrence of a life-threatening pandemic, and it made our future seem like a blur.

Furthermore, social media was used for better engagement to the outside world and to feel part of a community. After looking at others’ success stories, people became obsessed with the thoughts of sudden transformation and self-actualisation. Before we realized, we were again in a race to outdo each other. But this was worse than before the pandemic because the arenas of competition had widened to skills like fitness and cooking, in addition to the existing ones regarding employment and education. This negative effect ended up becoming a burden and people got involved in a rat race.

Also, to add to people’s frustration, there were individuals vouching for disengagement from social media and introspection, while being on social media. This dissonance allowed loneliness to creep into our lives. To make things worse, our downtime was replaced by mindless scrolling on our devices, and the lack of physical social engagement got the better of us. Thus, the prescribed method of feeling part of a society became strangulating. Our aid for dealing with the pandemic turned into a weapon. Consequently, somewhere down the line, solitude got confused with loneliness.

While solitude is enjoying one’s own company, loneliness can be described as a subjective feeling after being pulled apart from others and experiencing distance from those who are close to us.² This mix-up leads to a bubble being formed around us, which is nothing but a composition of an unhealthy feeling of void.

So, where has this endless story led us to? We have unknowingly been pushed into a whirlwind of negative emotions, over which we had no control, and have ended up feeling more trapped than free. Irrespective of our personalities and response mechanism, we all love to be in control of ourselves, be it in terms of our emotions or actions. And as a young adult in the 21st century, freedom is necessary not only for our survival but also for us to have a better sense of self and to embrace our individuality.

¹ Wilder-Smith, A., Freedman, D.O., “Isolation, quarantine, social distancing and community containment: pivotal role for old-style public health measures in the novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV) outbreak”, *Journal of Travel Medicine*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (March 2020): 1-4, doi:10.1093/jtm/taaa020, accessed 3 November 2020 via <<https://academic.oup.com/jtm/article/27/2/taaa020/5735321>>

² Gupta, N., “From “normal” to “new normal” and from “social isolation” to “social bubbles”: The impact of COVID-19, *Indian J Soc Psychiatry*, Vol. 36 (2020): S1-5, accessed 4 November 2020



Aadrika is currently a first-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.

LIVING IN YESTERDAY

By Flynn Moss

It's a small comfort to confront the inevitable. To see our tragedies replay themselves over and over and over again. With a checkpoint and an achievement, you have reached the next second successfully, you have reached the next hour successfully, you have reached the next year successfully... Are we being set up for failure? Are we living in a graveyard just awaiting the day of our reaping?

My neighbour's house is on fire.

The heat radiates and the faint scent of charred human meat and bittersweet memories drifts across my ashy driveway. I remember, when I first moved into the neighbourhood, they brought me a meatloaf. It was a quiet celebration of my first step into adulthood, moving out alone with only a tiny plant for company; they helped me make that leap into the unknown. I remember its smoky taste, the slightly charred meat; Irene said that their oven seemed to heat up too quickly for her poor cooking skills to keep up with.

That wasn't what lit up the small cottage next door. It came from the milky way of falling lights and termite-ridden planks that lay above, the rickety Sky Bridge that sleeps across our midnight sky and hovers over the town of Yesterday like our own personal storm cloud.

I found Irene's ring in the rubble, tarnished and flaked. Helen never could've afforded a truly gold ring, she confided in me once. I planned to buy them a real ring. I had a separate savings account in preparation, as reparation for all the help they had given me. I forgot the crucial rule for those living in Yesterday.

Never make plans. There is no guarantee you can follow through.

A middle-aged man stands neutrally over the chaos, an officer on clean up duty, adorned with the familiar copper emblem of the Janitorial Corps. In his dulled cyan jumpsuit, placid stance, and cigarette stained teeth, he tiredly watches on as the flames melt through the once squeaky floorboards. Extinguishing the chaos is not a thought that would cross either of our minds. There is no grass in Yesterday for a reason. We live in a concrete jungle stained with burns from the inevitable crashes and debris falling from above.

Eventually the flames peter out, gasping for food as all of the housing planks are consumed. No amount of oxygen can save the fire as it drowns, leaving dark ash and a familiar stain on the concrete below. The faint crackling pops in my ears, alike to popcorn. I never liked popcorn.

“Good evening, Miss.” A tan hand waves across my vision, snapping me away from the wreckage. The Cleaning Officer is staring blankly at me, a notepad in hand and a raised eyebrow.

“Did you happen to see the crash? Can you confirm it was debris from the Sky Bridge?” His voice is husky and dull, the result of which I suspect to be a chronic smoking habit and dissociative state. Seems to come with the job, a self-destructive nonchalance.

My parents always recommended that I join the Janitorial Corps. I think they were worried I would try to leave; they wanted me to see the results firsthand. It wouldn't have made a difference. I see the results every day... not many truly escape Yesterday when they try to drive across the Sky Bridge, unless you count death. Although people never really like to use as harsh a word - my childhood friends have simply 'disappeared', teachers have simply 'retired.'

I see the results every day just by living here.

