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Editorial team

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Introduction

Welcome to the inaugural issue of *Pioneer Road: Undergraduate Journal of Research.* This journal showcases the best essays and research papers written during AY2020-2021 by students enrolled in courses in the Language and Communication Centre (LCC) at Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore. The writing is non-fiction and explores a range of issues related to Singapore and more general topics in the humanities and social sciences.

The essays have been triple reviewed. The students were nominated by their LCC instructors to submit their essays, which were then reviewed by the Pioneer Road editorial team and given a final review by the Co-Editors and Advisor.

Pioneer Road refers to the street name that runs by NTU. It is also symbolic as the journal is NTU's first student undergraduate journal of research and first to publish first-year student writing.

We are grateful to our excellent editorial team and for the insightful guidance by the journal's advisor, Dr. Angela Frattarola.

Enjoy reading!

Keri and Yi-Chin
July 2021

HW0105: Academic Communication in the Humanities and Social Sciences

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Heritage Infrastructure Conservation and National Development: Are they Mutually Exclusive?

Wee Chang Han

Enter the Redhill Food Centre, a well-weathered hawker centre located just a stone's throw away from Redhill MRT. Known for its accessibility and variety of food choices, the hawker centre is a favourite among locals, and a regular go-to for many within the vicinity. Dwarfed by towering HDB flats and modern railways, this landmark has seen its fair share of Singapore's rapid urbanisation.

As I strolled into the establishment, I was greeted with a familiar humid atmosphere, followed by a medley of aromas, beckoning customers to look for the fragrances' owners. Despite the combined efforts of the platoon of ceiling fans, the air was warm and close - palpable as cotton. Columns of hawker stores flanked the seats, each displaying their assortment of awards, sprinkled with occasional mentions of ministerial visits, humbly bragging their popularity. But look past these exuberant displays of false bravado, and one would discover telltale signs of an establishment well past its prime.

Cracks and crevices riddled the dated porcelain tiles on walls, while the floors have their colours washed from years of cleaning and visits. Other than retrofitted wireless internet and powerful fans, little has been done to improve the building structurally. Despite the market's dilapidated state, Redhill Food Centre's cultural significance undoubtedly contributed to its prolonged lifespan. By juxtaposing the old-fashioned design of the food centre with its surrounding high-rise estates, the building serves to acknowledge the labours of our predecessors, providing insights to the different philosophies that governed Singapore's urban development since the 70s.

Despite our humble beginnings, Singapore now not only hosts one of the world's most competitive economies, but it also possesses a highly dense population as well, ranking third internationally according to the World Bank. With various stakeholders vying for our limited land, a city-state country like Singapore must balance landmark preservation with the effective employment of land, catering for both our growing population and globalised market interests. Faced with the pressing need for urban renewal, will Singapore need to choose between heritage infrastructure preservation and national development in the near future?

Preserving history and conserving our heritage is evidently important in culture conservation. Infrastructures with history are not just physical edifices, but emblematic of Singapore's cultural evolutions and racial diversity. However, simply having history will not guarantee a building's preservation in Singapore.

In a study that explores national monument conservation in Singapore, several examples were raised to illustrate difficult circumstances where important infrastructures were compromised for the sake of progress. From the levelling of the National Theatre in 1986 after being declared structurally unsound, to the demolition of the former National Library in 2005 in favour of a road tunnel to ease traffic congestion, these are staunch reminders of how commerce took primacy over urban conservation in Singapore, despite pleas from conservative initiatives (Henderson, 2011, p. 58).

Another point raised by Henderson was how difficult it was to gauge the cultural significance of a landmark. Given Singapore's dynamic economy, ethnically mixed society,

strong government and history as both colony and republic, government bodies and conservatives alike struggle to represent these ideals tangibly. Identifying monuments to distil these abstract ideas into them can be a real challenge (Henderson, 2011, p. 59).

Henderson's study identifies dilemmas that established agencies have when it comes to heritage preservation. The primary and inviolable principle of safeguarding national economic interests often overwrites the need for heritage preservation, albeit both are similarly paramount to a developing nation like Singapore. When faced with mutually exclusive decisions concerning land usage, the government would likely sacrifice dilapidated buildings for our national survival. Where remunerative endeavours dictate our land usage, preserving our history appears as a pipe dream for our small nation. Singapore simply does not have sufficient space to preserve all our old buildings and ways of life.

However, there are still many instances where mutually beneficial relationships are formed between old buildings and new activities within the city. This allows us to reach compromises that secure our economy, while preserving our rich heritage.

In a paper exploring the notion of "new uses need old buildings" and "old buildings require new uses," Chang et al. (2014) study gentrification aesthetics as a solution to Singapore's delicate balancing act between heritage conservation and urban renewal. Originally a western concept coined by Ruth Glass to describe changes in 1950s London, Gentrification Arts melds urban redevelopment with arts enhancement and cultural preservation. In a Singaporean context, Chang et al. (2014) analogized historical districts such as Chinatown and Little India to gentrified conservation buildings, designed by government bodies to preserve unique cultures in Singapore.

The specific example of the Little India Arts Belt was further explored and likened to a localised approach to implementing gentrification aesthetics in Singapore. By enacting the Land Acquisition Act and lifting the Rent Control Act, the government acquired several buildings in the Arts Belt for urban renewal. Private landowners in the Arts Belt refurbished their properties for rentals or resale at escalated market prices, while the government demolished overly dilapidated buildings in the Arts Belt and selected several shophouses for housing art (Chang et al., 2014, p. 531). This transformation of the Little India Arts Belt, orchestrated by the government, allowed the landmark to sustain economically while retaining its cultural significance in Singapore.

Chang et al. substantiate that despite challenges faced in preserving sites with cultural and heritage value to Singapore, there are interesting and unorthodox solutions we can utilise to circumvent these problems. Besides gentrification arts, special events such as tours and educational workshops are among the many alternatives that bring renewed value to a historical site. By repurposing and amalgamating these cultural landmarks with the renewed purpose of education, we can refurbish these buildings and extend their lifespan without replacing them, reaching a compromise between economic progression and heritage conservation.

When we put the opinions in conversation, Henderson illustrates how difficult circumstances of heritage preservation, coupled with the considerations for a significant landmark, paints a labyrinthian conservation landscape that is both arduous and difficult to navigate. With these considerations in mind, Chang et al. opine that Gentrification Arts is an innovative middle-ground between urban conservation and economic progression.

However, is it possible for us to further improve and reach innovative solutions that not only compromise, but fulfil the goals of both conservation and progression?

In 2008, Architects Allen Jack and Cottier transformed Sydney's Cargo Flour Mill into Flourmill Studios, and "by refusing to tear down the structure, they saved an estimated 21,000 tonnes of CO2" (Sebag-Montefiore, 2016). Not only was the building successfully preserved, the carbon footprint of the project was also significantly reduced. Sydney's Flourmill Studios' uncompromising innovation realises the possibility that conservation could prove more beneficial than conventional raze and rebuild approaches. Through the alignment of the goals of sustainable design and integrating it into conservation, a renewed importance on heritage conservation derived solutions can not only be culturally significant, but economically and environmentally viable as well.

To challenge the stigma that historic buildings are inefficient and cumbersome to conserve, we should first rethink the benefits of urban conservation. Cultural preservation, adopting sustainable green designs, these are some areas of development that cannot be discounted, despite the primacy of commerce. With these benefits in mind, urban conservation should not be viewed as the lesser option that contests economic progress in a mutually exclusive decision. Instead, it might just be the answer that meets more than just economic requirements, contributing to Singapore's vision of a sustainable future.

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Divergence in Nuclear Narratives

Lim Wei Bin

Deeply woven into human history, wars of aggression have subjected many to untold miseries due to the wanton violence and destruction against humanity. It is unsurprising that the notion of war holds biblical roots, even manifesting as one of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. In popular culture, when these anthropomorphic personifications of humanity's deadliest threats show up, a certain doom is often guaranteed. War is undeniably brutal and impersonal, and ultimately it is the civilians who are rendered powerless to the large-scale industrial weapons that the twisted promise of technology has brought upon the world. While weapons and methods of warfare cannot distinguish between fighters and civilians, in cases of deliberate military decisions to attack civilians, the innocents are unable to escape from the horrors of war and bear the biggest brunt of the damages. The realities of war and the collateral damage gradually became suppressed by political agendas, as history is often framed by the interests and prejudices of the winning side.

John Berger (2015) astutely captures this essence with his prose, "Hiroshima." In this short critique of the suppression of nuclear consequences behind the Hiroshima bombing, we are reminded repeatedly of the need to confront the horrifying reality of Hiroshima with the utmost agency. On reading an article written by his Marxist friend on the possibility of a third World War, Berger (2015) was compelled to finally open the pages of a gifted book "Unforgettable Fire" which he had set aside previously. The book, a compilation of paintings depicting survivors' memories of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima in 1945, then prompted him to examine and reveal the much-suppressed facts of the nuclear holocaust of Hiroshima in the form of his short essay.

Berger (2015) effectively convinces his reader of the gritty reality of agony and despair which the victims of the atomic bombing went through, by drawing parallels to traditional and modern notions of hell and going so far as to compare it with the nine circles of hell found in the first book of Italian writer Dante Alighieri's 14th-century poem "Divine Comedy." He throws the readers into the heart of the story, from the viewpoints of several Hiroshima victims (Berger, 2015):

> Skin of girl's hip was hanging down.
> "My baby is dead, isn't she?" (p. 17)

Berger's raw depictions of the survivors' accounts exude a certain pathetic appeal which can easily tap into a reader's compassion and instinctual anger at the American aggressors responsible for the bombing. Capitalising on the reader's invested emotions, Berger (2015) goes on to assert that political manipulation is the chief subversive trope which has obscured the physical and moral reality behind the grave acts of violence. He takes on an unrelentingly strong and bordering-extremist stance in labelling the bombings as "terrorist actions," that "what happened was evil" (Berger, 2015), which ironically compromises the credibility of his statements. He points to the fact that the Hiroshima event did not happen overnight but involved arduous planning and careful considerations over months and years with a certain matter-of-factness, delivering his conviction in demonising the military

decision (Berger, 2015). The war narrative that emerged after the bombings revolved around issues of diplomatic and defense policies which morphed into a discourse on "global strategies" and even the idea of the commercialisation of "private fall-out shelters" (Berger, 2015). These multiple realities tended to distract the world from the real humanitarian consequences of the nuclear event and created a sort of moral ambivalence that prevented us from confronting the dark truth of atomic bombs.

It has been a challenge to critically evaluate the objective definition of terrorism that is independent of its moral and political implications. Hence, an interesting debate emerges when we attempt to apply the concept of terrorism to states and state agents, as the line between government-sanctioned violence and unchecked destruction becomes increasingly blurred by political discourse and propaganda from all sides. In "Hiroshima," Berger (2015) wants us to believe that we are largely ignorant and blind to see how the nuclear event was a pure act of evil and undoubtedly a terrorist attack by the United States. While Berger (2015) attempts to convince us that the facts of nuclear holocaust have been hidden through a "systematic, slow and thorough process of suppression and elimination" and "within the reality of politics" (p.17), his narrative falls short to address how this complex process came about. He has failed to recognise that the other justifications (or condemnations) of the bombing are equally powerful contestations in deciding the reality of the incident. In relation to how the moral and physical consequences of the atomic attack have been silenced, what are some other aspects that Berger had overlooked in his arguments?

As we attempt to fill in the gaps left by Berger's arguments, we take a look at Ronald Kramer's (2009) literature which provides insightful perspectives on citizens' resistance to such state crimes. As the Professor of Sociology and Director of the Criminal Justice Program at Western Michigan University, he explores in his work "Revisiting the bombing of civilians: Challenges from a public criminology of state crime" how despite being a clear violation of international law, deliberate targeted bombings of civilian populations can become normalized and systematically denied from being labelled a terrorist act (Kramer, 2009). His work best encapsulates the popular notion that wars are not won on the battlefield, but in the socio-cognitive domain. We find out how war narratives shape people's minds and make callous war decisions abhorred by many become socially acceptable and even be seen as necessary by others.

Kramer (2009) identifies "the wartime erosion of social and moral restraint" (p. 75) in the context of World War Two as responsible for the concept of illegal bombing of civilian populations becoming morally acceptable. Interestingly, in the wave of terror that engulfed the European and Pacific regions, while aerial bombings by the axis powers on allied territories were met with public outrage, the reverse was "normal and acceptable to many people by 1945" (Kramer, 2009). We see a reverse, or rather, shift in the standards that the majority of American citizens subscribed to, thanks to the prevalent myths and political ideals that were conceived during times of war and which persisted even until today. The narrative constructed by the incumbent President Truman of that time was that the atomic bombings were the only way to shorten the costly war and avoid having to place American troops onto the battlefield of Japan to mount an invasion. Underneath all the debates about whether the plan was effective in shortening the war, the "social construction of the goodness and morality of the war" effectively stifled and curbed any attempts to examine

the morality and legality of the civilian bombings (Kramer, 2009). The result is the American public believing that the bombings were evil means carried out for a noble cause – to prevent more American soldiers' deaths. Hence, contrasting Berger's point that the Hiroshima bombing can "never be justified," we find out that the question of whether the bombings can be justified is not simply a one-dimensional question that can be answered by looking at the emotional and biological impacts of the blast on the Japanese civilians without considering the social implications of prevailing myths.

While the myth of the utilitarian formula fuels the purpose of (and justifies) The Bomb in Kramer's (2009) work, it is important to note that this very myth of believing that the bombings were necessary to secure victory in the war has ironically created a problematic feeling of uneasiness in American society today.

Sofia Ahlberg, a lecturer in contemporary literature at La Trobe University, Australia, attempts to deconstruct this new consciousness that manifested after the war in her opinion piece on Australian News Service website, ABC News. Titled "70 years after Hiroshima: what explains our cultural amnesia?", Ahlberg's (2015) work believes that the very myth that Kramer (2009) proposed has at the same time fractured the American Psyche, leaving with it an ambiguous discord that remains unresolved to this day. According to Ahlberg (2015), this discord is manifested in the form of "atomic amnesia," where there is a disconnection between the American public and the aftermath of the bombings. As she attempts in her article to examine the cloth of silence draped over the Hiroshima event, Ahlberg (2015) identified a gap and a kind of reluctance from Hollywood and contemporary novelists in using the "subject as a way of investigating human nature and conflict" (para. 4). While there has been a great deal of references in contemporary film and literature to both the World Wars, few address the fateful incident that took place in Hiroshima on August 6, 1945. The silver glare of the bomb has blinded us from seeing the human stories of lost and pain in nuclear history. We need a proper discourse that confronts the actual horrors of the bombings which has been frozen in time just like how the atomic flash fixed the fateful time of 8:15am as the instant countless lives got obliterated without any warning. While the myths and social constructions as posited by Kramer (2009) in the previous paragraph justify the attack, they also simultaneously impeded the development of a critical evaluation of its moral and legal implications as Berger warns in "Hiroshima." As the only nation that has ever used its nuclear arsenal in military warfare, the United States was in the position of moral authority to obscure its culpability by constructing the bombings as an ethical necessity. We see the banality of the horrors following the Hiroshima experience being played out, as Ahlberg (2015) points out that the bombings have been assimilated into the collective conscious. Overshadowed by the other arching national narratives such as America's victory in the Pacific and the atomic anxieties of the Cold War that followed (Ahlberg, 2015), it comes off unsurprising that the discourse on Hiroshima bombings became obscured by them.

President Truman's decision to drop The Bomb on Japan might have been made on utilitarian grounds, but was there really a need to target civilian populations, not once but twice? Berger's (2015) claim that Japan was "already prepared to negotiate, and was admitting defeat," when taken at face value, will definitely cast a prejudiced light on the United States. As a result, it is important to consider and acknowledge that the rules of war have indeed been broken during the instant the conscious decision to drop the atomic

bomb on the civilian city of Hiroshima was made. The immorality of this utilitarian approach as discussed by Kramer (2009), has far-reaching social consequences that persisted to this day, as the cognitive dissonance "distances us from ... reality" (Berger, 2015). As both Ahlberg (2015) and Berger (2015) warn us, we must reverse this process of normalising the horrors of nuclear bombings, in order to accord the rightful dignity to the many lives lost and give meaning and value back to human lives.

While Berger's "Hiroshima" has given us a glimpse of the tragic human consequences resulting from a nuclear attack in this fragile world, he warns us of our capacity for indifference as we fall silent on the military and political decisions behind the attack. It is a fact that the nuclear genie is already out of the bottle: these weapons of mass destruction cannot be dis-invented. Hence, there is a need to distinguish between true reality and the socially constructed ones. As political war myths frame Americans' justifications for the atomic attack, it leaves a gaping hole within us, rendering us helpless and fearful to confront the horrors it has created. Perhaps an increase in chronicling nuclear catastrophes through art and popular culture is needed, to break us free from the iron cage of atomic amnesia and nuclear ignorance. Continuous exposure to the military dimensions behind the events in Hiroshima and Nagasaki might also put an end to the misleading American narrative that has put Americans on the moral high ground. Not to be written off as mere unfortunates in a singularly tragic event, we must not forget the hibakushas, Japanese for "those who have seen war" (Berger, 2015).

Some nations are concerned that official apologies would create possibilities for legal repercussions (Pettigrove, 2003), but there is a moral impetus to affirm the moral innocence and dignity of civilians who have suffered or lost their lives needlessly in times of war. Victory by any means is not victory at all. When we ignore the rules of war, we all lose. The simple act of acknowledging the truth in America's complicities in the atomic bombings does not squarely compensate the Japanese people for what they have done to them, but it is a good place to start.

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Cole and Selective Representation

Amy Sng Wen Xiu

In the *New York Times Magazine* article "A too-perfect picture," Teju Cole (2016) introduces Steve McCurry, a well-known photographer, and his body of work, with especial focus on his compendium of photographs called "India." In spite of their boring composition, McCurry's photos are still wildly popular, which Cole purports is due in part to his dated portrayal of India. Cole argues that McCurry's work is inauthentic in the way that it crops out the present and portrays a fantasy India to the viewer. The work of Raghubir Singh is offered up as a comparison. His photos share similar elements of setting and subject, but compared to McCurry, Singh's photos capture a sense of life with unusual composition and the authentic essence of India. Cole uses Singh's work to ask the question of how we can tell the authentic apart from a rose-tinted and prejudiced perspective, going as far as to describe the western fantasy as pornographic in its sense of self-gratification. Coldplay's "Hymn for the Weekend" music video is offered as an example of this cultural fetishism and exoticism with how it portrays a western fantasy of India. Cole uses the topic of fetishism and appropriation to then ask if westerners should be allowed to approach stories and voices from another culture, to which he states that they can, though it is tricky to navigate. In dealing with this problem, Cole offers up photography as a better solution to portray stories that are not our own; he states that good photography captures the complexities of authenticity and reality and honours its subject.

Cole discusses some interesting ideas about the representation of culture and how we should approach other cultures, but a large topic that recurs a number of times in his article is that of selective representation of a foreign culture. He states that this can be seen in McCurry's work in how he attempts to attract his audience by presenting an intentionally skewed perspective of India because it is more appealing to them than authentic India. However, Cole acknowledges the counterargument that this facet of India is still part of India, which begs the question— is it morally acceptable to selectively represent culture?

In Nicola Palmer's (2007) article, "Ethnic equality, national identity and selective cultural representation in tourism promotion: Kyrgyzstan, Central Asia," she presents a study of post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan's depictions of ethnicity and its portrayal of Kyrgyz culture in promotional material. Kyrgyzstan is a multi-ethnic, post-Soviet country that was trying to promote its tourism to foreigners after its independence, while discovering its own national identity. Palmer states: "The identities projected for tourism promotion purposes are a potentially powerful means by which outsiders comprehend the way in which a nation wishes to be seen." However, as Palmer notes in the case of Malaysia, the identities put forth in tourism promotion can be a careful misrepresentation of the population in order to draw in foreign tourists. Kyrgyzstan is especially multi-ethnic and multi-cultural, further highlighting this issue in the way that Kyrgyzstan dealt with their tourism promotion. The multi-cultural aspect of Kyrgyz culture was not represented, clashing with the idea that the Kyrgyz government wished to put forth of an "inclusive ethnic state." Palmer posits that "selling the novel or exotic was regarded to be of greater importance" than the presentation of the inclusive values of Kyrgyzstan.

The intentionally biased representation of Kyrgyzstan calls back McCurry's photography and how he "sells" a contrived representation of India as a country. In both cases, the novel or only what is appealing to an outside audience is presented, thus presenting a confirmation of a foreigner or outsider's stereotype of another culture in order to draw them in. This image does not need to be accurate in its representation as its only goal is to draw people in. Thus, culture becomes a means to an end— a tool used to bring profit to those who abuse it. From the examples of McCurry and of Palmer's article, it is possible to see how this could be accomplished from the standing of an outsider, as well as a member of that culture. In either case, it only reinforces existing stereotypes and further perpetuates them to new viewers, creating a vicious cycle in which prejudiced behaviour based on stereotypes is fed by a culture using a stereotype of itself to profit of those who romanticise said stereotype. Returning back to Cole's article, perhaps the issue is not so much that of how an outsider misrepresents culture and how they can learn to respect it but is instead about breaking the cycle of romanticization of culture and profiting off of cultural stereotypes by both outsiders and members of that culture. Cole himself has alluded to Coldplay's "Hymn for the Weekend" music video, where stereotyped Indian-themed visuals are used with no prior context within the song itself. However, instead of connecting these ideas of the production of media and the use of cultural stereotypes with the cycle of stereotypes and profit, Cole focuses instead on composition as being the means of conveying genuine respect and accurate portrayal of culture, when the composition has little effect on how culture is misrepresented in terms of its content.

In the cases of Palmer's article, Steven McCurry, and Coldplay's "Hymn for the Weekend" music video, we can see the use of the selective representation, or misrepresentation, of culture and how it can negatively affect the culture that it is portraying by promoting a stereotype that contributes to the romanticization of foreign cultures and peoples. However, a very different outcome can be observed in this article authored by JoAnn McGregor and Lyn Shumaker (2006), where they discuss the case of cultural marketing in South Africa in a postcolonial society. In the section on "Historicizing Heritage" in "Heritage in Southern Africa: Imagining and marketing public culture and history," they touch on the idea of how South Africa had been trying to foster a sense of white national pride, in in pushing for the selective representation of white South Africans, had ended up erasing and overlooking native South African heritage and peoples. In the section titled "Historicising Heritage," they describe how the African historical and cultural presence was "efface[d]" by the history of the Victoria Falls (McGregor, Shumaker). One example given in the article is that of the South Rhodesian National Museum, where the collection and display of African cultural artefacts was highly discouraged and even defunded. Viewing the article through the lens of selective representation, we can see the forcing of selective and unequal representation of white or colonial Africa over its native African history and culture, similar to the cases of McCurry, Coldplay, and the marketing of Kyrgyz tourism. However, there is another facet to this article with regards to the concept of representation of culture.

McGregor and Shumaker state later on in the same section that the 1950s-60s brought on a new wave of interest in African culture through the African cultural nationalist movements, which led to the representation of African history and culture in "liberal colonial" elements. They state that public displays were forced to include some element of

African representation, and that this approach appealed to elite African intellectuals. The example of these forced inclusions is not precisely an example of selective representation. The word "selective" implies that there is a choice of one representation over another, where in this case, there is a forced inclusion of cultural elements that had previously been effaced. This speaks to a thread running between both of these ideas of artificial cultural representation, where the representation may not be organic or genuine, and instead springs from deliberate intention of one form or another. Thus, selective representation falls under a larger umbrella of forced, curated cultural representation.

In the case of McCurry, the purpose of forced representation would be to sell a biased representation of India through his photos in order to draw more interest in his work. In the case of the Kyrgyz tourism promotion, it would be the selective representation of Kyrgyz culture in order to market themselves to tourists. Finally, in the case of South Rhodesia, it would be seen in the forced inclusion of the representation of native African culture in order to make right an injustice and exclusion that was made in the past through yet another case of selective representation. In the context of these three examples, the South Rhodesian case is singular in that its motives are to make right and provide a fuller representation of local culture, rather than to profit off existing biases of its audience. Thus, in comparing these three cases, we could ask if it is moral to force any framing of representation at all? Could selective representation be used to positive effect?

It is true in many cases that forced and cherry-picked representation is highly negative, and is often used to present a false view of a group of peoples. As mentioned earlier in the case of selective representation, it can be used to draw in a specific type of crowd for the sake of profit. McCurry and the Kyrgyz tourism marketing both demonstrate that it can be to the profit of both a person from outside of the culture being misrepresented, or persons from within the misrepresented culture. To bring back some of these ideas, there is an imbalance of power where a culture or a number of cultures is reduced to an object for the gratification of others who do not truly appreciate a culture in its authentic form. The issue is not with the inauthenticity itself, but rather with the system of power that it creates. It can affect persons of that culture by dehumanizing and objectifying them for those who "consume" the representations of their culture, placing them in a position of oppression. We can see this oppression in a more active form in the effacing of native cultural groups in South Rhodesia as well, demonstrating how it can negatively damage different groups of peoples.

Now, with forced representation, we can see that interestingly enough, as much as selective representation stems directly from it, it can be solved through forced representation in of itself. Using forced representation as a form of reparation to a previously oppressed group is a decidedly positive side of the same coin, as seen again in the example of South Rhodesia. Thus, we can see that forced representation is merely a tool. Just as a pencil could be used as a tool to write a love letter or to quite literally stab a person in the back, forced representation can be used to accomplish both positive and negative outcomes. What determines the outcome is the intent of their wielder, and the morality of their motivations. This is the defining factor between the three cases of selective representation and the one case of reparation we have examined; the cases of selective representation were motivated by self-serving desires for profit or for representation, and the case of reparation was to make right an injustice that had been

exacted upon a group of innocents. The ones who carry out the misrepresentation are to blame, and not the act of forced representation itself. Forced or curated representation still has a place in a world full of objectification of culture— a double edged sword that must be wielded with care.

Navigating the issues of cultural representation and appreciation is often complex, and those put in a position to be a voice and representative for others have a responsibility to present foreign and even native cultures respectfully. The motivation behind any presentation and representation defines their purpose and their effect, no matter who it comes from, or the process through which it came to be. Those in a position of responsibility need to become more mindful of the effects of curated representation, and we as consumers should hold them accountable for how their actions affect groups represented. We ought to remain critical, to take responsibility to educate ourselves and to give due respect to other cultures around us, and to use these tools of representation to effect change for the better.

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Photography in a Post-Truth Landscape

Hu Huiying

People often say that we should never judge a book by its cover, but what if the cover is all that we have to form our judgements? In the Digital Age, different facets of our world have gone online and on-air. As a result, the use of photography as a medium of communication has increased exponentially, and these images are widely accessible by the masses. As photography often serves as a window into the things we cannot see for ourselves, much of what we know about distant topics depend on it. Hence, the ubiquitous use of photography carries with it massive influence on our worldviews. Indisputably, when viewing photographs, we are often partial towards accurate information as our need to be accurate has been said to be one of our central motives. However, accuracy can mean many things, and some of these meanings are at odds with one another. In the article "A too-perfect picture," Teju Cole (2016) provides us with his take on accuracy in photography and its effects as he breaks down the issues surrounding photographing only quintessential aspects of India and her culture.

In the article, Cole (2016) first argues that the works should be able to bring out the unique blend of the country's culture, "a mixture not only of its indigenous practices and borrowed customs but also of its past and present," (para. 4) rather than a prejudiced view of the culture. In this line of argument, he emphasises the importance of preventing the indulgence of this resultant fantasy among western audiences. Furthermore, Cole is a proponent of the need for realism in photography. This realism encompasses the necessity to capture the more mundane and chaotic elements of our daily lives — "in-between moments of drift that make up most of our days," (para. 5) aside from just dramatic, picture-perfect shots. Cole also acknowledges that a Westerner addressing a non-Western subject is not necessarily "appropriation" as "some of the most insightful stories about any place can be told by outsiders" (para. 10). On the whole, the article concludes with the idea that photography's strength lies in its ability to do much more than conveying dissipating messages and emotions.

Cole's take on McCurry's one-sided attempt at encapsulating the whole of India is nonetheless an insightful one. However, it was unclear if Cole based his arguments in the context of photojournalism. This point is significant as I believe that only then would McCurry's work warrant the harsh criticism of Cole. The crux of photojournalism lies in the capturing of the truth, regardless of how ugly the truth may be. This definition seems to underlie Cole's line of reasoning that includes presenting a holistic view of what India truly is, instead of featuring bits and pieces of the most glamorous or tear-jerking imagery. From this, we can see that Cole believes in *objectiveness*, a concept which leaves no room for fantasy or misrepresentation. Yet, to be completely impartial is an impossible feat given the subjective understanding of the world by the human mind. Hence, what exactly is the truth, and how do we obtain it?

Cole's exploration of the significance of portraying an *objective truth* presents itself as a prologue to the idea of truth in the present day. In our global society, there exists an increase in incidences of expert opinions brazenly brushed off, rampant political misinformation, and reckless sharing of alternative facts. Moreover, with the rise of social

media, the spread of disinformation is proliferated through echo chambers and the effective facilitation of convenient sharing. This slow erosion of trust in evidence ushers in a new age — the post-truth era. So, how relevant is photography in a post-truth world?

In the article "Digital photography: Truth, meaning, aesthetics," Steven Skopik (2003) explores the concept of the *truth value* of photography. With the transition from film photography to digital photography, image manipulation brings along the inherent potential to result in the "erosion of the reportorial value of the photograph" (p. 264). However, Skopik notes that image-making has always been influenced by the subjective decisions of the photographer even before the rise of digital photography. This idea was further developed by referencing Roland Barthes, highlighting the figurativeness of photography in which "no photograph operates purely in terms of its denoted, literal content" (p. 264). One could easily look at a picture and think that it depicts exactly what happens in real life. However, even without digital manipulation, the photographer decides on settings such as the aperture, shutter speed, and most importantly, what should or should not be included in the frame. These have the power to influence our perceptions of what is portrayed, and what is shown may not be the full picture. For example, photographs of a political campaign in a newspaper may depict a stadium filled with people, when in reality, only thirty people were present. Therefore, illustrating the massive influence that a photographer has on the final image even without manipulating it. Skopik's eventual review of the situational and interpretive facets of photography stems from his belief in the assemblage of "connotative meaning" (p. 264) underlying images. Thus, any vehemently set belief in the veracity in photography is questionable. As a whole, Skopik believes that the disintegration of verisimilitude is not exactly unique to digital photography and questions the idea of photography as a way to determine the truth.

An aspect of photography's relevance to society lies in its lack of *absolute truth*, an intrinsic trait harmonious with the nature of the postmodern world. According to Skopik, the veracity characteristic of most photography lies in its ability to imitate real life more accurately than a painting, rather than the accuracy in its meaning. Although, photography's ability to capture real-life images excludes painterly photography in which a photograph is edited to mimic a painting. In a post-truth world, objective facts are less influential in moulding public opinion than information that appeals to feelings and personal values (Oxford University Press, n.d.). Examples of this phenomenon can be seen everywhere, from anti-vaxxers to climate change deniers. Furthermore, poststructuralist views propose that our perceptions are only indications of what we perceive, and they do not apprise us of the realities of our world (Grundberg, 1990). More specifically, our interpretation of the world and what is true varies largely from someone else's. This notion is evident in Cole's article, "A too-perfect picture," where Steve McCurry's one-sided approach in capturing the culture of India ignores the parts of the country in the present day. Thus, these pictures do not count as presenting an alternative truth. In the case of McCurry, his works are crafted in a way to satisfy stereotypes and expectations of what Indians should look like, especially to a Western audience and possibly himself. What he may have thought as "seeking out the picturesque" and "showing a culture in its most authentic form" (Cole, 2016, para. 4) only presents a partial truth, leaving out elements of India in the present day. Therefore, McCurry's works are a quintessential example of photography in a post-truth world — not entirely truthful, yet not wholly fantasy either.

Despite the congruence of characteristics between photography and the post-truth world, there exists a misalignment between the two as well. Another quality of photography and art, in general, is the presence of manipulation to reveal the truth or to reveal parts of society that go unnoticed (Mullen, 1998), an idea commonly seen in documentary photography. In a world where objectivity becomes secondary, greater value can be sought in unearthing an impartial truth through photography, as seen from a modernist perspective. In the article, Skopik raises a point about how "recent commentary on photography concerns itself more with issues of representation" (Skopik, 2003, p. 264). Thus, in the pursuit of authenticity, the accuracy of the photographic representation of the situation is what matters. However, the accuracy of representations is independent of the occurrence of manipulation. The basis of this argument lies within the correspondence theory of truth, a view that truth or falsity of something is determined by how it corresponds with the world and how precisely it describes it (Hanna & Harrison, 2004). For instance, if it were to be said that "the chair is on the table," it would only be true if the chair is, in fact, on the table. This is also evident in Cole's article where works that recognise the complexities of the subject's cultural reality are seen as the objective truth. The consequences of leaving it out only result in McCurry's undesirable romanticism of orientalism, done to "indulge in fantasy" (Cole, 2016, para. 4). This notion of representation following Cole's belief that "work that acknowledges their complex sense of their own reality" (Cole, 2016, para. 11) is what honours the stories of the people that we are trying to tell. Hence, photography's relevance to a post-truth world also takes the form of finding objective truth in a world with almost none to eradicate prejudices, biases, and other disadvantages of situationally coded truths when seen from a relativistic perspective.

However, the function of photography to disclose an objective truth is discordant with the realities of the post-truth world. This is said even with the pre-existing value attached to the presence of objective truth in a society with no definite answers. Post-truth finds interest in the idea of consensus to enfeeble common opinions of the truth, presenting a paradox known as the "Consensus Theory of Post-Truth" (Bufacchi, 2020). Underlying this paradox is Habermas' consensus theory of truth, where the act of conceiving truth is characterised by conjectured, logical consensus. In comparison to the correspondence theory of truth, the consensus theory of truth states that the defining properties of truth are propositions rather than objective elements of the world, aligning itself with the malleability of facts and truth in society. Furthermore, when viewing works in photography as a kind of individualistic, subjective truth, it is known that these works can attract various explanations. An example of such a work is "Cabbage leaf" by Edward Weston (1931), a monochromatic photograph featuring a splayed cabbage leaf against a dark background, its ambiguity opening itself up to multiple interpretations. Weston accentuates the graceful flow of the veins, mimicking the folds of a piece of fabric, causing mixed perceptions. Yet, the aim of interpreting art does not lie in the attainment of "single, grand, unified, composite interpretations" (Barret, 1994, p. 198). This, therefore, underscores the mismatch between photography's ability to disclose an objective truth, the subjectivity of its interpretation, and the consensus theory of truth in the post-truth world.

The notion of subjectivity is intrinsic to the creation and interpretation of photographic works, as mentioned by Skopik. What underlies this quality is an alternative function of the art form — expression. Art has often been viewed as a form of representation, or even

imitation, in relation to the correspondence theory of truth. However, this notion has been on a terminal decline in some areas of the arts since the 19th century (Hospers, 2001). With its diminution, the perspective of art as a form of expression has gained momentum. In light of the Romantic movement, expressing emotions constitutes the making of art (Hospers, 2001). This is evident in the descriptions of tones in the romantic era and the neoclassical era which predates it. Tones of the romantic era are often described as spontaneous, while those of the neoclassical era are seen as balanced and calm. The expression theory of art postulates that emotions take precedence over ideas and thoughts. Hence, what significance do emotions in photography possess in a post-truth landscape?

In an article titled "Emotional truth," Ronald De Sousa and Adam Morton (2002) explore the idea of *emotional truth and accuracy*. Morton believes that an emotion's ability to provide precise expressions appropriate for its circumstances, and to represent a real situation as "rightly situated in the galaxy of could-have-beens and would-have-ifs" (p. 272) is what constitutes the idea of an accurate emotion. He further explains that unlike emotional truth, accurate emotions do not promise truth and likens it to "observational accuracy of a scientific theory" (p. 272) in which emotions can reasonably encapsulate real and possible observations. To illustrate this, a photograph may not portray the actual circumstances of the situation as a result of a photographer's subjective interpretations of it. However, this flawed portrayal could still fit the world that we live in. Thus, the work, a result of the photographer's expressions, still possesses emotional accuracy. Morton posits that emotional accuracy thus provides us with strong and trustworthy relations to various circumstances, paving the way for our subsequent actions and sentiments.

The overarching principle of Morton's analysis of emotional accuracy relates to how accurate emotions do not guarantee the depiction of knowledge acquired through positivist means as the emphasis is placed on the authenticity of the individual's emotions. In conjunction with Morton's analysis of emotional accuracy, expression as a function of photography offers a more idiosyncratic approach to the idea of truth as compared to that of representation. Thus, there is value in the search for personal truth in photography that may not be truthful in the grand scheme of things. Furthermore, in Tolstoy's association with the expressionist theory of art, he defines art as the expression of emotions or experience that allows the target audience to share those same feelings and experiences. Ergo, from this frame of reference, photography also possesses innate qualities of a post-truth world as emotions and wide-reaching influence form the crux of the era. In the context of "A too-perfect picture," the representational theory of art forms the basis of Cole's criticism of McCurry's work. However, when viewed from the perspective of an expressionist, McCurry's photographs would have garnered some merit as it is a representation of his emotional truths. McCurry captured possible observations of the world irrespective of how unrepresentative they may be, a contrasting view to that of photography's role of representation.

After considering various interpretations of the truth, the perspective of an objective truth seems to hold the most value in photojournalism. The term "fourth estate" has often been used to describe the press, relating to its duty as a watchdog that bears the power to frame political issues and influence the masses. Despite being seen as an outdated idea due to the growing distrust surrounding news coverage in the mass media, this concept still holds great importance as it maintains the impartial distribution of news (Hansen, 2018).

This characteristic of journalism is essential in helping the audience form their own opinions on issues based on the information provided. The act of allowing viewers of the work to make their own judgements is juxtaposed against allowing the pushing of specific agendas through images that are consciously skewed by an individual's implicit biases. Thus, photojournalism concentrates on uncovering truths which portray the fairest and most complete sense of various situations, a perspective in line with Cole's propositions. Ultimately, photojournalism leaves no room for images based on emotional truths, and erroneous ideas irrespective of whether they were derived from a logical consensus amongst the masses or not.

The very nature of our post-truth world shines a light on the dynamic landscape of truth in the present day. We see ever-changing consensus amongst the people, and increasing emphasis placed on an individual's interpretation of the truth. Consequently, every piece of information now exists in an unstable form of both falsity and truth. Perhaps this sense of objectivity advanced by Cole provides us with the anchor we so desperately need as we navigate through waves of falsehoods, misrepresentations, and lies.

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Remembering Authenticity: Cultural Value of Commodified Photography

Aretha Wan

Teju Cole, a photography critic of the *New York Times Magazine*, mentions, "You know a Steve McCurry picture when you see one" (Cole, 2016, Para. 1). Cole's article criticises the standardisation of art and expression through the works of Steve McCurry. While his works are ubiquitous and highly sought after as commercial art, Cole decries his photographs as "too perfect," highlighting how they seem extensively choreographed -- all follow a preferred theme, presenting a superficial interpretation of the country and its people. Though some argue that McCurry's representation of India gives value to the rendition of the place as a transitioning third-world country, the lack of soul in McCurry's works causes them to have no value due to their lack of insight, even being guilty of "appropriation" (Para. 10) due to the overtly exotic portrayal of Indian culture that is erroneously popularised. In contrast, Raghubir Singh's works capture the authentic chaos of life in India in a range of locations and context. This presents a complex and insightful image that comes together to add dimension to the viewer's understanding and an experience of just being in the moment. Cole highlights the need to acknowledge "(the subjects') complex sense of their own reality" (Para. 11), presenting the world from the perspectives of the subjects rather than the subjects for the viewer to perceive. There is no need to sacrifice the authenticity of the art to attain stronger aesthetic appeal. Rather, the beauty of photography comes from the photographer's ability to deliver more than just "a quick message" (Para. 11), telling stories beyond a simple perspective of the lens.

The phrase, "images that masquerade as art but fully inhabit the vocabulary of advertising" (Cole, 2016, Para. 7) captures Cole's view of art as presentation of the self, something personal and emotional, and his repulsion where authentic photography has been abandoned, becoming a standard expression of aesthetic to profit from. The contention of values thus lies in that of popularity and the meaningfulness of photography that seems to be diluted with each image plastered on another magazine cover. Cole presents the contradiction between popular mass media and authentic art. However, it would be unfortunate to deem them as mutually exclusive. There lies a delicate line between moderate appreciation and overrated propagation, where although art is made to be seen, mass reproduction of a work may cause it to be reduced to a mere novelty or commodity to consume as the original intention of the work is not retained. However, some still believe that proliferated photography has as much to contribute to the viewer's insight to life as any other art. Afterall, the merit of a photograph relies on the presence of a viewer, where the message behind the image may be construed to the eye of the beholder. As the reach of a photograph widens, the multitude of stories told may increase as well. The representation of various cultures allows for the development of perspective of other cultures through the arts as photography captures mesmerising moments of the natural community that an outsider is not privy to as a tourist. This leads to the question: Does the commodification of photography in mainstream media diminish its value as a cultural unit?

Cultural value of popular music is highlighted by Regev (1994), who explains that while critics did not recognise "music produced by formula for a mass-market demand" (p. 88) as

art, this collection of works create a "cultural unit" (p. 93) that indicate some form of ingenuity that may define a generation. While some may reject the idea of artistic value in indistinguishable rock music, the intricacy and deliberation of designing this unique sound that subverts the traditional expectation of music undeniably illustrates some of core principles of art: sophistication of medium and commitment to expressing the inner self. The transition to freer broadcast of popular music prompted the investigation of meaning or "serious(ness)" (p. 90) of rock music by a group of writers in the 1970s, revealing the underlying meaning of rock as an "aesthetic means for expressing rebellion" (p. 91) that is full of genuine emotion, along with the element of a collaborative creative unit. This captures the concerns of that era, such as self-image, individuality and unity found in a common "inner truth" (p. 92), revealing more about the self and society's atmosphere because of its movement into the mainstream (hinting towards a large extent of relatability to common emotions associated with "a larger cultural process" (p. 86). Regev also points out how new forms are often ridiculed by the "dominant position in the cultural field" (p. 98) when they first appear, demonstrating the rejection of the unfamiliar and some ephebiphobia. While this problem lies with the "institutionalised hierarchies" (p. 98) of art, the "ideology of autonomous art" (p. 98) is what truly poisons the realm of art as it chooses to define what has value and what does not, encapsulating some irony of wanting authenticity and nonconformity but rejecting the unusual.

The virtue of art is defined where artistic value of photography should lie in its genuineness and ability to express the self, focusing on the delicacy of crafting the image and moment, rather than the simple action of pressing a shutter. Both Regev and Cole impress on the importance of ingenuity and emotion in art, where rock music is powered by "rage, alienation, anomie, anxiety (and) anger" (Regev, 1994, p. 91), Singh's photography is powered by bittersweet appreciation towards the everyday moment. Although some may argue that the commodification of art contaminates its value, Regev rationalises that wideness of its circulation does not diminish its worth if it stays true to the artist's self. Instead of creating for the whims of market algorithms, making art with integrity creates messages that will surely identify with those they were intended for. While I believed that the debate regarding photography as an art laid in the contesting views of ideological and optical value, Regev illustrates that both attributes of art are not mutually exclusive but correlated as meaning is derived from the audience and how well the image resonates with an emotion within them. Furthermore, he brings to light the fault in the way artistic and cultural value is measured, where the rigidity of the expectations of what qualifies as good, "original" art limits true originality to shine. By encouraging a recognised standard of authenticity that Cole deems McCurry to have mastered, the voice of the medium is restricted into an echo of known concepts.