* * *

Groggily, I stumble into my office. My degree certificate is framed above the crème-coloured door, and a bulky desktop crushes my notes and pens, but no photo frames adorn my desk. Everything is easy to pack away in preparation for the inevitable; I wouldn't want to overextend my stay here.

I left the lid off my red pen again, the ink drying up inside overnight until it was bloody. A tiny table is scrawled across a sticky note, calculating my savings and cross-referencing ring prices from all the jewellers in Yesterday in an earnest haste. The delivery was planned to arrive at their house in two weeks. I really did forget. Never make plans... I cancel my order before moving onto publishing the morning's News.

After hours spent editing and re-editing their article, I post the morning newspaper, already awaiting the condemnation of the locals. Truly, working as an editor, I almost feel like the secret keeper to the thoughts of everyone in Yesterday.

Yesterday Morning Herald

12th February 2016

Yesterday Skyfall Death Total: 5684

Another 2 cases were confirmed last night: claiming the lives of Mrs Irene and Helen Castillo. May their souls rest in Tomorrow. Perpetrator was confirmed as beloved Yesterday Primary School Art Teacher; Kuramoto Yoshio. Students will be investigated to understand the extent of his possible moral corruption.

Job Listing: Art Teacher Wanted

Yesterday Primary School is in need of a new Art Teacher after sudden retirement of Mr Kuramoto Yoshio.

No degree necessary, artistic experience required. Must have a Working with Yester-Children Check and First Aid certificate.



Anon126

If anyone deserved to get out of here it was Kuramoto! It's sad about the Castillo's but in the scheme of things... He could've made it out, he should've gotten out. He was just, unlucky, I guess.



Allegra_M

May they rest in Tomorrow. It was unlucky and they will be dearly missed. Also, does anyone know who will now run the bakery? I can't think of any better sweetbread than poor ole Helens.



Tom_Morrow_Today

I mean seriously!!! Who will be next? Join us at Yesterday Uni to protest #SkyFall! If no one leaves this can't happen again! Build the blockade!

Comment

... Mr Yoshio. May his soul rest in Tomorrow. Along with Helen and Irene, I suppose. That is all we can do, dream, and wish of seeing Tomorrow; to escape this life of limbo. It's what I'm supposed to say, it's what we have all been saying since we could talk. Yet I can't bring myself to think about it. To believe it. His soul is not resting in the city of Tomorrow; it is burnt to a crisp and etched into another luckless gravestone in the flowery Fields of Yesterday.

I wonder what he thought, in those final moments traversing the Sky Bridge, his car wheels screeching as he dodged the potholes littering the wooden road before he finally found his grave next door. Could he see the city of Tomorrow beyond? Yoshio had always been a lucky man, winning the city raffles and doubling his own wealth. Most thought he cheated to win the jackpot that many times in a row. His luck must've run out.

May his soul rest in Tomorrow.



Flynn is a first year Science/Arts student with a passion for short story writing, horror anthologies, and vivid world building. She enjoys exploring the relationship between the familial and uncanny in horrifically dystopian universes. Outside of this, she precariously balances her enthusiasm for digital art with her daredevil attitude in the water polo cage.

SRC PRESIDENT'S REPORT

By Tom Kennedy

The term of the 2020-2021 SRC has officially begun, and while the coincidence of the beginning of our terms of office and the exam period wasn't exactly ideal, we're keen to get to work.

We're in the process of organising several planning days in the holidays, so that we can hit the ground running in 2021 and make sure we do what we were elected to do.

COVID-19 has been very difficult for many students, has put immense strain on UNSW's academic and crisis support systems, and has given the incoming SRC some major issues to tackle.

Some of the major priorities for the 2021 SRC include:

- Ending Week 0 content, so that students can actually get a break between terms
- Expanding the types of crisis support available to students, such as offering a term-long pass/fail marking system to students managing long-term personal issues
- Ensuring that all assessments are easily accessible to students in different time zones (by expanding the use of take-home and 24-hour exam formats)
- Improving crisis support services on campus, such as CAPS, Crisis Accommodation and Spec Cons
- Campaigning against the NSW Government's ridiculous decision to axe the Central-UNSW Express bus service

Last but not least, we would very much like to make the SRC more accessible to the student body, through regular stalls, social media content, and direct assistance with UNSW-related issues.

So if you have any concerns relating to your Academics, Spec Cons, crisis support, or anything else, please don't hesitate to get in touch at src.president@arc.unsw.edu.au

MEET OUR ARTISTS



Pg. 008

Juliet is a Science/Arts student who likes to combine her autofictive style with her interest in biology. 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



Pg. 015

Remember that artsy girl in middle school that is super into anime, thinks she's a cat and wears all black? Well, it wasn't a phase. Although studying marketing requires one to communicate ideas to the public, Jiashi prefers hiding in her den and express between the motion of lines and shapes.



Pg. 018

Wen is a first-year Commerce student from the Island of Bubble Milk Tea, Taiwan. When she's not writing, she can be found on volleyball courts, by the sea, or wandering in worlds of magic, faeries, and dragons.



Pg. 016

Dylan is a Sydney based graphic designer studying media arts at UNSW. He usually works on branding and identity projects, but also has a spot in his heart for the ms paint aesthetic when illustrating.





COVER BY TALICA