The perception of cultural value is further refined in Eriksen's article, where he highlights the hypocrisy underlying UNESCO's ideology of culture. While the organisation was set up with universalist goals of conserving humanity's heritage, it "almost immediately degenerated into a tool for parochialism and relativism" (Eriksen, 2001, p. 127), where declarations of cultural value seemed to separate the location from local life because of its glorification. In fact, Eriksen mentions how "Although [UNESCO emphasizes] the value of cultural diversity, it appears largely as an aesthetic, rather than a moral, value" (p. 128), pointing out some performative nature of these declarations. Culture has thus

proceeded to be defined as both everyday life as well as an artistic phenomenon, where the people are central to the composition of heritage, though this fascination with heritage stems from external interest in how locals have adapted to diverse environments differently. Eriksen emphasizes on how this view of culture creates a segregation of the "minority" culture and "majority" culture, adoring seemingly "exotic" appearances rather than their own modern cultural phenomenon which may be dubbed as "ordinary." This romanticisation of difference not only creates a sense of exclusivity but exclusion as well, for both sides, where idealised respect and tolerance due to awareness are but just foolish ideals. As he illustrates the detriment of ranking culture by their own artificial measure of authenticity, he emphasizes on how "cultural rights" (p. 133) should be a choice to express, rather than a defining feature that binds the self.

His words resonate with that of Cole's, where heightened attention of culture is not representation but a prejudiced portrayal. This does not bring any benefit to the culture, not recognition, not understanding, but a cheapening of individuality in the hands of an outsider. While there may be good intentions to preserve the diversity and locality, "There is no need for a concept of culture in order to respect local conditions in development work" (Eriksen, 2001, p. 142). Extravagant performances and titles of adulation are not required for appreciation of customs, but rather non-interference and the simple sincere want to understand would be more rewarding for the locals. When supposed highbrows purposefully seek out landmarks or iconic features of a culture to share, the tradition is reduced to some quest for unique experiences or a rather peculiar specimen of the heterogeneity of mankind. Both UNESCO and McCurry have created a wedge between those in front of and those behind the coloured lens. However, while the recognition brought by UNESCO's identification of World Heritage Sites like Taj Mahal and Ellora Caves highlight some of India's rich history and origins, the circulation of most of McCurry's work mainly serves to paint a dramatic, saturated image of rural India in exchange for his own recognition in the realm of photography. For cultural value to be obtained, an artist should fully experience and show the multifaceted story of the place and its people rather than narrowing down to myopic, ornamental presentations of a set aesthetic.

In view of this virtue of cultural value that lies in authenticity and understanding, we see that McCurry's work alienates, rather than honours, the culture he sought to appreciate. Presenting another's culture in a way that conforms to and reinforces narratives or stereotypes implemented by the majority deforms the truth of local authenticity. Some may insist that McCurry is presenting his perspective of India, where his photography is his genuine expression of opinion as his lens reveals his appreciation of the country. Even that his striking pieces are works of art that receive popularity, and therefore at the very least improving the recognition of the beauty and esteem of the minority groups he sheds light on. Nonetheless, some have to realise that it is this popularity that amplifies the detriment to the people when the group is distorted into some performance rather than an actual being's beliefs and life. The expression of the self in photojournalism comes secondary to presenting the subject in a way that is true to them. The value of this art lies in the veracity of the story and fidelity to the autonomy of its subject, which is denied from McCurry's works when he chooses a concept to sell his work as.

The problem thus lies in the perceived hierarchy of cultures, where the aesthetic of rural authenticity is deemed to be more genuine while developing or modernised cultures are not recognised as valuable as they do not adhere to the superficial image of culture depicted in mass media. Yet, this is what occurs in reality. As countries develop towards modernity, their unique heritage becomes part of their foundation and history but do not entirely define their present. Countries progress as their people seek better lives, instead of being in the perpetual image of struggle. If an outsider truly wants to appreciate culture, they would have to appreciate the change as well, not just having a fixation on the narrative of the backward, victimised minority as there is much to share about current states as well.

Hence, the real issue does not lie with how the mainstream simplifies or corrupts meaning but the fact that the mainstream is created by the majority that devalues real authenticity and is unwilling to change its perception of the minority. Like rock music, McCurry's photography takes the stage because of the fascination it draws from the audience. However, the distinction between the two, as art that conveys a message, lies in the soul of the piece, where rock is music for the self while McCurry produces images for the masses. Music by seeming outcasts that resonate within the silent majority is much different from images by someone from the majority that portray the minority for the majority. Art that perpetuates these stereotypes of cultural minorities only serve to isolate and brand people who identify with the custom. Once again, the ranking of art based on its supposed "expressive truth" (Regev, 1994, p. 98) is what limits the cultural value of mainstream media as those who seek to break into the attention or gain recognition from the market are inclined to only capture aspects of a community that are institutionally defined as "valuable." The truth is rarely one dimensional, especially with regard to human development, and who is to say one feature of a culture is more valuable than another?

When the dominant majority has a hold over how art should be presented to the masses, there is little space for cultural or artistic integrity. The art can only remain in the set ideals of the masses while the community progresses and alters, causing the piece to lose relevance as a cultural unit. As Eriksen implores, "the mystifying and ideologically charged culture concept can be discarded" (p. 142), in place of ethical appreciation of locality. Culture is about what we create, the collective expression of the self as a society. It is not simply the colourful past we inherit, but the stories about our present and future that should not bind us by the clothes we wear or the food we eat. While culture can be celebrated and remembered through circulation in mainstream media, the value of culture should not be evaluated according to the expectations of an audience. As McCurry frames his subjects within his rather Western colonialist concept of what India should be, the proliferation of his works place the subjects under the judgement of the masses, harming cultural representation as this outdated, misleading image is reinforced. By abandoning this concept of sacred culture and focusing on the evolving present, will we be able to embrace the true beauty of civilisation through the arts.

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Science: The Key to Our Salvation or Destruction?

Malcolm Goh

A bright flash erupted in the middle of the New Mexico desert. The ball of plasma burns thousands of times hotter than the surface of the Sun. A shock wave thunders across the landscape, vaporising everything in its path. A cloud of smoke and radioactive particles rises into the sky, looming ominously over the testing area. Viewing from the safety of an observational bunker thousands of kilometres away, a sense of dread filled Robert J. Oppenheimer's heart. Oppenheimer was one of the leading physicists who developed the world's first atomic bomb, the Trinity bomb. Upon seeing the explosion, the line from the sacred Hindu text, "Now I am become death, the destroyer of worlds," rang through his mind. Knowing that he helped to develop a weapon that could potentially wipe out all of humanity weighed heavily on his heart. In the past century alone, we have seen remarkable advances in science and technology. We have managed to split an atom, put a man on the moon, developed cures for diseases, delved deep into the human genome and created artificial intelligence that are eerily similar to that of a real human being. These advances in science and technology have enabled us to lead more comfortable, convenient and healthier lives. Science and technology have no doubt also made us more interconnected than ever before. The rise of personal mobile phones and the world-wide-web has basically transformed how we communicate and has allowed for the rapid flow of information all around the world. On the other hand, scientific and technological advancements have also shattered the lives of millions and robbed them of their dignity.

According to Richard P. Feynman, science gives humanity the key to either heaven or hell. In his speech titled "The value of science" in 1955, Feynman acknowledges that science has enabled us to transcend our ancestors in technological and intellectual advancements but it could also lead to unspeakable horrors. Although Feynman (1955) was an established theoretical physicist, his speech was written in an easily accessible manner for his listeners to grasp the immense potential that science has. He likens the discoveries that science has been able to produce to that of a grand adventure. He expresses his sense of wonder and perplexity by using various examples such as, "Stands at the sea… wonders at wondering… I… a universe of atoms… an atom in the universe" (Feynman, 1955, p. 14). Here, Feynman (1955) implies that each and every human being is himself a universe – containing within him trillions of atoms arranged a specific order to form a living being, and that living being just a minute particle in an infinitely large universe around him. It is only through advancements in the intellectual and scientific realms that human beings are able to discover and ponder about such things.

After the Age of Enlightenment (post 18th Century), science has enabled human beings to fundamentally reshape the way we see the natural world. No longer are gods or God the explanation behind every phenomenon. Science provides us with an objective point of view in which we can quantify the universe through theories, precise calculations and developments in technology. In spite of these developments, Feynman expresses his concerns that "science could produce enormous horror in the world" (Feynman, 1955, p. 13). Scientists who are in search for the cure for cancer could inadvertently discover the means to develop biological weapons that could be used in warfare. The advent of the atomic age enabled scientists to split an atom. However, that technology was used to incinerate

thousands of civilians in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. What then is the morality of science? Can science be morally neutral?

To answer this question, I think that we must first unravel the fundamental spirit of science. Yuval Levin (2006) from the New Atlantis, a Journal of Sciences and Technology, argues that science was not born out of a morally neutral quest for facts. Although science enables people to look at the world through an objective lens, it has more often than not been perceived as lacking in humanity. However, this view of science is inadequate. Beneath all its complex theories and calculations, Levin (2006) argues that science was created to improve "the condition of the human race, relieving suffering, enhancing health, and enriching life." The essence of science is to empower people, relieve human suffering and to free them from their physical restraints. The discovery of the miraculous mould that could save lives, Penicillin, saved thousands of lives during World War II and led to the development of anti-biotics. Scientific studies into aerodynamics and advances in aerospace technology have enabled human beings to soar high into the skies. The fundamental spirit of science is not, therefore, a strictly inquisitive one. It is born out of the desire to improve the human condition and enable humanity to reach for the stars. And it is this underlying moral purpose that motivates scientific research and advancements. Although Levin (2006) does put the moral purpose of science in a positive light, he also expresses his concern that "we denizens of the scientific age are at risk of becoming unable to distinguish between good and evil."

Technological and scientific advancements have given humanity strength, and that strength in turn offers us power. However that power could lead to dominance, and dominance paves the way for abuse and decline. Humanity has always been aware of the temptations that power provides. Even in classic Greek literature, this lesson was illustrated by the tale of Icarus. In ancient Greek mythology, Icarus was the son of a master-craftsman named Daedalus. Icarus and his father were imprisoned on an escapable island by Zeus, the Greek god of lightning and the apex of the Greek pantheon. Seeing that there is no conventional way of escaping that island, Daedalus proposed a solution. His plan was to use the feathers and wax that were found on the island to construct artificial wings for both him and his son, Icarus. Using his skills as a master craftsman, Daedalus soon constructed the wings and climbed up to the highest tower of the island. Icarus and his father then leapt off that tower. The wings that his father had constructed enabled both of them to soar and fly among the birds. The wings had served as their means of liberation and made Icarus feel like a god. Enthralled by the limitless possibilities that these new wings could offer, Icarus looks up into the sky and sees the Sun. Ignoring the warnings from his father, Icarus then flapped his wings and soared higher and higher into the direction of the Sun. The exhilarating experience of flight had caused him to be arrogant.

Soon after climbing higher into the sky, the heat from the Sun melts the wax in Icarus's wings and the feathers fell off. Icarus then falls from the sky and into his death. Thus, the ancient Greek tale of Icarus could be interpreted as humanity's quest to master our environment and breakthrough our physical restraints through science. Science grants humanity the powers of the gods and the "key" that Feynman (1955) speaks of. It has enabled us to accomplish things that were never even dreamt of by our ancestors. However, with that power, it could bring along with it corruption and that could spell disaster for humanity.

As what Albert Einstein once poignantly said, "Technological advancement is like an axe in the hands of a pathological criminal." Although I believe that not all of us are pathologically criminal, the temptation to ignore our moral values will always be there. It is this temptation that worries John Kozubek from the Scientific American. Kozubek (2017) argues that what we are witnessing now is the "extreme capitalisation of the life sciences" where scientists and companies use scientific inquiry to develop drugs or technology for their own personal power or gain (Kozubek, 2017). Insulin was a drug that was created in 1923 to treat diabetes and at that time, 10 millilitres of Insulin could cost the average American US$3. In 2010, that same vial could cost up to US$300. Treatment for diabetes could cost up to US$1,000 a month. As a result, a number of patients have died because they are no longer able to afford the drug. This institutionalised monetisation of the life sciences has destroyed the lives that science was initially founded to save. If the underlying moral purpose of science was to improve the human condition (Levin, 2006) and help humanity, then how could we have allowed this to happen? The increasing power and freedom of the scientific industry have no doubt allowed humanity to advance technologically in recent decades. However, it has also paved the way for abuse and shattered the lives of countless others. Thus, absolute freedom can sometimes be no different than absolute chaos.

Levin (2006) and Kozubek (2017) thus illustrate the duality of science that Feynman (1955) depicts in his speech. Levin (2006) posits that the fundamental spirit of science was to alleviate human suffering, improve the human condition and to help humanity to break through the shackles of life, death and Mother Nature. It is this pioneering spirit to doubt, discover and innovate for the sake of mankind that motivates scientific inquiry. However, Levin (2006) also does express his concern that people in this age of technology and scientific advancements have an increasingly harder time distinguishing between right and wrong. The story of Icarus illustrates the temptations of power and the corruption that it could entail, which could lead to the downfall of humanity. Kozubek (2017) takes this notion and applies it to the current state of the scientific industry. Kozubek (2017) warns of the potential atrocities that scientific and technological advancements could bring about because of the temptations of power and institutionalised monetisation. In addition, violations to human rights and dignity are often shrugged away when it comes to the advancement of the scientific industry and for the "greater good." Mankind also often tend to believe that they have the right to expand, convert, absorb and exploit natural resources in the name of progress. In doing so, we have blackened the seas and caused marine life to drown in the oil that we have accidentally released into the ocean. We have punched holes into the Earth's Ozone layer and buried radioactive wastes in the desert that could take up to millions of years to decay. Knowing this, one cannot help but wonder if humanity is flying too close to the Sun.

At the end of both Levin's (2006) and Kozubek's (2017) articles, both agree that science is after all just a tool. This is similar to Feynman's (1955) concept of the key that "if we lack clear instructions that determine which is the gate to heaven and which the gate to hell, the key may be a dangerous object to use" (Feynman, 1955, p. 13). Science is a powerful tool to gain knowledge about the natural world. But it is just that, a tool. Kozubek (2017) writes about how science does not give us a script or a set of instructions pertaining to how we should behave. It only gives us the information and the knowledge to write that script. How

we choose to write it is what's important. Levin (2006) writes about a "Moral Forgetfulness" and that it is not because that we are lacking in moral values, but that we often forget about them when we're tempted by power and gain (Levin, 2006). This is what Levin (2006) meant when he writes that people in this day and age have more difficulties distinguishing between right and wrong. Therefore, science itself is a neutral tool. How we decide to use it is up to our own mortality.

Perhaps the question then is not what is the morality of science, but how has science impacted our sense of morality. Science is itself just a tool for gaining knowledge. That knowledge in turn gives humanity the means to fly among the gods and reach for the stars. In our grand quest for progress and innovation, can we truly hold onto our own humanity when tempted by power and monetary gain? How often have we human beings chased the dream of progress, but only to see that dream become perverted? More often than not, haven't the machines and technology we built that were supposed to improve life displace the lives of countless others? The temptation to ignore our humanity will always be there and it is this temptation that worries me. Perhaps the thing that's most troubling is the chaos that could ensue when individuals have nothing else left to restrain them but their own morality. Then again, who is to decide what is good or evil? Who is it that gets to decide what is morally right or wrong? Perhaps the "good versus evil" and "right versus wrong" are outdated concepts and reality exists in a morally grey line. I do not have the answers to these questions, but I believe that this is a matter of philosophy. What I do believe in is that one day, human decency will triumph. That humanity will be able to correct its course. We are the ones who are writing that script and charting the course for humanity's future. It all depends on each and every one of our own individual efforts to ensure that there will still be a tomorrow for generations to come before we fly too close to the Sun.

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Language and Communication Centre
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Inequality in Equality: The Plight of Migrant Workers in Singapore

Ng Ping Siang

Blue-collar migrant workers take up a considerable percentage of Singapore's workforce. As an integral part of our labour force and even society, one might think them to constitute the Singaporean identity as well. Yet, despite their importance, they often endure subpar living conditions and are subject to exploitation by their employers – an otherwise obscured matter made salient to Singaporeans due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Their plight has since been met with swathes of online media attention, both positive and negative. Among some of these comments are calls for the government and civilians to improve their treatment of migrant workers. Now that Singaporeans are finally beginning to realise the existence of inequality towards migrant workers, the next step is to naturally seek a resolution to the issue. After all, if migrant workers constitute such an important part of the Singaporean labour force, why are they subject to such brutal inequalities in their daily lives? In order to effectively deal with the plight of migrant workers, one must first pinpoint the exact root of the issue. This paper explores the various factors that have created the present issues faced by migrant workers.

The recent COVID-19 pandemic has brought an uncomfortable truth to light – the subpar conditions migrant workers endure daily. Rebecca Ratcliffe's (2020) article in *The Guardian* paints a picture of this scenario. Dormitories are described to be overcrowded with migrant workers who are "crammed into rooms with as many as 20 people" (Ratcliffe, 2020, p. 1). By contrasting their living conditions to the "city-state's glittering skyscrapers and luxury hotels" (ibid), Ratcliffe highlights the inequality migrant workers face in terms of their living conditions. While Singapore's measures against COVID-19 are applauded, they are also criticised as being neglectful towards the migrant worker communities and insufficient in preventing an "undeniable outbreak" (Ratcliffe, 2020, p.1). Ratcliffe then proceeds to reveal Singapore's – both state and citizens – treatment of migrant workers throughout and in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. She denotes the unfair treatment as a "glaring inequality" and points out how the lack of governmental support has created situations which fan "the flames of xenophobia and racism" (Ratcliffe, 2020, p. 3). Migrant workers are isolated by and from Singaporeans, being marked by netizens as a blight on Singapore's pristine image. Ratcliffe also provides insights from migrant worker themselves while suggesting potential improvements to the current system. She extrapolates the plight of migrant workers beyond just the pandemic and uses the pandemic as an opportunity to call for a major overhaul of existing treatments towards migrant workers.

By describing the conditions migrant workers face, the disparity between the value migrant workers bring to Singapore and their treatment by Singapore is elucidated. Despite being touted as "the men who carry out backbreaking work to building Singapore's infrastructure" (Ratcliffe, 2020, p. 1), their labour does not necessarily reward them in equal measure or even in fulfilling their basic rights. With this in mind, I investigate the plight of migrant workers by observing Singapore's legal and civil treatment towards them.

A look at the Ministry of Manpower's website demonstrates how Singapore's labour laws are impartial in their application as well as treatment towards both migrant and local workers (Ministry of Manpower, 2020) – at least from a legislative perspective, there is

equality in how Singapore treats migrant workers. Where, then, does the inequal living and working conditions stem from? On the topic of blue-collar migrant workers, their lives intertwine with two other key entities – the state and their employers. While the two play important roles in the lives of migrant workers, their roles manifest in different manners. The state serves as an indirect enforcer of legal treatment while employers are direct enforcers. It is thus pivotal that we first delineate the lines separating the two before proceeding with any potential rectifications. Fillinger et al.'s (2017) study analyses the effectiveness of work policies through interviews with blue-collar migrant workers. They offer a comprehensive view on how both entities have functioned in the past and present – identifying existing lacunae in the system and provide recommendations for the state to begin filling such gaps. This resonates with a point made in Ratcliffe's article, that "substantive changes are needed in how Singapore looks at migrant workers, what rights migrant workers have, and how they are able to advocate for their own health and well-being" (Ratcliffe, 2020, p. 4).

Fillinger et al. provide insights towards Singapore's legislative framework – which serves as an intermediary between employers and migrant workers. They list out three primary pieces of legislation – The Employment Act (EA), The Employment of Foreign Manpower Act (EFMA), The Work Injury Compensation Act (WICA) (Fillinger et al., 2017, p. 31).

As mentioned above, these legislative acts by the Ministry of Manpower serve both local and migrant workers. By giving examples of legislative power at work, they reveal the "basic labour rights" (Ratcliffe, 2020, p. 5) Ratcliffe claims migrant workers should be granted during their time in Singapore. The limitations and faults of the current legislative system are revealed through a series of interviews with blue-collar migrant workers. Though labour laws enforce and provide legal avenues for migrant workers to seek recourse from, there are still many loopholes within the laws that employers exploit to save costs and maximise revenue. One such example is the withholding of legal documents (e.g., salary, medical) which prevents migrant workers from pursuing a legal case should they need to do so (Fillinger et al., 2017, p. 73). Employer retaliation towards employees seeking recourse is also explored, revealing the exploitative relationship between employers and migrant workers. Singaporean employers can refuse to communicate with workers and threaten workers by blacklisting them or through baseless counterclaims, all to jeopardise workers' claims (Fillinger et al., 2017, p. 77). These examples all point to a singular issue: the grey boundary in the system where mistreatment of migrant workers by employers go unchecked.

As mentioned above, situations where employers withhold documents to prevent recourse are possible only because the government does not directly enforce policies. When the enforcement is left to a middle party such as employers, policies can be corrupted and exploited according to employers' personal interests. The existence of this grey boundary is further reinforced through the recent COVID-19 pandemic depicted in Ratcliffe's article where attention is drawn to the issues faced by migrant workers. This trickle-down effect, where governmental policies are diluted by the enforcers enacting it on the ground, demonstrates how equality in labour laws do not necessarily result in equality of living and working conditions. As revealed by Ratcliffe, migrant workers "are tied to their employer, making them extremely vulnerable to exploitation" (Ratcliffe, 2020, p. 3). By looking at how

impartial the state's treatment of migrant workers are, we thus see how it is the civil body that allows for the situation today.

As such, while Singapore's legislative framework is impartial, the inequality caused by employers' actions hints at something more deep-seated and sociocultural in nature. After all, migrant workers – despite being given the same benefits and avenues for recourse as local workers – do not see the same living conditions being replicated for them. Therein lies the possibility that the inequality does not stem from a legislative mode, but perhaps from how Singaporeans perceive migrant and local workers. An International Labour Organisation (ILO) report in 2011 indicated 58% of Singaporeans felt migrant workers should not expect to receive equal payment and working conditions as local workers for working the same job (Tunon & Baruah, 2012, para. 28). More importantly, many local nationals felt migrant workers should remain subservient to their situations as it was "better off than they were at home" (Tunon & Baruah, 2012, para. 30). We thus see how a good percentage of Singaporeans in general do not think migrant workers are entitled to equal treatments as local workers for putting in an equal amount of effort. This mindset that migrant workers should be content with their subpar living conditions also seems to indicate an implicit class bias and hierarchy between Singaporeans and migrant workers. This existence of both pro-migrant and anti-migrant worker sentiments in Singapore is a point Max Tunon and Nilim Baruah (2012) share with Ratcliffe, to which the latter states as having a "great impact upon the status and well-being of migrant workers" (Ratcliffe, 2020, p. 3). It is perhaps this inequality in perception imposed by Singaporeans themselves that has allowed for an "environment in which discrimination and the unfair treatment of migrant workers" are tolerated (Tunon & Baruah, 2012, para. 3). There is another facet of inequality faced by migrant workers – a sociocultural one.

Looking across all three articles – Ratcliffe (2020), Fillinger et al. (2017), and Tunon and Baruah (2012) – one can observe a common thread tying them together, societal perceptions being a root cause of the poor living and working conditions migrant workers face. Ratcliffe (2020) talks about the existence of xenophobic and racist sentiments towards migrant workers. Filinger et al. (2017) use employers as an example of how migrant workers are still mistreated by Singaporeans despite being given the same benefits as local workers legally. Tunon and Baruah (2012) then provide an exact number to Singaporeans' negative societal perception through statistics. Identifying societal perceptions as a causal factor is also key to the greater question at hand – is perfect equality for migrant workers achievable? If the yardstick used to measure equality is the average Singaporean, then I believe the answer is 'yes.' The difficulties migrant workers encounter today are largely rooted in negative societal perceptions by Singaporeans, not the policies passed by the state. Unlike disparities brought on by a lack of resources, societal perceptions do not necessarily require any material cost to resolve. It stands to reason that correcting negative perceptions of migrant workers is an issue Singaporeans can begin targeting – or even resolving – starting now. In fact, resolving societal perceptions might serve as a catalyst to effect changes in other more resource-based issues when it comes to migrant workers.

Public solidarity is also noted to be crucial in financing and consequently, increasing healthcare equity post pandemic (Goh et al., 2020, p. 3). Goh et al. (2020) discuss how public sentiment over the plight of migrant workers has made way for "an unprecedented show of support financially or in the form of donations" (p. 3). More recently, support groups such as

Transient Workers Count Too (TWC2) have stepped forward to lend a voice to the marginalised workers (Ratcliffe, 2020, p. 2). Organisations such TWC2 or HOME – "prominent migrant worker advocacy organisations" – have been noted to "engage state agencies" as well as "pressure government officials to enact policy reform," as Yeoh et al. (2020) described in a report on migrant dormitory workers. The domino has been cast: activism in support for migrant worker rights are now front and center of public discourse.

Although the subpar conditions migrant workers face today has its roots in both Singapore's legislative and civil body, there is a key difference between both. While the former – though impartial – is insufficient in mandating proper treatment, the latter is the reason why there even has to be a mandate set in place. Singapore should work towards tackling these negative perceptions which have given rise to various other inequalities in migrant workers' lives. By removing the prime cause of the issue, it will consequently eradicate the other problems that stem from this source.

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Nurturing the Arts in Singapore: Struggles of a Conservative Asian Metropolis

Meisha Fahira

Washed by moonlight and the metropolis' nightly beams, the rooftop of Marina Square is ceaselessly cast by light. Its neon accents burn brighter when flanked by the darkness, though not to say that there is no life; rather, the opposite. Marina Bay Sands looms over the bustling cityscape, keeping a watchful eye on everything under its nose. Three strobes of light shoot from its peak like the arches of a crown, pirouetting in small circles, punctuating its already overwhelming presence.

Below the building's smothering stature, another trio dances on. The apparitions jive along to constant thrum of house music, unperturbed by the din of the traffic underneath. They bounce and bump and breathe in the thin night air in sharp sniffs, welcoming the horns and beeps that greet them as added punches to their spontaneous dance. Like rebels darting past the harsh searchlights of Singapore's neglect of the arts, their movements are akin to a jailbreak, outrunning the pressures of a state that favours capital and political correctness over individuality. The confines of collared conformity close in on them, but in this freestyle circle, they make the rules. Their tired but fulfilled smiles seem to glint right back at their taller counterparts, not falling prey to the scare tactics of Marina Bay Sands and its family of equally intimidating edifices. Threatening to grow like flowers from concrete, the dancers and other creatives alike are uncertain yet hopeful in the ongoing fight for authenticity and self-expression, overwriting defeat from their narrative per artistic license.

Singapore is a city that never rests — the need to be more productive and yield results (of both quality and quantity) drives us forward. This fixation with growth and progress has the country scrambling to cover all the bases. With the city-state already known for its performance in education, tourism and commerce, she strives to earn yet another notch in her belt: the arts. Regrettably, the freshness of this focus has ostensibly set us years, even decades behind other cities like San Francisco, known for their thriving art scene birthed from open-mindedness and diversity. The arts were left in the backburner during the country's formative years, but Singapore can no longer deny its appeal and merits. In the 2016 budget address, Minister-in- Parliament Kok Heng Leun stresses that art is "integral to our society" and "can contribute to the resilience and maturity of the populace" (Govsingapore, 2016). However, he recognises that this awareness alone is not enough. "So why are we not talking about art and innovation?", he continues. He also asks, "Why are we not talking about art and the creative industry? *Where is art*?" There is indeed an arts community here, but it still runs in the undercurrent of Singapore's system. How does Singapore view the arts as a practice and an industry? What is limiting Singapore from being an art-rich country?

With our local arts scene still in its infancy, the government has taken bold steps towards realising their aim of turning Singapore into a 'Global City for the Arts.' This entailed annual funds of up to S$31 million into the 'Renaissance City Plan,' mostly spent on building sites like the Esplanade Theatre and the School of the Arts (SOTA), as well as countless art and culture events such as the Singapore Biennale and Singapore Arts Festival (Ooi, 2010). Despite this strong display of commitment, the country has yet to overcome its aesthetic plateau still. I place blame on three undeniable culprits: the valuing of art solely for economic worth, censorship of artistic expression and politicising art to fulfil government agendas.

It is clear that the nation recognises art's importance in nation-building and social cohesion, yet sociologist Can-Seng Ooi (2010) suggests that this push is mainly contingent on how "economically beneficial" the arts sector is. The worth of creative industries is

calculated not by the value of their art ¾ that could enrich the country's lore and unique identity — but instead, by its *profitability*. This emphasis on profit reveals the government's goal to "extract creative energies in its pursuit of profitability in the creative economy" (Ooi, 2010). Artists and creative businesses are painfully aware that their artistry is reduced to just another source of income in bolstering national growth, thus leaving them to reject government support grants to avoid "[becoming] sites for even more control and management" (Ooi, 2010). The authorities' promotion of the arts comes with an ulterior motive that may estrange local art practitioners from Singapore herself — thus hampering the infinite potential of our arts scene.

Ooi (2010) highlights another factor behind the nation's aesthetic infertility: censorship. As a "soft authoritarian" state, the Singaporean government prioritises economic growth and maintains social control by teaching its people (and at its core, the local workforce) to "put society before self" (Ooi, 2010). Such messaging conditions Singaporeans to forsake personal, 'individualistic' goals for financial advancement. Ooi details this suppression by citing three main "creativity limits": social and political opposition, controversial activist art and homosexual content. Singapore staunchly defends the aforementioned restrictions, masking its hypersensitivity as a necessary censoring of contents that threatens them and the state's conservative nature. Examples of such curtailing include restrictions on works that challenge Singapore's political leadership (Ooi, 2010).

Martyn See's 2007 documentary "Zahari's seventeen years" features the 17-year sentence of a political prisoner known to be critical of the government, but never duly charged nor underwent trial. It was inevitably banned for being possibly defamatory towards leaders of the ruling People's Action Party (PAP). This reaction was met with widespread public criticism, pressuring the government to relax restrictions on political films. The authorities eventually receded their previous stance, but not without insisting that such media should be "factual and objective, and do not dramatise and/or present a distorted picture" (Ooi, 2010). This suffocation of opinion and expression has imbued in local creatives a sense of self-censorship, which stands to prematurely and inevitably diminish the authenticity of art and its ability to highlight important and sensitive issues beyond political injustices. Ooi sums up that "the Singaporean government wants to cultivate the cultural and creative industries but maintain strong control" (2010). The clashing dichotomy behind Singapore's pandering treatment of the arts not only slows the much-needed evolution of our arts scape, but has the potential to prevent it from flourishing entirely.

Dr Terence Chong, a researcher of arts and cultural policies and politics in Singapore, presents views in tandem with Ooi's. He asserts that PAP deliberately neglected the arts — that is, until they realised that they could make it "subordinate to the ideologies, values and interests of the ruling elite" (Chong, 2010). Thus began the government's compulsion in using art to further political agendas.

Chong details that PAP wishes to shape Singapore's identity to reflect that of a harmonious, multicultural and well-educated society. Engagement with art for art's sake was frowned upon, for it bore no fruit from the money trees and had no marked significance in grooming a country. Instead, the government painted ideals of "the orthodox Singapore artist," whose role was to "dedicate his craft to the support and edification of institutions and prevailing political structures" (Chong, 2010). This eerily relates to Ooi's points on censorship and control - except in this case, it was exercised even before art's conception, beginning by already confining artists into a politically-correct box. Singapore's lacklustre arts scene comes to no surprise, with self-expression and experimentation shelved to give way to the safe and cookie-cutter approach enforced by the government.

The arts and culture were seen as ideological tools to engineer in Singaporean's traits that the government perceived as lacking, such as being "civilised" and "cultivated." The

art's "civilising properties" was used to imbue in citizens good etiquette, refined cosmopolitan tastes and all-roundedness (Chong, 2010). Chong's views hence reiterate the Singaporean government's flippant attitude towards the arts — deeming it useless and unimportant *until* it can be used for profit, or in this case, manipulation of the masses.

The PAP's ulterior motives behind pushing the movement, as Ooi and Chong have discussed, leads me to doubt the validity of such governmental support. The policymakers' abuse of art as an expedient of profitability and the indoctrination of nationalistic ideals have undoubtedly cost us valuable accounts of Singaporean culture. These shelved or lost artefacts would have otherwise gone into building an authentic and comprehensive history, and by extension, cementing a national identity that instead still feels so infantile to this day.

Despite the authorities' self-serving attitude, creatives in Singapore have remained steadfast in promoting artistic freedom via the preservation of significant works, even in the face of PAP's performative backing. Political discourse is still very much alive, especially in academic spheres with critical texts still being included in school curriculums. One such example of such safeguarding is Nanyang Technological University's (NTU) inclusion of Kuo Pao Kun's 1988 play *Mama Looking for Her Cat*. Taught as a drama text in the English Literature curriculum for first-year students, the play can be seen as a microcosm of our melting pot of a city-state. Its status as Singapore's first multilingual play owes to its central themes of a multiracial, multicultural and multilingual society. The play's inception itself was a collaboration on many fronts: *Mama Looking for Her Cat* was the result of a workshop with a multiracial cast of talents, speaking to Kuo's wish to not only have it be representative of Singaporean society, but also to reaffirm the individual's role in societal and political matters.

Meant to be performed in English, Malay, Mandarin, Tamil, Hokkien, Cantonese and Teochew, its story is a commentary on the erasure of a traditional national identity. More importantly, it is largely regarded as a critique of the adverse effects of government policies. In aiming to modernise the state and streamline modes of communication for ease of instruction, education and commerce, the play's crux lies in the rising prevalence of English and the intentional erasure of Chinese topolects (think the "Speak Mandarin Campaign" of 1979). I find that this double-edged-sword-quality of language policies undeniably mirrors that of PAP's other nation-building strategies: in moving forward as collective, it seems we have to shed our past, individuality and defining traditions. The Singaporean identity is thus ever-elusive and unestablished, led by a government hell-bent on prestige, productivity and profitability.

It is important to note that even Kuo's inclusion in the curriculum is somewhat inauthentic: the version of the play taught at NTU is rendered fully in English. While the main idea is to expose students to the existence of multilingual texts and the use art as a medium of national discourse, I believe that even this is inextricably linked to the stripping of diversity *in* individuality. Though necessary that it be understood by all, one cannot deny the pressures and effects of the government's push for homogeneity: having English as our one common tongue also represents the suppression of Singapore's multiplicity as inspiration for our unbridled potential.

I argue that we — students, teachers and creatives alike — should fight to preserve the presence of art, especially if it is political and controversial in nature, by creating opportunities for open discussions in school. Facilitating such activities in school will require experienced and well-versed mediators, especially in addressing hot-button topics like race, gender, and of course politics itself. I recognise that a faithfully holistic education sounds rather idealistic, but it is difficult to undermine the importance and impact of exposure to uncovered truths and hidden perspectives that lie in alternative history. It is in these buried accounts that we are privy to the injustices and disparities in the human experience, gaining greater insight from one was once shrouded in secrecy. Setting this

precedence of societal discourse would lead to more sensitive, aware and inquisitive minds seeking to uncover what lurks beneath the surface of Singapore's gleaming façade. Alas, these qualities are exactly what the government wishes to eradicate, for a mass of dull, industrious and blindly patriotic minds is much easier to control and monopolise.

I echo Ooi and Chong's sentiments that art in Singapore can only flourish when given space and licence to exist. One could argue that the heightened support for arts and culture in recent years indicates a shift in Singapore's attitude towards creative fields. Singapore can only become a 'Global City for the Arts' when the sanctity of the arts and culture itself is recognised and upheld. Art must be embraced for its boundless nature instead of only being regarded for its economic value and influence alone, for true appreciation and support also comes with welcoming diversity in thought, expression, discussion and the impact of such liberties. Alas, the arts landscape in Singapore is still in its initial stages of blossoming — and I truly hope that the promise of talents both existing and unborn will not wilt before I do.

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Can Singapore Continue to Justify the Construction of Costly National Symbols Today?

Cedric Chin Zhihao

Nestled between miles of runway tarmac is the crown jewel of Singapore's aviation hub, the aptly named Jewel Changi. Glass and steel make up the entirety of Jewel's façade, and all of it converges at a single point, where water falls seven stories through a gaping hole in the roof. Given the current COVID-19 situation, I was expecting Jewel to be largely devoid of the crowds that graced it during its heyday, but I could not have been more wrong. Nearing the grand atrium, I began to feel the rhythm of the masses deep within my bones. Indecipherable conversations besieged my ears, blending together like some alien dogma far beyond my understanding. Perhaps I could have decoded at least one, had I not bumbled straight into a group of alarmed teenagers. Having apologised for my careless transgression, I pushed my way through the crowd, searching for an optimal shooting angle. Having found my spot, I steadied my camera, only to be overwhelmed by the sight before me. Water, pulled by the invisible hands of gravity, came down in torrents, the sheer force of impact generating a mist that enveloped the entire area. The mist wafted lazily in the air, blessing all nearby with its cheeky, cooling touch. Laser beams breathed life into the otherwise colourless waterfall, bathing Jewel with an ethereal glow. The atrium is lined with walls of flora, and while the juxtaposition of plant life and cold, industrial materials may seem jarring at first, extended viewing leaves a calming effect that is difficult to describe. Perhaps the "bespoke fragrance" that is extensively (and expensively) piped into Jewel contributes to this effect. Admittedly, I lack the training required to detect the nuances of this scent, but it is certainly pleasant – an alluring, almost magnetic scent that is both familiar yet full of mystery.

Five years – that's how long it took to construct Jewel. Five years may seem insignificant when compared to the decades it took to construct some of the world's architectural masterpieces, yet Jewel, in the eyes of many, is the pièce de resistance of the many megastructures that have marked Singapore's economic progress. It speaks volumes about Singapore's commitment to being at the forefront of innovation and technology, and its need to remain at the bleeding edge. Jewel is an unashamed display of these qualities, which, according to our government, make up the ideal, future-proof Singaporean. Yet, given the current economic climate – one of imminent decline – such forceful displays of excess leave a different taste in one's mouth. Stringent travel restrictions meant that the vast majority of those present at Jewel during my visit were locals. Despite looking outwardly thrilled, I could not help but catch a few stray conversations that sang a different tune. "Huh, Jewel seems dimmer today leh. Off light to save electricity ah" and "Wah. The waterfall is still on, not scared bleed money ah" are just some of the many quizzical quips that caught my ear. Singaporeans, it seems, are not blind to the current state of affairs, one that demands financial prudence and restraint. It begs the question then, are such opulent displays of financial and technological capability really necessary in an unpredictable, ever-changing world? Can Singapore continue to justify the construction of costly national symbols today?

The idea of sustainability is central to any economic decision, and Chandran Nair discusses various ideas on how countries can achieve sustainable development in his book,

"The sustainable state: The future of government, economy, and society." Sustainability, in his eyes, "should include a conscious and all-encompassing discussion of our long-term use of economic resources" (Nair, 2018). Too often, however, companies and governments prioritise financial gains, resulting in an inability to employ truly sustainable practices. Rather than commit to sustainable ideals, they tend to green-wash and make use of "feel-good" slogans that do little in reality – serving only to placate public opinion. In Chapter 8, "Redefining Freedom, Rights, and Prosperity," Nair argues that the perception of prosperity changes as countries develop economically. His experience growing up and working in developing countries, where citizens are content with fulfilling their basic needs, contrasts sharply with that of first world countries – countries that are driven by consumerism and the fervent desire to accumulate wealth. It is not enough, then, for countries to attain prosperity in a fiscal sense – they feel the need to demonstrate this prosperity - costly national symbols are one of the more obvious manifestations of this desire to impress.

Singapore can be said to follow the Western economic model, and in it, as Nair defines, "prosperity is equivalent to consumption, the more one consumes and owns, the more prosperous one is." Furthermore, Nair noted that "this is true even if the consumption does not serve any real personal or social purpose or if people could achieve the same standard of living with less consumption or fewer resources." This philosophy of owning more than you need in pursuit of status also stretches to the construction of national symbols, as "governments too strive for a version of prosperity focused on symbolism and status," wanting "the tallest buildings, the most glamorous cities, the flashiest movies, and the largest companies." While the construction of prominent national symbols generates good press and contributes to national pride, Nair is dismayed by the lack of societal benefits these projects bring to the average citizen. Moreover, one can question whether such statement pieces even represent good value, given that their PR (public relations) benefits are fleeting. In Nair's words, "the tallest skyscraper is rarely the tallest for very long; yet remains a blot on the landscape." Governments could do better by allocating these resources to more pressing issues, like improving the welfare for the underprivileged. For a start, however, one could change their perception of what it means for a country to be prosperous; and question the need for such ostentatious displays of wealth.

Jewel, like many of Singapore's mega-projects, is no doubt a statement piece. Jewel boasts the world's tallest indoor waterfall, while Marina Bay Sands, another mega-project, boasts the world's highest swimming pool, a vertigo-inducing infinity pool that melts into the horizon. While one cannot question the economic benefits of such structures – revenue is measured in cents rather than sense – there are certainly more frugal ways to achieve this. Nair's point on the fleeting nature of such achievements is important in recognising how the chase for supremacy in such structures is both endless and increasingly expensive – and how wasteful it is for champions of the past to be cast aside for the latest, shiny project. However, Nair's stance on the need for such national symbols is rather hard-line, and one needs to consider the inherent benefits of having such symbols. Of course, poorer countries strapped for resources would be foolish to embark on such costly projects, but Singapore is in a unique position of excess. Our government has vast reserves and revenue surpluses – a billion-dollar structure is well within our financial capability. Putting aside the revenue generated by the structures themselves, such displays of wealth also boost citizen morale and investor confidence. It is only in more recent times, given the

unpredictable economy marked by international strife and wreaked by COVID-19, that financial security is less assured.

Citizen morale and investor confidence are just two of the many psychological benefits that national symbols can bring to a country. More importantly, they connect individuals to something bigger than themselves. Cynthia Miller-Idriss (2016) discusses this in her opinion piece titled "The emotional attachment of national symbols." According to Miller-Idriss, national symbols "evoke emotional attachment to the nation, crystallize identity and help people feel connected to something outside of their own immediate family and community." National symbols aren't limited to the mega-structures I have discussed, of course, the humble dollar coin is as much of a national symbol as the Merlion is, for example. These symbols are everywhere, deeply entrenched in our everyday lives. School children recite the national pledge on a daily basis, and plenty still flock to Botanic Gardens to catch sight of an Orchid, Singapore's national flower. In Miller-Idriss' words, national symbols "offer a focal point for diverse societies to express and navigate what it is that unites and represents them." The top one percent (financially) in society may seem to exist in an entirely different reality from the bottom one percent, but national symbols can bridge that gap. Every time an individual interacts with a national symbol, it raises the question - what does it mean to be Singaporean? Both the privileged and the underprivileged can see an orchid flower and understand what it represents. National symbols are not exclusive to any race or religion; and being of a higher social class does not grant any unique access to them either. Nair is not wrong when he said, "the tallest skyscraper is rarely the tallest for very long, yet remains a blot on the landscape," but perhaps therein lies the beauty of national symbols. They are a static representation of society that, should they be preserved, offer a window into history that unites all.

Beyond these domestic benefits, there is an international dimension to national symbols too, especially when it comes to "costly" ones. Nair may seek for a reimagining of what it means to be prosperous, but our world is still very much motivated by appearance. Having record-breaking structures puts countries on the world map, opening doors and providing levels of exposure that are difficult to obtain via other means. Timothy Johnson, Chairman of the Council on Tall Buildings and Urban Habitat in Chicago, puts it eloquently - "Who are we to say it's good or bad. People want to push higher and higher. That's just human nature isn't it?" (Bloomberg, 2012). Singapore does not have significant amounts of natural resources nor a large land mass, so our achievements are limited to that of our own creation. Costly national symbols ensure Singapore remains relevant in the global arena. When asked where he thinks the next record-breaking building might be built, Johnson had this to say – "Maybe the one-mile building will be in Africa, a place that needs to somehow say, 'look, we are also here'" (Bloomberg, 2012). Even developing countries which lack Singapore's financial muscle find the need to partake in this chase for greatness. It would be foolish, then, for Singapore to back down while ahead.

The argument here is not whether national symbols are necessary – every country needs national symbols, that is beyond doubt. National symbols unite an otherwise divided populace, reminding all of the existence of a common identity, and strengthening this bond by virtue of their omnipresence. They are also a way for countries to showcase their superiority over one another. There has to be other ways to demonstrate this superiority, however, and Singapore's attempts to be the first to create a vaccine for COVID-19 is a

prime example of this. The COVID-19 pandemic has served as a stark reminder not to take economic stability for granted – as financially mighty as Singapore is, there might come a day where it no longer has the bulging pockets necessary to tide it past such crises.

Although costly national symbol put more strain on Singapore's coffers than other more "symbolic" alternatives, as long as the world's perception of what it means for a country to be prosperous does not change, such "vanity projects" may very well remain in vogue – if one were to put aside the possibility of future health pandemics. If Singapore can continue to afford such mega-structures, there's no reason to stop building them, at least for the foreseeable future. However, this is a big "if" – after all, if the well runs dry, idols and totems are not going to quench anyone's thirst. And if the metaphorical well really does run dry, Jewel may be the last of its kind, harkening in a new era of economic conservatism; at least until the money comes in again.

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Women Empowerment in the Workplace Depends on All of Us

John Pravin S/O Kanesan

In the article titled "The essay that won me Codeup's Women In Tech scholarship," Business Intelligence Analyst Cris Giovanoni (2019) shares the idea of the "Feminine Genius" and what success should look like to a working woman. She argues that a strong woman is not one who is austere but one who embraces the maternal qualities she describes as integral to women.

Inspired from her own experiences of being compared to male-like characteristics, Giovanoni's search in discovering her identity as a working woman brings her to the concept of the Feminine Genius – where "women are not seen or assumed to be clones of men; and imitation of the archetypal male domination does not encourage equality, but opposes it" (Giovanoni, 2019, para 6). The power of the feminine genius lies in a woman's natural inclination to understand a human being – or what some would call the "maternal instinct."

Giovanoni therefore argues that in the modern workplace, a feminine genius would harness the power of humanness and intuitively see a colleague for who they are rather than merely what they can bring to the table. This – Giovanoni believes – is vital in the workplace where women bring a human touch to an otherwise dreary, process-filled environment.

Though the qualities described by the concept of the feminine genius apply mainly to women, she does concede that some men are instinctively inclined towards it. While it is an inclination to men, she stresses that it is a necessity for women. She argues that "the woman who has lost touch with or is discouraged to display her feminine gifts is akin to being lost at sea, misplaced and even buried among male and female presence" (Giovanoni, 2019, para 14). Success for a working woman is then the display of her femininity in the workplace instead of a striving for masculine qualities.

Giovanoni's article presents a different perspective towards women empowerment in the workplace. She uses pathos effectively to convince female readers in displaying the feminine genius. This can be seen through her patronizing views of sensitivity and nurture together with her vivid description of the feminine genius paradigm. Her personal experiences in dealing with misogynistic perspectives in the technology industry has shaped her beliefs of a successful women. I agree with her stance that a strong woman is not an authoritarian "pant suit-clad executive who gave smirks, not smiles" (Giovanoni, 2019, para 5). However, her absolute claim of women needing to embrace their maternal qualities brings us to the other extreme notion of what it takes to be a strong woman.

The feminine genius in itself traps women in another box that requires them to display their maternal instinct. This is then over-glorified as a special ability for understanding interpersonal relationships. Is authentic feminism in the workplace then a matter of personal choice? Do women simply start embracing innate qualities, choosing how they want to portray themselves, and abolish the need to be compared to qualities that are deemed masculine?

The writer generalizes that all women should embrace the feminine genius to display authentic feminism in the workplace. How might her absolutist position keep her from seeing other forms of women empowerment in the workplace?

Writing for The Conversation – a collaborative publication between journalists and academics in Australia – Meagan Tyler argues against the idea of what she terms as "Choice Feminism" in the article "No, feminism is not about choice." The co-editor of "Freedom fallacy: The limits of liberal feminism" explains how feminism is easily reduced to a matter of personal choice instead of an organisational change within existing structures to curb social norms that restrict women.

Tyler believes that "the choice arguments are fundamentally flawed because they assume a level of unmitigated freedom for women that simply doesn't exist. Yes, we make choices, but these are shaped and constrained by the unequal conditions in which we live" (Tyler, para 10). She stresses that such benighted assumptions that women are given the ability to choose who they want to be is a distorted position held by those who place the responsibility on women instead of the systems that are in place.

The individualisation of "Choice Feminism" has resulted in an imbalanced approach towards the empowerment of women. Tyler warns that this creates an inward-looking approach that focuses almost entirely on self-empowerment. This undermines the need for social and structural change that is essential for the equal treatment of genders that feminism advocates. Though working women are given the liberty to be at home to take care of their children and often allowed to leave work early when their children need them, that should not be considered a win when they are given poor remuneration for providing a similar amount of work as their male counterpart.

Thus, she calls for a lesser emphasis on choices and greater action on institutional change:

> the focus on women's choices as the be-all and end-all of feminism has resulted in in a perverse kind of victim-blaming and a distraction from the real problems women still face. If you're not happy with the way things are, don't blame misogyny and sexism, the pay gap, entrenched gender roles, women's lack of representation on boards or in parliament, or an epidemic of violence against women. Blame yourself. You obviously made the wrong choice. (Tyler, Para 12)

Tyler states that the pinning of choice and responsibility on women is in fact going against feminism's advocacy of a holistic approach to equal treatment. Thus, the ball is in fact in the courts of those in charge of creating structural changes in institutions to allow for fairness and eradication of gender bias.

This paints a different picture from what Giovanoni presented in her article. There, she writes how a woman who is not in touch with the natural feminine gifts she possesses is adrift in this world without a clear understanding of who she is. But this is opposed by Tyler who deems this diluted mantra of self-motivation as a form of 'Choice Feminism.' That, "instead of resistance, we now have activities that were once held up as archetypes of women's subordinate status being presented as liberating personal choices" (Tyler, para 15).

The writer therefore argues how feminism is not just advocated through the "genius" of the individual female but also in collaboration of structural changes required for women to have equal treatment. This idea enlightened me to the logical fallacies present in Giovanoni's article – where the focus is on a necessity to showcase what it means to be female instead of challenging the normative biases that exist in organizations. Perhaps, a collaborative approach towards women empowerment will not be enough in a world that is constantly measuring women by a masculine yardstick. In the article titled, "Feminist ethics and women leaders: From difference to intercorporeality," Pullen and Vachhani (2020) raise the issue of female leadership and how it is invariably viewed in relation to male leadership. Instead of being identified for who they are, the writers stress that this relation causes a typecast of women and forces them to resort to being the man's other.

The article, which was published in the *Journal of Business Ethics*, sheds light on the very notion of leadership and how it is a construction that stems from a morally rooted position. In this sense, our current understanding of leadership is mired with masculine connotations when it in fact was not how we ought to view it. Often, we view leadership traits such as boldness, sensitivity or gentleness as types of masculine or feminine qualities. The writers stated that these enforced gender binaries create an anxious environment for female leaders. Furthermore, by not subscribing to either of the two positions, the modern female leader is deemed lacking in character or unable to demonstrate genuine leadership.

But these identifications are exemplified in the feminine genius paradigm. The rhetoric presented in Giovanoni's article of positive feminine qualities such as care and compassion as a form of effective leadership might serve to create identifications for women and legitimize a pro-feminist leadership ideal. Pullen and Vachhani argue that leadership should be reimagined. The case in point is New Zealand's Prime Minister Jacinda Arden who is noted as an example for effective leadership without gender connotations. The Christchurch shootings in 2019 and the Coronavirus Pandemic are instances where Arden's yielding of calm strength and decisiveness earned praise from all over the world – further pulling away from the motherly tag placed on female leaders.

However, despite producing an alternative model of authentic leadership based on strong morals, gender binaries are still reinforced. Her prowess is confined to the realm of femininity and differences to male leadership are perpetuated:

> it is commonly her qualities of care and compassion which are the public focus, as if the only thing that really matters is that she makes people feel that from the remoteness of a television screen she can 'hold you close in a heart-felt and loving embrace.' (Wittenberg-Cox qtd in Pullen & Vachhani, p.4)

The question we should ask ourselves is why this is so? Why are women instinctively being attributed to the love, peace, tolerance, and placed in contrast to power, boldness, strength, and assertiveness? These "heads or tails" approach to how we understand leadership causes a deep-seating divide between male and female leaders. In the case of Arden, she is used as an example in a way "that 'inclusiveness' and feeling issues 'deeply' are often juxtaposed with 'clarity and decisiveness.' Her warmth is (instead) balanced by a steeliness" (Pullen & Vachhani, p. 5).

Perhaps, if women are capable of such a balance – as seen through Arden – we then might need to rethink the compasses used in our definition of leadership. Pullen and Vachhani suggest that we ought to look at leadership as ethical or unethical as compared to feminine or masculine. By doing so, the qualities described above would not be defined and reduced to the outcome of one's gender but the process in which leaders relate ethically to society.
This new model is thus described in this manner:

> leadership surfaces in the relations between leaders and follows and effects social change. Arguably what emerges 'is a less individualistic, more relational concept of leadership, one that focuses on dynamic, interactive processes of influence and learning intended to transform organizational structures, norms, and work practices.' (Fletcher qtd in Pullen & Vachhani, p.6)

While Tyler leads us to ponder how the display of authentic feminism is not one of choice but one that works hand in hand with institutional changes, Pullen and Vachhani bring focus to the deeper nuances in the identification of genders in leadership. These two texts give us a more holistic approach towards women empowerment in the workplace and challenges the sole responsibility on women to display "authentic feminism" as described by Giovanoni.

This does not necessarily mean that Giovanoni's assertion of the need to embrace feminine qualities is untrue. Instead, it shows us that her individualistic approach is not enough for a woman to be empowered in the corporate world. Women in leadership positions are evaluated by their relation to male leadership as seen in Pullen and Vachhani. Thus, any form of approach that leaves it up to women alone will simply be an unfair struggle where the sole responsibility of performance is placed on them and the responsibility of the corporate authorities and society at large are minimized. Consequently, the way we view leadership as well as the structures in place for equality take a back seat.

Giovanoni's absolutist position then does not give us the complete picture. Ultimately, women empowerment is not up to women alone – we should not force this responsibility of equality on them but understand that an inequality exists that can only be eradicated if all parties play a part. Constant dialogue, changes in organizations, and a new perspective on leadership will serve a huge role in empowering working women.

The idea that women should display the feminine genius is a good thought that seeks to empower women but it is one that I do not fully agree with. I believe that women should be who they naturally are – as should men. But that does not mean that a woman should be particularly maternal or "cherish, guard, protect, nourish and advance growth" (Stein qtd in Giovanoni, para 12). Women empowerment comes in various forms – all of which work together to advance our genius.

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On Remembrance

Ong Ye Xun, Adrian

Tucked away in a quiet neighbourhood and perched on a hill overlooking the city, sits the Kranji War Memorial. I visited the memorial in the afternoon, where the weather was surprisingly pleasant. There, the warm glow of the sun beat down on the trees and cast pleasant shadows on the wooded avenue. After walking up a gentle flight of stairs and entering the main entrance, I was immediately struck by its serenity. Apart from the occasional bird chirping, the venue was utterly tranquil. The tombs of the fallen soldiers were all neatly arranged in rows, and the ground was impeccably well-maintained. The hedges and trees were neatly trimmed, and the ground cleanly swept. A massive structure stood in the middle of the memorial. Inscribed on its walls were the names of over twenty-four thousand service men and women. As I read the numerous names on the walls, a lone wreath of red poppies on the pale grey floor caught my eye. In it, a note was written in memory of the brave service men and women whose names were upon the walls. Instinctively, I could not help but look up in the direction of Marsiling, which shimmered in the mid-day sun. There, the buildings stood tall and proud, like a scattering of jewels and gems in the distance, glinting. Indomitable towers, powerful structures, racing to touch the sky. Looking more closely, I could just about make out the main road and could barely hear the faint bleep of traffic, where the cars appeared as tiny specks, whizzing past each other.

The beautifully kept lawns and the idyllic surroundings masked the ugly events of the recent past, that took place on the very ground the memorial stood on. It masked the morbid fact that these men and women, who died in heaps and fragments, and whose bodies were so mutilated by the violent forces of war, that they never were identified. I must add too that as I made my way to the memorial, I had to ask a passer-by for directions. He did not know the way, and I did not think much of it initially. This, in addition to the hustle and bustle of nearby Marsiling made me ponder. As we trudge along the inevitable passage of time, and as we develop, change, and look toward the future, why do we remember the distant past? They were just like us, and as the poem goes, they lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow (McCrae, 1919). So, for their loved ones and descendants, remembering the past is a form of love and respect. But even then, their numbers are dwindling. What about the rest of us? As Percy Shelley's "Ozymandias" and its chilling reflection on the ephemeral nature of legacies would remind us, memory can be frightfully fragile. If memories are so easily lost, surely then the historical significance of any event, in its own time, offers no real use for us in the next century, let alone for many centuries after.

At Nanyang Technological University, Professor Kwok argues that we should remember the past because it is useful. He claims that by remembering the past, "we engage in a process of examining why people do what they do in the face of extreme conditions" (Kwok, 2019, p. 4). The past, therefore, can give us a glimpse into human nature. This is applicable to the descendants of both victims and perpetrators. For the descendants of victims, the object of remembering is not to hold onto feelings of hatred and resentment, for that does nothing but hold them back. For the descendants of perpetrators, the purpose is not to just to apologise blindly and allow guilt to overcome them. These two perspectives would just be missing the broader picture. While we remember the depravity of war, the bigger

lessons that history teaches us are the ones on morality. A closer analysis of history will tell us that it is never just black and white with a clear separation between good and evil. Rather, it is a convoluted picture of blurred lines. As Professor Kwok stated, "a war brings to the surface not only acts of moral courage, but also the worst of human traits" (Kwok, 2019, p. 5). We should never see either side as a monolith, and there is both good and bad on both sides. The qualities of ambition, avarice, compassion, and generosity are present in all people and they transcend borders. In history therefore, one can see true human nature and when we choose to forget it all, we fail to remember what we are truly capable of.

The answer that to remember is to learn more about our own nature is a direct answer and a compelling reason as to why the past is worth remembering. However, this is no straightforward process. What if remembrance is abused by communities, to fuel resentment rather than foster reconciliation? I would argue that Professor Kwok's warning that war memories can be drawn into nationalist discourses is the more important idea worth exploring and it cautions us how remembrance can be a double-edged sword. As the French historian Jacques Le Goff once remarked about memory, memory "seeks to save the past in order to serve the present and the future" (Goff, 1996, p. 99). Thus, the argument that we remember to learn, is strictly dependent on the lessons we draw from it. But how does one ensure that the lessons on human nature are the ones we learn? Memory after all, is a social construct, and as the philosopher Maurice Halbwachs explained, memory plays an important role in creating identity and can shape the way societies identify and understand itself (Halbwachs, 1992). Memories are malleable, and many times are not factual accounts of the past. This presents an opportunity for demagogues to misrepresent and distort the past to fit their narrative and concerns of the present.

Regrettably, this opportunity has been exploited countless times. Time after time, humans still fall into the same trap of war and senseless killing. On most occasions, these conflicts are fuelled by past perceived grievances, for example the genocides in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia. Perhaps that was why during the 1998 bicentenary of the United Irish rebellion, literary critic Edna Longley sarcastically proposed that "we should build a statue to Amnesia and forget where we put it" (Beiner, 2018). Clearly then, memory is not as harmless as it first appears and there are no easy answers. We should always pause to think, why exactly are we remembering? Are we living just for the sake of retaining the memories of the dead? Or worst still, are we remembering so that we can avenge?

In Friedrich Nietzsche's (1980) "On the advantage and disadvantage of history for life" he offers a possible solution. Here, he compares the memory of animals and humans. The animal is guided by its instincts, only briefly concerned with its comfort and is therefore neither sad nor disinterested. However, the human is held prisoner by his past, which "oppresses him and bends him sideways, it encumbers his gait like an invisible and sinister burden" (Nietzsche, 1980, p. 9). Nietzsche also recognised that history's claim to objectivity is nothing more than a false belief, for there are no absolutes and no certainties about the past. Having said that, if held hostage by history, man will "hardly dare in the end to lift a finger" (p. 10). But that does not mean that one should lead the life of an animal, one that is completely ignorant and guided by mere instinct. Here he introduces the idea of the "plastic power" (p. 10), the ability to know how to, when necessary, to break free from the shackles

of the past. With it, Nietzsche argued that we can bring closure, recover, and rebuild ourselves. In short, it helps us to carry on with life, as well as become a better person.

The Polish poet, Wisława Szymborska (2001), once wrote that "Reality demands that we also mention this: Life goes on. It continues at Cannae and Borodino, at Kosovo Polje and Guernica." Like many in her generation, Szymborska witnessed first-hand the horrors of the Second World War herself. Still, even she realised that eventually, the blood will dry, and we must move on. But to forget everything, is to lead a life that is completely devoid of meaning, while remembering everything is destructive. Clearly then, remembrance offers us valuable lessons, but as shown, it has a dual nature. We need to recognise this, and we must also aim to develop the "plastic power" as advocated by Nietzsche. This allows us to move on with life, but also to learn the useful lessons of history that Professor Kwok so eloquently wrote about. We forgive, but never forget.

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Pioneer Road (2021) 1: 55-60

Tourism as a Preservation Method for Traditional Buildings

Lim Xin Yi Clara

Like many metropolitan cities worldwide, skyscrapers are a distinct highlight of Singapore's skyline. Rising into the clouds, these elegant giants of steel and concrete are especially concentrated in Singapore's Central Business District, where some of the city state's most important economic exchanges take place. During rush hours, the streets are filled with a cacophony of hurried footsteps and lively chatter between smartly dressed men and women, as well as the occasional honking of a car from amongst the long ribbon of tail lights flashing red and white. All these then gradually fade into silence, as people and cars alike swarm in or out from one of the many buildings in the area. In these rare moments of peace, one's vision is naturally drawn to the towering structures surrounding them; though adding a sense of the refinement and sophistication marking every cosmopolitan city, these buildings' designs reflect little about Singapore as a nation. Varying only in small architectural details, skyscrapers are beautiful, yet lifeless imitations of one another. However, just a little down the road in the shadows of these soaring skyscrapers lies a cosy street lined with modest shophouses and traditional temples. In contrast to the grey monotony of its modern counterparts, buildings in this street are a colourful and eclectic mix consisting predominantly of Chinese, Malay, Indian and European elements. Each of these buildings reflects unique architectural styles of the era in which they were constructed (Kong, 2011) (Figure 1. The six architectural styles of shophouses), allowing one to piece together Singapore's history as a multicultural nation, and witness its growth from a British colony into an independent first world country. They are physical representations of a nation's historical memory and can cultivate a shared sense of national belonging amongst Singaporeans from all walks of life (Thatcher, 2018). As an immigrant society with a comparatively short national history (Global-is-Asian, 2017), it is thus imperative that we preserve these traditional buildings and leave a lasting legacy for future generations (Gin & Planner, 2019). Conversely, the un-rootedness of skyscraper architecture from Singapore's history and culture can be attributed to "imported global styles and techniques that do not cope with ambient environment and do not reflect the uniqueness of each country and its people and society" (McLennan, 2006, as cited in Salman, 2019, p. 5). In other words, globalization is a significant contributor to the loss of cultural individuality in our modern buildings. How can we then preserve our traditional buildings in the face of rapid globalization?

The preservation of traditional buildings in Singapore is inextricable from the tourism industry. With visitor arrivals increasing at an annual growth rate of 12 per cent since 1970 (Teo & Huang, 1995) and making up to 10 per cent of our gross domestic product (Knoema, n.d.), tourism is an increasingly lucrative industry for Singapore. In part to justify the continued existence of traditional buildings in land-scarce Singapore, and in part to capitalize on the boom in the tourism sector, the Singapore government has resorted to the "commercialization of this heritage for the purpose of tourism and leisure" (Teo & Huang, 1995, p. 590-591). Hence, heritage tourism is the primary method in which Singapore goes about preserving her traditional buildings. However, despite the significant economic value that heritage tourism generates, it is detrimental to preserving traditional buildings. In his conference paper "The impact of the tourism on the revitalization of the historical centre,"

Boudiaf (2019) explains how tourism disrupts building preservation. Firstly, to make the area more visually appealing and more convenient for tourists, traditional buildings are torn down and replaced with replicas that often serve entirely different functions from the original buildings. As a result, these newly reconstructed buildings lack the historical and cultural value of authentic traditional buildings despite the close resemblance. As Boyer (1992) puts, areas with such reconstructions of traditional buildings are "historical theme environments" (Boyer, 1992, as cited in Levi, 2005, p. 149) rather than "historical environments." Secondly, tourism often ends up metamorphosing the surrounding environment from an aesthetical, cultural and economic point of view (Boudiaf, 2019) through various factors. A prominent factor would be developing infrastructures like hotels and roads that cater to tourists. As these infrastructures' architectural design often neglects compatibility with their surroundings, their presence often results in an "unharmonious environment from the urbanscape point of view" (Boudiaf, 2019). One such design would be The Premier Inn on York Road, Lambeth (see Figure 2. The Lambeth Inn), which stands out like an eyesore from the beautiful red-bricked hospital beside it. The Inn was deemed so ugly that it was nominated in magazine Building Design's annual Carbuncle Cup in 2013 (London SE1, 2013). Another prominent factor would be over-tourism, which puts enormous stress on traditional buildings and the surrounding environment. Take, for instance, the Angkor Wat in Cambodia, which receives millions of visitors from all around the world every year: parts of the Angkor Wat, such as the stone staircases and sandstone carvings of the five-tiered Phnom Bakheng Hilltop Temple, are now at risk of incurring irreversible damage due to over-tourism (Smith, 2007). The nearby hospitality industries, Angkor theme park, and shopping malls have resulted in rampant pollution in the temple and the Siem Reap river (Bhattacharya, 2020) and broken the serenity of Angkor Wat (Smith, 2007). The changes brought about by tourism on the environment surrounding traditional buildings could potentially implicate their preservation, since the environment has a significant influence on traditional buildings' ambience and architectural style (Gin & Planner, 2019).

Although heritage tourism is evidently not the best method to preserve traditional buildings, it is the most practical option for land-scarce Singapore, where “the spirit of renewal and redevelopment continues to characterize the country’s growth and its successful developmental story” (Ong et al., 2020, para. 2). In addition to making up a significant part of Singapore’s gross domestic product, the revenue generated by tourism also goes towards the reconstruction and renovation of the traditional buildings (Pinto et al., 2015), thus allowing Singapore to further its economic interests while also conserving its heritage (Mei et al., 1989). In any case, it would be unwise and irrational of Singapore to miss out on the opportunity of using traditional buildings to promote heritage tourism, when other countries are also doing so (Goss, 2017). Hence, given that Singapore is unlikely to scrap heritage tourism as a method of preserving our traditional buildings, the question now turns to how we can minimize the detrimental effects of tourism on the preservation of traditional buildings.

According to former United Nations World Tourism Organization's secretary-general Dr Taleb Rifai: "Tourism growth is not the enemy, bad management is" (Jong, 2019, para. 2). In line with this principle, Lansky's (TED, 2019) talk proposes a framework that would allow Singapore to continue profiting from heritage tourism and better protect our traditional

buildings. To better preserve the pristine conditions of traditional buildings and their surrounding environment, Lansky (TED, 2019) first outlines the idea of "destination capacity," which is defined as "a certain threshold level of tourism activity beyond which there will occur damage to the environment, including natural habitat" (Clark, 1997, as stated in Massiani & Santoro, 2012, p. 142). To ensure that this "threshold" is not overstepped, he suggests that the tourism areas be operated like amusement parks, which controls crowds through various management systems. An example of such a management system would be Disneyland's virtual queue system, which allows only a certain number of people into amusement rides at any one time, thus ensuring that crowds are dispersed and that the facilities within the rides are not overwhelmed (Electrosonic, 2020). Many traditional buildings such as the Alhambra Palace in Granada and the Taj Mahal in Agra have adopted similar management systems which limit the number of tourists allowed in per day (World Travel & Tourism Control, 2018). Additionally, Lansky (TED, 2019) also suggests that tourism areas periodically suspend tourist activities to allow the area to undergo recovery and maintenance work. These recovery periods help traditional buildings avoid deterioration and decay and significantly prolong the buildings' lifespan (Abdul-Rashid & Ahmad, 2011). The Forbidden Palace in Beijing is one such attraction which has adopted this practice; various infrastructures and areas within the Palace, such as the North Wall and The Hall of Literary Brilliance, are frequently cordoned off for renovation and reconstruction (The Palace Museum, n.d.). Aside from ensuring that the traditional buildings are well-preserved, Lansky (TED, 2019) also encourages these tourist areas' profitability. He proposes that the local economic impact be maximized by keeping tourists within a "consumer loop," which in less technical terms, means to facilitate an environment where tourists are encouraged to keep on spending. Take the aforementioned virtual queue system at Disneyland for example: by freeing customers from standing in line, Disney managers estimated an additional hourly revenue of up to $101,500 from customer spending on other amenities within the park (Cope III et al., 2011). The "consumer loop" would allow traditional buildings to generate more revenue without increasing the number of tourists, thus ensuring that both profitability and preservation goals are achieved.

Although Lansky's (TED, 2019) framework answers Boudiaf's (2019) concerns on over-tourism and provides a practical compromise between the preservation of our traditional buildings and advancing our economic interests, it does not address Boudiaf's (2019) other worries about tourism. Particularly perturbing of these unaddressed worries is the reconstruction of traditional buildings and their surrounding environment for tourism purposes, which easily results in museumization if not done meticulously. Museumization, defined as "the phenomenon of presenting and interpreting cultural groups and their representative tangible and intangible heritage" (Milenkovski et al., 2016, p. 641) which "produced stereotypes derived from the past constructions" (Milenkovski et al., 2016, p. 641), is a prevalent issue in Singapore. For example, Chinatown after preservation works has been described by critics as "an inauthentic and contrived Orientalist theme park for tourists" (Centre for Liveable Cities, 2015, p. 65) which lacks "activity and spirit" (Centre for Liveable Cities, 2015, p. 64). Other preservation areas which have attracted similar criticisms are Clarke Quay (Gin & Planner, 2019) and Kampong Glam (Lou, 1980). Hence, Singapore still has a long way to go in preserving its traditional buildings. For now,

Singaporeans can play their part by learning to appreciate the uniqueness and vibrancy of our traditional buildings and educating ourselves on the topic. After all, Singapore's traditional buildings would stand a better chance with citizens recommending and advocating for more effective preservation methods.

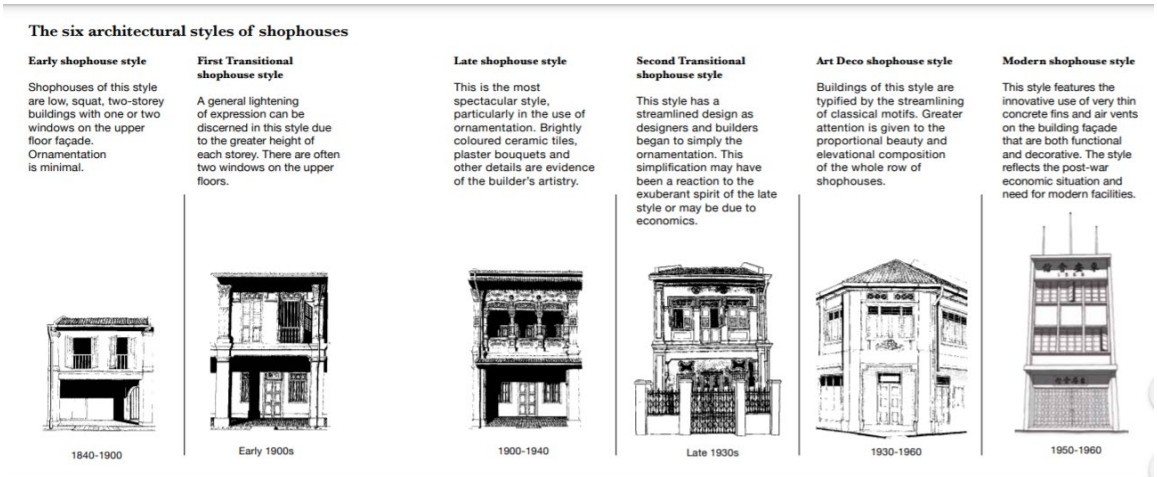

Figure 1. The six architectural styles of shophouses

Figure 2. The Lambeth Inn

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Nature Through the Eyes of Artifice

Ong Jing Ting

It is neither sight nor scent of encompassing green that invites my steps into the Shiseido Forest Valley, but the deluge of water crashing down. I hear it over music in my earpiece, over conversations of other visitors. I remove my earpiece, and the sound of waterfall washes away all distractions without becoming noise. Muffled by the Rain Vortex, a subtle atmospheric music reinforces the illusive tranquillity. The gentle chill of the air has seeped into everything, as I find out when I take a seat. The air mists visibly from the fountain in the centre, the displaced air becoming an outward breeze. Even through the mask, the air is fragrant but without resemblance to the natural scent of plant life, calling an aroma diffuser to mind. Natural light passes through the glass panes of the toroid roof, gently illuminating the entire space. Spanning five stories, the terraced indoor garden integrates trees and shrubs into its architectural design such that at a careless glance, the rings of walkway and steps blend seamlessly into foliage. There is privacy in the upper levels; through the meandering pathways, I find a man asleep in a seating area, enjoying the quiet of his refuge. Around these seating areas, trees are noticeably trimmed, shrubs are contained in rows, plant life makes space for the comfort of its visitors. There are no insects in this synthetic sanctuary.

Inevitably, I am drawn back to the Rain Vortex, the centre of the concentric structure, the dip in the toroid. Water slides down the concave centre of the roof in wavy sheets, its eventual fall connecting every level of the garden in its spectacle. All throughout, visitors may stare mesmerised, may take selfies with the attraction. Excited children press against the glass boundary with awe, and in that moment, we are connected by a love for beauty, rewriting the way we experience nature. Here, it would be easy to forget the dirt and the dust, the bugs and the bite, and how we could never find perfection in wild, untamed nature. Everything around is curated so carefully, allowing us to experience nature at its most pleasant and most enticing. This place is the pride of Jewel, and a microcosm of Singapore's ambition to interweave nature and city-planning as a "Garden City." Though I am lulled into gratification, I still wonder: How does this artifice affect our perception of nature?

Artifice comes in many forms, but when defined against nature, it refers to deliberate human intervention, such as through landscaping or gardening. In the article "Are gardens natural?" landscape architect Thomas Rainer (2010) claims that no garden is natural as "all gardening is an attempt to halt ecological succession and freeze it at a point that pleases us aesthetically" (para.3). His words capture my immediate attention, echoing my own impression of the Shiseido Forest Valley. Pristine and composed as it is, incredible upkeep must be required to battle the unpredictable and impermanent nature, all the while disguising its artifice. Artifice selects nature at its most aesthetically pleasing, interfering with natural processes to exclude unpleasant or inconvenient aspects of nature. Insects, weed, vines - much of the unfettered natural that is self-sustaining invites disdain rather than admiration. We have all been taught, consciously or through observation, to equate nature with beauty, and this reinforces the unrealistic expectation that nature must be beautiful. As we expect beauty in nature, the basis of our appreciation becomes aesthetic value, and natural processes that 'tarnish' this value begin to garner contempt and disdain.

The taming of nature to become palatable for its viewers therefore reduces nature to mere ornament, an object kept for aesthetic value, thus encouraging exploitative, entitled behaviour towards nature. In the long term, it may further the disconnect between human and nature, as we develop a reliance on tamed, curated nature and become intolerant of the unpleasant parts of nature.

Furthermore, unrealistic idealisation of nature thrives just as certainly at the other extreme. When Rainer points out that artifice is maligned in favour of a mythicised wilderness, he quotes Martha Schwartz, a renowned American landscape architect, "We view the landscape much as the Victorians viewed women: as either saints or whores" (as cited in Rainer, 2010, para.4). Nature is mythicised as an ideological opposite to artifice, assigned a moral value of purity against the corrupting artifice. This false dichotomy condemns artifice to glorify nature, idealising nature as wild and untouched by human intervention. However, this ideal is unrealistic, and encourages one to dismiss the importance of allowing nature in man-made spaces. Much of the truly natural has already been destroyed through human intervention, and efforts to preserve nature inevitably serve to tame and contain it. Not many can experience truly unfettered nature, particularly when considering Singapore's land scarcity, and laws that restrict such areas from public access. Much of Singapore's city-dwelling population are more at ease with artifice than nature, as the man-made environment is both the norm, and explicitly designed with human comfort in mind. For most, the integration of green spaces in an urban setting may well be our only experience with nature. As such, to demonise artifice while idealising the mythical wild only furthers our disconnect with the few natural spaces that we do have.

When we stop idealising nature and demonising artifice, we might see that artifice does not have to compete with nature, but rather, human intervention can serve to mediate between nature and humanity. Streetscape greenery in Singapore, for example, integrates nature with the urban environment, reclaiming nature as a normalised part of our everyday lives. This is epitomised in Jewel, the crystallization of Singapore's "City in a Garden" ambition. By design, it contains everything that we find most attractive about nature and integrates that seamlessly into a sleekly designed urban setting. Here, the aesthetic concerns of artifice are not merely a way to please the viewer, but a way for us to reconnect with nature and develop appreciation for it. Though it may be a superficial, sensorial appreciation of beautified nature, as a pragmatic compromise it is effective in inspiring a love for nature.

Additionally, when faced with the artifice that saturates our experience with nature, we begin to see nature as something fragile to be preserved and protected. Here, artifice manifests in a much larger scale, outside of curation or landscaping. In the article "Have humans evolved beyond nature – and do we even need it?" by Manuel Berdoy (2020), a biologist of Oxford University points out that "We were no longer fearful of nature, but of what we would do to it, and ourselves" (para. 12). Where we used to view nature in awe and terror as a force of destruction, human intervention is now seen as destructive to nature. When the presence of nature in urban spaces is itself considered unnatural, when reintroducing nature to the city is itself considered an intervention, we become abruptly and uncomfortably aware of how scarce and diminished nature has become, in a world made ours through artifice. When faced with the devastation of large-scale human intervention, artifice becomes intolerable even at its most innocuous. With growing

awareness of global warming and ecological destruction, our perception of nature has changed, as nature is now seen as linked to our survival as a species. Where humanity and nature were once opposed, with artifice aligned with humanity, we now see artifice as a dangerous, destructive influence opposed to nature and therefore humanity, despite artifice remaining at its core, human intervention. Becoming aware of artifice thus makes us aware of the frailty of nature and become protective of it.

Ultimately, artifice does more than change our perceptions of nature, but define how we see and relate to it. Artifice changes our perception, yet human perception is the very basis of the kind of deliberate, considered interference that human curation of nature entails. In fact, this artifice is an enactment of the human perspective towards nature. Whether we value aesthetic, pragmatism, or conservation, we intervene because we judge it worthwhile. As a result, we see nature as secondary to human needs and desires, subject to our values and judgement. Artifice and human perception thus cannot be categorised as simple cause and effect. Artifice is the very lens with which humanity sees nature with: "Such is the extent of our dominion on Earth, that the answer to questions around whether we are still part of nature – and whether we even need some of it – rely on an understanding of what we want as Homo sapiens" (Berdoy, 2020, para.1). Indeed, regardless of how positively or negatively we view nature, artifice creates a human-centric understanding, where human needs and desires dictate our relationship with nature. By interpreting nature through artifice, we thus reveal that artifice has become the very fulcrum of our perception - artifice is inseparable from the human perspective.

It is with this awareness that I think back to the indoor garden in Jewel: how it uses artifice to manipulate our perception of nature, and how that artifice exposes the designer's personal preferences. As it is a space created to elicit admiration, we see what the architects saw and valued, and the enactment of their design. Knowing that artifice is more than alteration, but the very lens with which we impose judgement, Shiseido Forest Valley becomes a living monument of our perception of nature, embodying the ideal of beauty and the verdant ambition of Singapore's urban reforestation plans.

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Redefining the Value of Art

Vigneswari T

"They are astonishingly boring" is how Teju Cole (2016, para. 2) describes the works of Steve McCurry, a world-renowned photographer, in his *New York Times Magazine* article, "A Too-Perfect Picture." It is a rather bold statement to make about the artist behind one of 20th century's most iconic photographs, *Afghan Girl,* and whose works fetch steep prices at auctions. Cole (2016) uses McCurry's collection of photographs taken in India as a point of comparison to the works of an artist he admires, Raghubir Singh. He attributes McCurry's works to be straight-forward, organised, sentimental, reflective of historical Indian culture, and with a keen eye for technicality. Although these are not necessarily bad qualities and in fact signal aesthetic excellence, Cole (2016) argues that these are what make McCurry lacking as an artist. While some may posit that there is nothing wrong in showcasing India in a scenic and archetypal manner, the author believes that the genuineness of a country lies in both its past and present.

Singh prevails as a better photographer in this aspect as he takes pictures of everything – dresses, suits, turbans and saris – while being rough around the edges and not fussing too much about being technically perfect. Cole (2016) fondly likens Singh's works to "a moment of truth snipped from the flow of life" (para. 5). In contrast, McCurry's works feed into the West's fantasies of what India should be, ignoring her reality. Cole (2016) even goes to the extent of implying his works are of the same calibre as hardcore pornography due to their commercialised nature of wanting to evoke a specific response. Finally, he ends by stipulating his standards for good photography and in a broader sense, art: to portray an untampered sense of reality while establishing a deep emotional engagement with the viewer.

As an admirer and appreciator of art, it was enlightening to learn about Cole's (2016) point of view. It made me reflect on why I liked viewing McCurry's work – everything seems to be seamlessly and thoughtfully put together, the elements such as the subject, colours, and composition are all in harmony. This is definitely indicative of McCurry's strong technical prowess in photography, but as Cole (2016) puts it, it does render his pictures *too perfect*. However, the essay takes on a strong biased tone as Cole (2016) evidently has a special liking to Singh's photography and distaste for McCurry's. His personal preference and standards hinder him from making an objective analysis of McCurry's works, where he overly condemns McCurry and praises Singh. Cole (2016) makes use of pathos and as a fellow photographer, ethos as well, to convince his readers. He does so by employing emotive and exaggerated language such as "astonishingly boring" and "what a relief it is to move from Steve McCurry's work to that of someone like Raghubir Singh" (Cole, 2016, para. 4). While his biased position is apparent to readers, his loaded language and expertise can lead them to believe his arguments.

Despite Cole's (2016) prejudiced views, his essay unveils two aspects of art evaluation. The first is aesthetic value which McCurry's photographs score high in as they are visually-pleasing, so much so that they are featured on magazine covers and other promotional collateral. However, this aesthetic appeal is not enough for Cole (2016) to deem an artwork as "good". He places more importance on the second aspect, ethical value, which McCurry

purportedly fails to fulfil. The unethicality lies in his inaccurate and fantasy-like impression of present-day India as he chooses to depict only dated and traditional aspects of the Indian culture. Moreover, his works do not incite more than a surface-level emotional response. This is unlike Singh, who chooses to showcase present-day India without any pretence and encourages a deeper emotional response from his viewers, which Cole (2016) considers ethical. Cole (2016) connects these two factors to what role a photograph "plays within the economic circulation of images" and asserts that good photography has to have an emotional and ethical duty (para. 7). This then leads us to wonder about the relationship between the form of art and its content, and how they both affect its overall judgement. Can art be judged solely based on its aesthetic or ethical value?

To gain an understanding of these two factors, we can take a look at Laura D'Olimpio's (2020) article "When Good Art Is Bad: Educating the Critical Viewer" where she tackles the ethicality of art versus its aesthetic value. She posits there are two opposing stances to this issue – aestheticism (autonomism) and ethicism (moralism) – where the former believes that art should be judged purely by its aesthetic value divorced from its moral message and the latter which believes that an artwork's ethical value always relates to its aesthetic value. There are intermediate stands to each side, moderate autonomism which morally analyses an artwork but still claims it does not affect its aesthetic value and moderate moralism which considers some artworks have ethical value that affects its aesthetic value (D'Olimpio, 2020). One of the important benefits of autonomism is the protection of artists from being censored and commercialised due to moralising as it "[reduces] the artistic value or appreciation of the work due to the heavy handed moral message seeking to grab the spectator's attention where the artwork may feel like a vehicle for the values presented" (D'Olimpio, 2020, para. 4). Moreover, artists have creative freedom without being bogged down by moral or political assessments. Despite this, D'Olimpio (2020) takes on the ethicism stand as she believes that "where we find a moral message in an artwork, and given that art affects us emotionally as well as cognitively, artworks must be subject to ethical evaluation as well as aesthetic evaluation" (para. 9). She quotes an example *Triumph of the Will* by Leni Riefenstahl, whereby the aesthetic excellence of the film was tainted by its immoral message of Hitler being portrayed as a good leader. She concludes by stating that it is vital to consider both the aesthetic (appreciation) and ethical value (critical engagement) of art.

Although D'Olimpio (2020) takes on a definitive stand of ethicism, her analysis of the two factors allows us to reflect on how they play a role when we view an artwork. In the case of Cole (2016), he seems to adopt a moralist approach when judging art as even though he acknowledges McCurry's aesthetic prowess, he condemns the artist's works to be weak photography due to their "immorality" – playing into the fantasies of the West by rendering India solely from a historical and stereotypical viewpoint, while removing its current day relevance. The ethicality of his photographs takes precedence over their aesthetic value where the overall assessment is ultimately dependent on the former condition. In fact, Cole (2016) places a pressing emphasis on how an artwork engages viewers morally and critically that he discredits McCurry's photographs which only bear aesthetic significance as artworks because they almost exist in the realm of advertising and pornography. Even though Singh's photographs contain aesthetic flaws, Cole (2016) praises them as strong photography as they do not create a false depiction of India being stuck in the past, unlike

McCurry's works. Cole (2016) and D'Olimpio (2020) believe that where there is an establishment of an emotional and cognitive engagement, the aesthetic value must be considered in conjunction with its ethical sense. An unethical artwork would eventually be deemed a bad artwork holistically regardless of how well it looks. Therefore, both authors share a similar stand of ethicism whereby the aesthetic value of an artwork cannot be judged independent of its inevitable moral message.

However, is the onus of immorality really on the artwork itself? It seems somewhat unfair to put down the entirety of an aesthetically well-executed artwork just because of the message it is conveying to the viewer, whether intended or not. To analyse this interlacing relationship between artworks and their moral value, we can turn to Rob van Gerwen (2004) who in his article "Ethical Autonomism: The Work of Art as a Moral Agent" introduces the idea of artworks as "moral agents." Firstly, he posits similar methods of art evaluation as D'Olimpio (2020) with the two opposing sides – autonomism and ethicism – and the two less assertive, in-between stands. He holds the view of an ethical (moral) autonomist as he believes that the ethical content of artworks can be evaluated separately from the works themselves. He criticises the ethicist view by questioning why ethicists do not condemn newspapers for publishing immoral incidents such as rape (Gerwen, 2004). It is argued that the function of newspapers is to present the truth to the world and this function does not apply to art, which is why art can be subject to moral evaluation.

However, Gerwen (2004) asserts artworks have another duty of relating to the viewers and thus have to be judged a certain way. This can be done by adopting an artistic approach which essentially refers to the audience being able to "think and feel (morally) relevant thoughts about the represented without being obliged to act according to these thoughts and feelings" (Gerwen, 2004, para. 3). For example, if someone liked the film, *Henry, Portrait of a Serial Killer*, it does not mean the person condones murder. Similarly, if someone was motivated to murder after watching the film, it would reflect on that individual's character rather than the film's moral value (Gerwen, 2004). Therefore, art's ethicality is not congruent to its aesthetic value and therefore should not tarnish its overall intrinsic value even if it encourages immoral behaviour in some individuals.

Gerwen (2004) challenges the views of Cole (2016) and D'Olimpio (2020) as he asserts that the morality or immorality of an artwork does not play a role in determining its overall worth. The other two authors are strong in their opinion that an artwork which is unethical in nature is not good art, despite its aesthetic greatness. Gerwen's (2004) example of the film can be used to rethink Cole's (2016) evaluation of McCurry's photographs – if one were to consider the photographs to be good photography, does that necessitate the individual to supporting the West's fantasy of India? The viewer could have taken on an artistic attitude and appreciated the photographs for their visual and technical prowess. While Cole (2016) decries McCurry's portrayal of archetypal subjects as they do not show the reality of India today, some viewers may not even recognise that there is a lack of ethicality and instead see them as authentic cultural beacons and insight into India's history. In the case that an individual recognises that McCurry is producing a fantasy of India, it does not mean he/she perpetuates or condones the notion, and even if they do, it reflects more on his/her character than the value of his photographs themselves. Moreover, it does not take away the credit of McCurry's artistic skills as substantiated by his huge commercial success as a photographer. The onus is on the audience, as art evaluation is a subjective process that is

unique to each received experience. Hence, Gerwen's (2004) article provides an alternative perspective on relating an artwork's moral content to its entirety.

After analysing the two sources, my stand lies more with Gerwen (2004) as I believe art can be evaluated separately for both its aesthetic and moral value. Putting down a piece of artwork just because it has the potential for immoral conduct is inequitable as it invalidates the other components such as its formal qualities and artistic finesse. Credit has to be given where credit is due. Art is so much more than just a vessel for ethical reinforcement and deserves to be judged through an artistic lens rather than only a moral one. This artistic lens should not just include the artwork's perceived beauty but also the intention of the artist. Artistic statements are commonly included in presentations of artworks (such as in museums and exhibitions) to help viewers better understand and interpret the work. Artists can set some context such as the historical or even their personal background and justification on why they chose to portray their work in a certain way. Understanding where the artist is coming from encourages viewers to not form hasty conclusions about the work and instead, lead them to form a more reflective judgement.

The responsibility of morality does not only lie in the artwork (or the artist) but also in the audience's personal moral compass. The notion of individualised perception of morality brings up the philosophical concept of moral relativism. This idea asserts that the verity of moral perceptions is based on individual traditions and cultures rather than on objective standards. In a way, no one belief will be morally more "right" than another as there is so no one universal moral code that everyone agrees on (Holyoak & Rai, 2013). In the case of artworks, it will be useful to consider the artist's moral standing, which is most often gauged from his/her artistic statement. What may seem unacceptable for us could be a common practice in another culture. Understanding where the artist is coming from allows us to be more open-minded and even, forgiving, in our ethical evaluation of artworks.

However, certain artworks which carry jarring, controversial messages may not be universally appropriate for certain audiences, especially children, who can be impressionable. We cannot pin the blame on them if they end up committing an immoral behaviour learned through an artwork because they still do not fully possess the discernment to make the right choices. Moreover, not everyone is equipped with the capacity to process all types of artworks. Thus, I partially agree with D'Olimpio (2020) that both aesthetic and moral aspects have to be considered; but the moral evaluation pertains more to the suitability of the artwork for a specific audience rather than to the overall judgement of whether it is a good or bad work. While the authors of the aforementioned articles provide insightful and rather convincing viewpoints on how aesthetics and moral value influence art evaluation, it is important to keep in mind that these are not the exhaustive guidelines. Considering the artist's intention and remembering that not all morals are universally set in stone are important for a more nuanced and fair judgement of art.

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Female Empowerment in the Modern World: An Update and A Re-evaluation

Tay Kai Jun

In her 2019 article "The Essay that Won Me Codeup's Women in Tech Scholarship," Cris Giovanoni espouses her conception of the "Feminine Genius" paradigm, and strongly affirms its value in the modern world. She distinguishes between strong women and natural women, purporting how it is the latter who possesses the feminine genius. For Giovanoni (2019), women who show strength through material factors such as job rankings and social status are but façades of their true selves, reduced to mere "imitation[s] of the archetypal male domination" (para. 6). In Giovanoni's (2019) view, feminine geniuses are women who can effectively exercise and showcase their ability to see people "for who they are" and "their value as a human person" (para. 12). This, she believes, allows women to be whole, "identity intact, fully embracing" their true selves (Giovanoni, 2019, para. 16).

While Giovanoni (2019) reasonably qualifies that the concept of feminine genius is highly subjective, her attempt at balance is largely overshadowed by the fervour with which she promotes her version of it - an attempt rife with logical fallacies, which confer a self-righteous tone on her writing and significantly diminish her persuasiveness. One of Giovanoni's (2019) key assertions - that "authentic feminism in the workplace... is only achieved by embracing the feminine genius" (para. 13) - creates a false dichotomy by suggesting how women who do not adhere to this paradigm are essentially "lost at sea, misplaced and even buried" (para. 14). In egregiously suggesting that women disadvantage and degrade themselves by not conforming to the feminine genius, Giovanoni blatantly disregards the myriad women - past and present - revered and respected for qualities other than those coherent with her idea of feminine genius, such as critical thinking, business acumen, and strong political conviction and voice. This black-and-white rhetoric extends to her penultimate paragraph, which not only paints a romanticized picture of the feminine genius, but also fails to consider the possibility that when both sexes realise their "natural geniuses at work" (para. 17), clashes rather than cooperation may result due to incompatibility of character, values, attitudes and working styles, among other factors.

In defining the traits women ought to display to be "genuine," Giovanoni adds her own voice to the perennial debate over the broader social concepts of gender and gender roles - notions which have certainly evolved over time, complicating the male-female dynamic and the interplay of the sexes. The feminist movement's emergence and rise are arguably both a manifestation and cause of such a progression, as women navigate through, and locate themselves within, their respective societal contexts. Certainly, its momentum remains strong, with a more powerful spotlight cast on it by new entities such as social media. However, reading Giovanoni's (2019) unfortunately preachy insistence on her one-sided version of feminine genius and its prescriptions, I cannot help but wonder whether the drive toward female empowerment has lost its original meaning, instead becoming a buzzword or cliché to preserve a veneer of inclusivity and progressiveness, or worse, a means just to jump on the bandwagon of a modern-day fad. Just how far has the feminist movement today managed to retain its relevance and profound importance?

In her provocatively titled work "Is There a Feminine Genius?" Julia Kristeva (2004) posits that the "highest realization of human rights, and of women's rights" is to achieve "ecceitas" - the "flourishing of the individual in his or her uniqueness" that allows him or her to realise "who he or she is" (p. 494). While women "cannot be separated from [their] various [societal] attachments" (p. 499), each of their underlying identities and selves look to self-actualize, by "transcend[ing]" the "constraints of biology, society and destiny" (p. 496). Specifically, the simple, yet profound act of thinking is key: in Kristeva's (20004) words, "life is thought and thought is life" (p. 500), and the ability to think without succumbing to the chains of "totalitarian" social rules, norms or constructs will allow a woman to reach a state of pseudo-Nirvana, or an "osmosis with [just] Being" (p. 499). In essence, it is the independence and autonomy of the mind, and of thought, which are instrumental in helping a woman embrace herself more fully.

While Giovanoni (2019) and Kristeva (2004) cohere in their message about the achievement of an authentic self-identity as a hallmark of women's empowerment, Giovanoni's (2019) analysis is comparatively static - either a woman embraces a certain version of feminine genius and succeeds, or she will lose touch with herself and end up submerged under a sea of male dominance and lack of self-fulfillment. In contrast, Kristeva (2004) emphasizes how females' self-discovery remains a legitimate and continuous process of empowerment. She dissociates herself from "mass feminism" by suggesting how female empowerment is not the same as "rebellious negativity" (p. 494) - "rebelling" or simply bandying about terms such as "feminism" based on a superficial understanding of it, because it sounds good or because it seems like the "In Thing." Rather, Kristeva (2004) asserts that women are actually trying to advance something deeper - a "feminine particularity... different in each [woman]" (p. 497), which goes beyond Giovanoni's (2019) definition of a real woman based more on biological proclivities. Instead of trying to define a 'woman' - as Giovanoni (2019) attempts to - Kristeva (2004) echoes Giovanoni's qualification on the subjectivity of female traits and proceeds to advance this caveat by acknowledging, for instance, how there are "feminine aspect[s] of man" (p. 497), and how women may actually "have a stronger bisexuality than men" (p. 497).

From Kristeva's (2004) ruminations, a key takeaway is that women's identities are non-monolithic and non-binary. They remain constantly in a flux, even today, as a reflection of the currency and profound relevance of the feminist movement. As Grady (2018) aptly puts it, the modern feminist movement is a "diffuse movement without a central goal": there is no singular "piece of legislation or major social change that belongs" to it, or which it myopically seeks to achieve (para. 60). While there is a struggle to define and enact a defined female identity or persona, actually "succeeding" in doing so is secondary. What is more important, is that women keep up the process of finding themselves: to think, strive and act on their beliefs and self-conception, even if they constantly evolve.

Rather than the typical harping on women being an "Other" - in other words, binary opposites - to men - so they do not end up as "imitation[s] of the archetypal male dominance" (Giovanoni, 2019, para. 6) - Kristeva's (2004) admission that women may well be an amalgamation of traits from both sexes all the more serves to amplify the power of females' uniqueness. Unlike Giovanoni (2019), Kristeva (2004) omits any clearly defined consequence of not being able to enact or showcase the feminine genius, pointing to how women's current outcomes are but a snapshot of their conceptions of self at a certain point

in time, but never a true or fixed reflection of their whole selves. In this manner, women's struggle towards self actualization is given greater permanence and longevity, legitimizing the concept, process and significance of female empowerment.

These arguments may in fact be corroborated in the modern-day context. According to Pacific University's Professor Martha Rampton (2008), the feminist movement "is now moving from the academy and back into the realm of public discourse" (para. 17). Specifically, society's - not just women's - increased awareness of the explorative process of feminism has enriched the social consciousness, facilitated by more extensive discourse and the democratization of information via various media platforms. Granted, some may argue that such platforms are hotbeds for loudly negative or discriminatory views, which end up stymying discourse. However, in reality, it may be a blessing in disguise that open discussions about sensitive topics such as rape, societal abuse of women and workplace discrimination are no longer considered taboo, nor merely "the purview of rarified intellectuals" (Rampton, 2008, para. 17). I opine that this is so because such polarizing views are now more often, more easily, and more freely exchanged, improving society's receptiveness to the multifarious, potentially unorthodox or discomforting viewpoints within the feminist movement. There is much evidence to suggest how today's feminist movement has stepped up to actively embrace modern-day biases and prejudices, as a means to address them. The emergence of 'SlutWalks' in 2011, for instance, was "in protest of the idea that the way to prevent rape is for women to 'stop dressing like sluts'" (Grady, 2018, para. 68). That women feel empowered enough to adopt such a counter-intuitive, brazen approach to tackling stereotypes - by flaunting them rather than instinctively and angrily squaring off against them - demonstrates progress not only in how women think of themselves, but also in terms of their ability to find new, unconventional avenues to express themselves and concretize the features of their self-identity within a larger societal context. To draw the link back to Kristeva's (2004) discussion, such progress is a clear reflection that women today continue to surpass themselves, growing out of hackneyed, common conceptions and ideas in favour of more personal, stronger views of the self within the socio-cultural landscape, verifying again how the depth and profoundness of the feminist movement remains alive and well today.

Up to this point, considering broadly the relevance and significance of the feminist movement, an underlying assumption is that women are actually free to find, express and realise their identities. Yet, starkly different realities exist. As commonly described from a western or progressive standpoint, in the Arab world, for instance, the female gender is an oppressed one, due to highly conservative Islamic laws and norms and the entrenchment of patriarchy. In such regions, where an apparently strong culture of female subservience and a seeming dearth of opportunities for female expression and self-discovery prevails, is the term "feminist movement" relegated to become merely lip service? More broadly, with such observable inequality in outcomes for women, does the apparent lack of inclusivity of the modern feminist movement diminish its true value and meaning?

Not so, according to author Nawar Al-Hassan Golley (2004) in her article "Is Feminism Relevant to Arab Women?" for the simple reason that Westernized stereotypes towards women's status in such regions fail to fairly assess their corresponding socio-cultural contexts. According to Golley (2004), Western feminists more often than not view the situation in Arab countries through "textured image[s] of exoticism" (p. 521 - 522),

describing Arab women's lives as being "so different from their [own] that they cannot possibly develop any kind of feminism" (p. 522). In essence, feminism is "alien" (p. 521) to the Arab world. However, Golley (2004) resolutely suggests how these notions are "misrepresentation[s] of Arab women" and, more broadly, of "Arabic culture at large" (p. 522). Rather than reflecting entrenched social hierarchies and cultural backwardness, the outwardly traditional roles and place of women in such regions still prevail for the important functions they have in preserving culture and social stability. What is or what used to be seen merely as manifestations of female subservience in these contexts, reflect today, quite contrarily, the continued importance of females' social status. Further shoring up this perspective is the fact that certain traditions and practices in the Arab world have evolved to elicit more modern, progressive themes. For instance, "the veil ... has recently been considered a means of empowerment, rather than oppression, especially when worn as a personal choice" (Golley, 2004, p. 527). In a similar vein as the aforementioned rise of "Slut Walks," it is clearer today in these regions that women's lifestyle decisions, even if conservative or stereotypical, are increasingly embraced out of their autonomy and freedom of choice rather than solely out of submission to established norms and values.

This element of real choice forms the basis of Golley's (2004) discussion, which augments Giovanoni's (2019) piece while simultaneously connecting with Kristeva's (2004) ideas. Similar to how Giovanoni (2019) emphasizes the importance of women exhibiting typical traits associated with the female gender such as motherliness and a stronger innate ability to understand fellow human beings, Golley (2004) affirms a more traditional conception of women, but suggests how feminism can shine through despite women not being too overtly adventurous with finding a new self, nor being too conscious about trying to overtly show off their individuality. Unlike Giovanoni's (2019) insistence on how women should choose to embrace and enact typical female traits, lest they wish to remain unfulfilled, Golley (2004) complicates the argument by ascribing a greater semblance of real choice on Arab women, eliciting the possibility that such traditional roles and appearances could well be adopted out of these women's own volitions, out of their awareness and respect for their country's social, cultural and political dynamics. Besides the previously discussed example of the veil, in marriage, by grounding themselves to the household, Arab women notably take on an "extra-domestic" role in "male politics" by helping to guard against "dimininish[ed] intrafamily male solidarity, flatten[ed] lineages" and "factionalism" (Golley, 2004, p. 526). By keeping up such traditional roles, these women, at the very least, indirectly ensure their continued relevance in larger socio-political causes, such as the "nationalist struggles [of] Arab countries (Golley, 2004, p. 526)." This coheres with Kristeva's (2004) concept of "feminine particularity" (p. 497), which confers a high degree of autonomy on women to decide for themselves what their role and place should be in their society - what it really means to be female in their own contexts – to develop a truly unique identity unbounded by norms and expectations. For Arab women, it is inconsequential that their outwardly traditional roles are often equated with backwardness through the Western feminist lens. Instead, their sense of self and the part they play both "draw on foundations of Arab feminism that do not pander to cross-cultural notions" (*The Yale Herald*, 2010, para. 9), much less Western ones, thereby making a powerful statement regarding the superficial nature of Western skepticism towards the viability and prevalence of feminism in such regions. While today's feminist movement appears mutually exclusive with women's

status and mobility in ostensibly less progressive parts of the world, the feminist movement in these places has actually grown, and remains pertinent - albeit in a more traditional sense, but where there certainly is no lack of women trying to find and exert their identities in relation to their sense of self in society.

In the words of award-winning singer-songwriter Madonna, "I'm tough, I'm ambitious, and I know exactly what I want. If that makes me a bitch, okay." Ever since the word "Feminism," with a capital F, and its underlying meaning and modern wave came into force, women have become far more cognisant, active, and vocal in exerting their evolving, but nonetheless richly complex, sense of self within their broader social contexts. More importantly, women have found new ways to take charge of their lives, rhetoric, and the broader feminist movement, while holding the lessons, examples, and conviction of their predecessors dear, powering a fresh wave of female empowerment and reaffirming the strength and meaning of the feminist movement.

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HW0111: Communication - A Journey of Inquiry through Writing and Speech

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The Silent Pain of Gender Dysphoria

Poh Dominique

Often hidden away in the shadows, seldom seen or thought about, little is known about the Singapore transgender community. Judging by the few articles written on transgender people in Singapore, I seek to explore their experiences and reflect deeper on the undercurrents of their trans identity. In particular, I will focus on what is arguably, though not definitively, a hallmark of trans identity: the experience of gender dysphoria (GD). By definition, gender dysphoria is the feeling of incongruity with one's biological sex, for instance, a biological male (AMAB) identifying as female and vice versa.

During an outing I went on with a group of trans girls, I learnt about their experiences and also noticed some peculiarities in the outing itself, contrasting with hanging out with cisgender friends. From what they shared, a dysphoria episode could be easily triggered by the sight or sound of certain feminine characteristics. For example, seeing a ciswoman's dressing or figure which they desire or perceive as superior to their own, could trigger a wave of envy/jealousy and self-deprecating thoughts, such as "why don't I have curves like them?", "why are my shoulders/jaw (etc.) so masculine?" The thoughts could become so overwhelming that they have a nervous breakdown, depressive episode and simply cannot function socially. As a result, they may retreat to the relative safety of home, to recharge what some of them call "social energy." Unfortunately, one can run away from external stimuli but cannot hide from one's own thoughts.

Fortunately, this did not occur that day and the outing continued fairly smoothly. Why "fairly?" It is because I noticed from the onset that the group was very quiet, and with the exception of those who are already close with one another (and even then), they would use a group chat to communicate with one another. Only with the arrival of a talkative person did conversation become more natural. I also did not notice anyone staring or giving particularly judgmental looks. Hence, I think that ultimately, people do not seem to care much about whether someone is trans or "out of the norm" in any way. Rather, people make snap judgements to address them as "sir" and "miss" according to whether they pass as female. Otherwise, service staff may simply avoid gendering a person lest they unintentionally offend someone.

After joining the chat group myself, their low self-esteem became painfully apparent, seeing self-derogatory comments like "so ugly, sigh" (attached selfie) and "I'll never pass even with hormones." I think it highly likely even if they "passed," they would still be hyper-conscious about their perceived flaws, and devastated on the off-chance they were misgendered. Maybe, this was the reason they avoided speaking aloud. But why do trans individuals insist that others see them the way they see themselves? Is it insufficient to just accept oneself and be who they are? Or is it a process of self-acceptance to ultimately see beyond such vocabulary?

Well, we could start by considering what trans individuals would like to have on their Identification Card (IC), and why. According to Ho et al. (2016), most trans individuals would like to self-identify on their ICs "Post-operative" (95%) or "Pre-operative" (80.4%) (p. 59,60). However, they would like to self-identify on their birth certificates to a lesser extent (Post-operative: 65.9%, Pre-operative: 66.7%). For non-operative trans individuals, most (35%) prefer to reflect their sex assigned at birth, while a close second (32%) would like to

self-identify. Despite the desire to self-identify, Singapore only allows individuals who have undergone sex reassignment surgery (SRS) to change their gender marker. However, as the existence of non-operative individuals shows, not every trans person wants SRS. This could be due to various concerns, such as financial, concerns from people around them, fears and doubts about surgery, religious community and finally unconventional identities.

When it comes to finance, many simply cannot afford it for various reasons ranging from the lack of family support to insufficient income or savings (*sidenote: CPF or Medisave cannot be used for SRS.) (Ho et al., 2016). There are people who feel that the (monetary) cost is too high for the fact that they are removing healthy organs which, when removed, would also mean they have to pay for and consume practically a lifetime of hormone therapy. Secondly, individuals may not undergo SRS even if they so desire because of potential or actual negative reactions by family, friends or even colleagues or spouses. An example presented was a transwoman who was threatened to be chased out of her home if she undergoes SRS (Ho et al., 2016, p. 68). Realistically speaking, surgery always has its risks. On top of that, the only SRS-specific facility in Singapore ceased operations in 2001. This makes the final roadblock to changing one's gender marker highly inaccessible. Fourthly, religion can affect the acceptance of a person along with their intention for SRS. For example, people have been "turned away from burial services, leaving them discriminated even in death" (Ho et al., 2016, p. 70). Last but not least, some people feel uncomfortable with the gender binary as a whole and have a variety of identities other than just man or woman. These cases fall outside the scope of my essay.

Ho et al.'s research made me realise some things: Desire to self-identify on identity documents is prevalent, and I agree strongly with the paper that Singapore's current gender recognition law (GRL) is insufficient to meet the needs of the trans community – despite some individuals feeling otherwise. This is because the law requires one to undergo SRS, which necessarily implies gonadectomy, that is the removal of one's sexual organs. This effectively renders them sterile. Numerous interviews quoted within said, sometimes the desire for SRS may be motivated not by dysphoria, but by practical concerns – where one may face abuse or discrimination due to the mismatch between presentation and identity documents. Thus, while there is no straightforward answer to the GRL, more attention must be given to non-operative trans individuals.

I think, even if it is internally (for individuals themselves) sufficient to accept oneself it would be a huge obstacle in life if they are not accepted in society or legally. Along this line of thought, if one is enlightened enough to see beyond vocabulary, how much real difference would it make to one's life? Should the focus of change be away from trans individuals conforming to gender stereotypes to feel better to society needing to accept individual human beings as they are, allowing all individuals to be comfortable in their own skin?

A possible direction to look at is how successful medical treatment/transition is. We may consider the Dutch approach to diagnosing and treating supposed cases of GD since it is regarded as the gold standard in the field. Wiepjes et. al. (2018) focuses on the prevalence of GD, and analyses retrospectively statistics for gender-affirming treatments such as hormone therapy and surgery. They argue that the increase in referrals to the gender identity clinic raises an important concern of the regret rate of gender-affirming treatments with irreversible effects (Wiepjes et al., 2018). They concluded that the 0.5%

overall regret rate of such surgeries is very low (p. 8). There were some (812) adolescents between 12 to 18 years old who visited the clinic, with almost half of them starting puberty blockers (Wiepjes et. al., 2018, p. 3). However, most patients started hormone therapy between 24 and 55 years old, and these were the only noted regrets, which came 4 to 22 years later. It is also noted that "Reasons for regret were divided into social regret, true regret, or feeling non-binary" (Wiepjes et. al., 2018, p. 4).

If the Dutch gender clinic is indeed the most conscientious in their diagnosis and prescription of gender-affirming treatments, there should be minimal regret rates due to misdiagnosis and the like. Accordingly, the statistics agree. This further suggests, in the context of my question, that maybe trans individuals insist on others seeing them the way they see themselves simply because it is the most widely known, practiced and possibly most successful way to alleviate their dysphoria. While this may seem heartening, there are still people who reverse their transition, and it is important to understand why. It tends to be due to social regret, which is when one returns to presenting as their assigned gender rather than self-identified gender for a myriad of reasons, such as losing their familial relationships. It could also be that they find life in general too difficult, due to discrimination or disrespect. This is in contrast with true regret, where some individuals thought hormone therapy or surgery could resolve their internal conflicts which may include homosexuality but realised that the diagnosis and treatment were not right for their situation. In other words, they realised they do not identify as the gender they supposedly transitioned to (Wiepjes et. al., 2018). According to both papers, the focus seems to be more on practical concerns and any discrimination in living as one's authentic self. This is especially true in Singapore, a conservative country which still criminalises gay sex (even if argued to be merely symbolic). In our case, trans individuals who choose to transition or pursue SRS may have a higher chance of experiencing social regret. Whether to identify as trans or accept their assigned gender, both paths involve self-acceptance. Maybe, as in my question, labels are but labels – yet for most people, external acceptance is probably still crucial.

Considering both Ho et al. (2016) and Wiepjes et al. (2018), one might intuitively conclude that medical transition is good and safe for transgender people to undergo. Maybe Singapore's gender recognition laws are not too unreasonable on that basis, but even with low regret rates, gender markers are important to the individual. Indeed, as Ho et. al suggest, it still seems unjust to mandate sterilization for non-operative trans individuals, especially if such healthcare is so inaccessible in Singapore. We must also note, as Ho et al. highlighted, that trans individuals have this period (which can be very long) where their gender marker does not match with their gender identity. Thus, they are condemned to live with the discomfort until and unless they fulfil the criteria to change their ID.

On the flip side, what if there was a way to resolve or at least minimise gender dysphoria without medical intervention or even a change in gender marker? Maybe, the more enlightened one is about gender stereotypes and categorization, the less compelling medical transition becomes. Consider the arguments that ADHD is not really an epidemic-level medical problem that warrants consistent treatment with drugs. What if, indeed, some kids are simply overstimulated by the world around them, resulting eventually in the manifestation of an ADHD diagnosis? If so, we may draw a parallel with GD and a trans identity. It could be that GD is a by-product of restrictive gender norms and unhealthy

(especially for non-conforming individuals) stereotypes. If there was room for gender non-conforming individuals to be themselves without judgement, even throughout childhood, we might see less cases of gender dysphoria as a product one's inability to fit into the roles and stereotypes of their assigned gender.

By working to remove more preconceived notions about gender, one can live authentically without having to worry about which category they are/have to be placed into. At best, only extremely severe cases of gender dysphoria, as in the classic born-in-the-wrong-body narrative, would persist. At worst, medical intervention still remains for sufferers of GD. For such individuals, "fixing society" as described above could potentially contribute much more to an individual's wellbeing, without the use of drugs with risks and side effects while potentially avoiding the problem of "forced sterilization" if legal gender no longer matters in social interaction. Ultimately though, my personal wish is that both society and the individuals can work together to make trans lives better without having either to bend their back politically for the other party. Regardless of how one identifies, I strongly believe that they should never feel pressured to medically transition or undergo any procedures due to discrimination, lack of acceptance in society, or an expectation to "pass". This means that for those who still would identify as trans, I hope that cases of social regret no longer occur.

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Glossary of terms
AMAB – Assigned Male At Birth
AFAB – Assigned Female At Birth
Cisgender – A person whose gender identity corresponds with that person's sex assigned at birth
Depressive episode – Symptoms of depression even if not clinically diagnosed with depression
SRS/GRS – Sex / Gender Reassignment Surgery
Gonadectomy – Removal of sexual reproductive organs
Pre-operative – Individuals who have not undergone SRS but indicated their desires to go through SRS. (Ho et. Al, 2018, p. 54)
Post-operative – Individuals who have undergone SRS.
Non-operative – Individuals who have not undergone SRS and indicated would not go through SRS. (Ho et. Al, 2018, p. 54)

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Pioneer Road (2021) 1: 80-83

The Singaporean Identity: Cultural or Global?

Jian Jingying

"Discover a wondrous world where nature meets retail" the advertisements crooned, earning itself a scoff. The fool that I was, I had given in to my baser Singaporean *kiasu*-ness (fear of missing out), travelling across Singapore for no better reason than to check out what had been the talk of the town: a brand-new, upscale attraction that made all the waves online. "Nature" it was indeed – like a scene straight out of a postapocalyptic movie. As I stepped into Jewel Changi Airport, I discovered that I was not met with incessant chatter, bright lights or life, but rather a strange sense of desertion. Branded shops lined the glimmering, impeccable white corridors. Large signs, that once trumpeted the presence of big-name high fashion brands like Coach, Hugo and Pandora, now glowed quietly over shuttered doors. For the few that remain open, the single staff member on shift could often be spotted either gazing absentmindedly at the wide, empty walkways, or lazily wiping down the dining tables for what I suspected might've been the umpteenth time that day. The silence that had settled upon the area was so deafening that as I toured through the corridors of the retail sections, I found myself solely accompanied by the soft thumping of my shoes against the tiled floor. The thumps turn into clicks on polished wooden floorboards as the waterfall came into view – or lack thereof, for that matter. The imposing, 40-meter tall centrepiece, that once towered over the rowdy crowd jostling to grab rushed, haphazardly framed photos "for the gram," was now a slumbering gentle giant, biding till the end of time. Its spout, framed by the gentle sunlight streaming in from the large, expansive glass ceiling, stood silently over the large yet sparsely populated viewing gallery, its visitors now strolling around unhurriedly, no longer having to clamour for the best camera angles. Soft piano music, which would once have done wonders to accentuate the posh, swanky character of the shopping mall, now merely served to fill the silence in place of the thunderous roar of the waterfall, a further testament to the sleepy state of the attraction. If one did not pay attention to the carefully manicured façade of the mall, one might even mistake it for an old museum.

It is only too easy to dismiss it as just another economic casualty of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, one must be careful not to be fooled by such an illusion. Clean floors and neatly trimmed horticulture point to a continued investment in the maintenance and upkeep of such high-cost attractions, which speaks of a dogged belief in its value, whatever it may be. This is hardly justified, given the fact that when you take away the tourism and the fanfare, all that remains at Jewel Changi Airport is nothing more than an over-glamourized shopping mall, a mere imitation of the likes of Orchard Road and Marina Bay Sands.

This thus presents a striking dichotomy. As the front-facing attraction for foreign visitors to the country, one would expect the Singapore government to be more than eager to showcase what represents us as a country – our national identity. Yet, as in the case of Jewel, the "multicultural heritage" and "racial harmony" that are so enthusiastically touted at National Day parades every year, are nowhere to be seen, instead being replaced by meagre tokens of a global consumer monoculture. This leads one to wonder about the true value of our national identity in the face of globalisation. In our relentless pursuit for globalisation and international recognition, have we forsaken our own identity?

Common wisdom dictates that as a society moves to increase its embrace of globalisation, and thereby the global culture, the local culture becomes more vulnerable to dilution and eventual extinction. After all, a person can harbour only one "culture," in every sense of the word. This argument is echoed by Terence Chong (2003) of the *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, whom in his article "Chinese Opera in Singapore: Negotiating Globalisation, Consumerism and National Culture," recognised this particular phenomenon in scholarly literature as "deterritorialisation" (p. 450), which is defined as the loss of the natural relation of culture to geographical and social territories. Singapore, as a quintessential example of a cosmopolitan society as it is today, is no doubt a witness to deterritorialization. Amidst the heat of rising racial tensions in the early days of independence, the government of Singapore needed a way to keep the peace while simultaneously legitimizing their authority. This was precisely the appeal of the global culture: eclectic, universal, timeless, technical, and bereft of ethnic-based appeal (Chong, 2003, p. 449), the perfect common middle ground that the opposing racial groups could identify upon. The drive towards globalisation also coincided with economic goals necessitated by the nation-building process to ensure prosperity and security, another rallying point that the new government could unify the population towards. Increasingly, the global culture was integrated into the fabric of Singaporean society, and no longer was a Singaporean's sense of national identity confined within the boundaries of the ethnic community. As the HDB flats, skyscrapers and shopping malls went up, down went the kampungs, street performances and food stalls.

Evidently, globalisation and cultural identity have an antagonistic relationship, but is it really necessary a zero-sum game? I think there's something deeper going on as well. Certainly, anyone would agree that the Singapore today is a globalised nation. Yet, ask any millennial on what it means to be a Singaporean, and in the same vein that I doubt you'll hear a response like "chinese opera", "chapteh" or "kachang puteh", you probably don't expect "Netflix", "Playstation" or "Mcdonald's" either. While the latter category can be said to constitute a prominent part of a young Singaporean's lifestyle today, at least more so than the former, it does not necessarily form the whole experience. This alludes to an obvious distinction between the adoption of global culture, and the mere consumption of it. If Singapore is indeed only a consumer of global culture, there must be something more that defines its identity, one which simultaneously draws the line between its consumption of global culture and the adoption of it. As such, perhaps the more poignant question to ask would be how Singaporeans of the present age distinguish their national identity from global homogeneity?

In her article, "Globalisation and Singaporean Transmigration: Re-imagining and Negotiating National Identity," Lily Kong (1999), prolific Singaporean human geographer, writes that the common consensus on Singaporean-ess is defined by shared experiences, most notably a common culinary culture, the use of a unique language variety (Singlish), an ability to adapt to cosmopolitan contexts because of a multicultural societal background, as well as values like efficiency, responsibility, a law-abidingness, and a grasping, selfish attitude (colloquially termed "kiasu") (p. 581). While this definition of national identity is vastly different from that of our traditional ethnic cultures, it is also worth noting that all aspects of this definition can be identified and classified as one of two things: either remnants of the gung-ho spirit of Singapore's nation-building phase, or the result of an

amalgamation of said cultures, whose roots can be traced back to the individual cultures. In light of this perspective, not only has it failed to place globalisation and local culture at opposing ends of the spectrum, it can also be observed that the two have, in fact, worked in tandem to cultivate the modern sense of the Singaporean identity.

Chong (2003) asserts that Singapore's ethnic identities have indeed been lost to globalisation, yet Kong (1999) argues that hints of these cultures can still be found in the modern Singaporean identity. This begs the question, why do some elements of culture get retained, while others don't? What are the factors that determine this? I think the key difference lies in adaptability. This is best summed up by Kong (1999), who suggests that national identity is merely "the renegotiation of ethnic identity to fit [the society's] frameworks and worldviews" (p. 585). What globalisation entails is not an obligation, but rather a choice. When traditional practices fail to keep up with modern ways of living, the global culture naturally presents itself as the more appealing option. As a result, that part of the local culture no longer serves a practical relevance to everyday society and becomes increasingly difficult for subsequent generations to sustain. Eventually, it becomes replaced. This explains why the elements of our ethnic cultures which correspond to fundamental human processes, such as food and language, are markedly less vulnerable to replacement by global culture, and continue to thrive today. However, these too, like any other part of local culture, must continue to remain robust and evolve with the changing times to ensure its survival, or risk obscurity.

Turning my attention away from the centrepiece of the waterfall, I notice, for the first time, how the abundance of lush greenery that quietly line the sides of the spacious viewing gallery lend the space a welcoming yet graceful air of dignity. Despite Singapore never having a strong history with its original natural landscape (apart from the one legend of a certain majestic-looking animal being spotted amongst the Singaporean jungles), greenery has over the last few decades become a hallmark of Singapore's modern development and the source of its well-loved namesake, "Garden City". It serves as a reminder, in its own gentle way, that society is always changing, and with it too does national identity. While it is highly unlikely that the cultural markers of yesteryear will be able to ever have the same place in society as they did before, there is some reassurance to be found in the knowledge that the choices we make today to preserve, innovate, and adapt our culture to meet the changing times will, at the very least, ensure its continuity in a limited capacity. Perhaps, it is time for us to stay true to our Singaporean roots and be *kiasu*, to re-evaluate what we cherish as a society, before the "Singaporean-ness" we know today, too, becomes obsolete.

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Pioneer Road (2021) 1: 84-86

The Uncertain Future of Our Offshore Islands

Edsel Lim

The heartland of Yishun unfolded before my eyes as I gazed out from the top deck of The Spiral's observation tower. With the sun creeping down the horizon in the distance, the pond's surface glistened with a warm orange hue. Soft chatter could be heard as patients were wheeled out of the nearby Khoo Teck Puat Hospital by their loved ones to bask in the warmth of the sunset. Meanwhile, light footsteps of joggers and cranking of bicycle pedals engulfed my peripheral hearing. The Spiral perfectly encapsulated Singapore's urban design. Towering above The Spiral on the left bank of the pond was the relatively new Khoo Teck Puat Hospital, built in conjunction with the Yishun Pond Park with a renewed focus on sustainability and nature integration. With its darker colour scheme of pristine metallic grey and black, the hospital stood out like a sore thumb when viewed with the adjacent HDBs which sported a colour palette of brick red and lime green. The hospital's sky garden and overflowing greenery highlighted the juxtaposition between Singapore's 21st century sustainable urban planning and the more compact industrial 1980s cookie-cutter design of the HDBs. Singapore has undoubtedly come a long way since its humble economic beginnings. Like most nations, economic prosperity is often accompanied by a shift in urban planning from an industrial to a sustainable strategy. However, as much as the juxtaposition is representative of the progress Singapore has made thus far, it is also indicative of the challenges ahead. As Singapore reaches the projected land use saturation, our pursuit of sustainability seems to clash with the need to develop new spaces and land. Naturally, one cannot have a conversation about Singapore's land constraints without mentioning our mainland coastal regions and offshore islands—both of which have been serving as the default quick fix for our land constraint issues since independence.

Many solutions for land constraints have been put forth over the years. However, the development of our offshore islands is the strategy that is deeply embedded in our nation's history and a huge contributor to our current economic success. Despite its track record of proven benefits, decisions to develop offshore islands are not without resistance. The fate of Singapore's remaining offshore islands has always been shrouded in uncertainty in a battle between national interests and environmental prudence. One general camp seems to advocate the preservation of the islands by opposing developments while the other camp pushes for pragmatic developments in the name of national interests. Hence, in light of Singapore's shift towards sustainability, how may we balance potential island developments with environmental ethics?

In a study done by Nistor, Rahardjo, and Satyanaga (2019), development of our remaining offshore islands is feasible and pragmatic. The study employed the use of "favourability index" distribution of Singapore for the years 2014 and 2030. In 2014, the majority of mainland Singapore scored low on the favourability index due to the region already heavily developed with "industrial lands, residential areas, and infrastructure" (p. 9). Conversely, areas such as "Pulau Ubin and Pulau Tekong are classified under high and very high favourable areas" (Nistor et al., 2019, p. 11). High and very high scores of the index represent regions that have the potential to support new infrastructure and developments. Hence, Pulau Ubin and Tekong scored highly on the favourability for development index. This is mainly attributed to their natural undeveloped environments

which offer the potential to be cleared and redeveloped. Aside from the undeveloped lands of the islands, the coastal region of Pulau Ubin and Pulau Tekong holds the potential for further reclamation of land and new housings. It is even suggested by the study that Pulau Ubin and Pulau Tekong, which are near to mainland Singapore, may be joined and connected to the main island and could symbolise "a significant [role] for future development: new traditional neighbourhoods, research centres" (Nistor et al., 2019, p. 12).

Having said that, it is worth noting that the study is done mainly from a technical standpoint with little considerations for potential environmental repercussions. It can be surmised that the study only viewed the natural environment as a currency for development projects. Hence, while the numerical values from the indicators seem to point to the offshore islands as potential sites for developments, the holistic nature of an environment means that it is often insufficient to judge by a single metric. While the presence of open land and undeveloped areas contribute to a high favourability index, environmentalists would argue that such environmental spaces are instead exactly what needs to be preserved and not sacrificed for national benefits.

According to Lai, Loke, Hilton, Bouma, and Todd (2015), the degradation of the environment due to developments can be mitigated through ecological engineering to preserve the local biodiversity. Ecological engineering is an appealing choice which aims to offer the potential for preservation of species diversity where development is rigorous and inevitable. Artificial coastal structures such as seawalls that replace the original landscape can serve as surrogate habitats for coastal creatures. Even though the preservation of the original natural environment is evidently valued, it may not always be possible given the circumstances. With the majority of Singapore's shoreline already being man-made, it is paramount to come to terms with the adverse effects of the infrastructures and acknowledge their potential role in the "conservation of coastal biodiversity" (Lai et al., 2015, p. 4). Findings cited in this paper "suggest that armoured coasts could serve as a refuge for some species when their natural habitats are removed" (Lai et al., 2015, p. 5). Having said that, "converting the ubiquitous seawalls into surrogate habitats for coastal species is still at a nascent stage" in Singapore (Lai et al., 2015, p. 7). While we may not be able to turn back time on the adverse effects of coastal structures on the environment, ecological engineering offers an opportunity for redemption for these structures to take on a new lease of life.

The key takeaway from ecological engineering should be its underlying principle of making the best out of our current circumstances to maximise the ecological benefits of the choices at hand. Development and conservation are not mutually exclusive just as conservation does not necessarily equate to an absence of development. To continually defer and fight off developments may not be sustainable in the long run. Development of our offshore islands, while far from being a panacea, has appreciable benefits especially under the guiding principles of ecological engineering to mitigate environmental degradation. Prudent developments can enhance our economy and industrial output for essential goods such as masks during a pandemic. The ongoing COVID pandemic and political climate between the USA and China have highlighted the importance of self-sufficiency in various aspects of nation-building such as the economy, local productions and even domestic tourism. The outbreak of COVID cases in the cramped living quarters of foreign workers' dormitories has also exemplified Singapore's land constraints. Many

proposed solutions for land constraint involve employing compact space-saving building designs and urban planning. However, these solutions alone without an actual physical expansion of living spaces could serve to further increase our population density and exacerbate our vulnerability in a pandemic.

Our national interests seem to be piling up against conservationists. While we may not be able to control world events and our national needs, we can instead pre-emptively choose to take the first step to secure the interests of our local biodiversity. Instead of continual deferment, we should embrace the principles of ecological engineering and engage in early planning and discourse. Hence, when the time comes to sacrifice for our national needs, we would already have charted a clear future for our islands instead of leaving them in a state of limbo only to be frantically salvaged amid developments.

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Old Neighbours in New Waters: Singapore-Malaysia Economic Cooperation in the Light of COVID-19

Gee Hui Xun Damien

Built in 1994, the Raffles Marina Lighthouse is an asset proudly owned by the Raffles Marina Country Club. The 12-metre-tall structure is built at the end of a boardwalk, which snakes around the lagoon berth. The lagoon berth is a 220-metres by 120-metres area of water, where hundreds of boats are docked in neat rows. The water in the lagoon berth is calm, gently caressing the boats as they bob up and down rhythmically. Together with the low rumbling of the engines on the boats, the sound of the waves lightly splashing on the seawall formed a melodious rhythm. On the other side of the boardwalk is the open sea, where huge waves crashed into each other, sending loud roars that greatly disrupted the peaceful atmosphere in the lagoon berth.

The lighthouse stood tall over the open waters, like a guardian watching over the safety of the seafarers. The exterior of the lighthouse was pure and clean. Because it is white in colour, any stain or blemish can be easily spotted. However, not one spot of grime can be found on its pristine white surface. Even though it is exposed to the mercy of the elements, the lighthouse remains untainted.

Figure 1. Sun setting over the Raffles Marina Lighthouse

The lighthouse overlooks the Straits of Johor, where Singaporean and Malaysian waters meet. The sea was calm and peaceful, with Singaporean and Malaysian fishing boats reeling in their catch. There were Singapore Police Coastal Guard boats on alert, ready to neutralise any threat to our nation's waters. Upon spotting a suspicious sampan boat wandering around in our waters, the Coastal Guard boats immediately surrounded it and began their interrogations.

Although we are just separated by a body of water, the ideologies and management of Singapore and Malaysia are very different. One instance that demonstrated this is the Pedra Branca dispute, where both countries tried to claim sovereignty of the small island,

located about 40 kilometres off Singapore's east coast. Another occasion would be the water agreement dispute where Malaysia threatened to terminate the Johor Water Agreement before it was expired in 2061.

Even with such disagreements and disputes, both countries are still unwilling to cut ties with each other, and have even launched bilateral initiatives periodically, more so during this COVID-19 pandemic. One of such initiatives would be the Reciprocal Green Lane (RGL) and Periodic Commuting Arrangement (PCA) travel schemes (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020). Although this scheme has been temporarily suspended due to the resurgence in the number of COVID-19 cases, it still shows the effort that both countries put in to maintain strong bilateral relations. Since both countries do not agree with each other on many terms, why do they still bother to maintain strong economic ties with each other?

Hutchinson and Bhattacharya (2019) explore how Singapore and Malaysia are related structurally. Initially, both countries had different economic models. As their economic models changed and converged in the recent years, both countries slowly became more integrated. Hutchinson and Bhattacharya note the collaboration of authorities of both sides to initiate deeper economic exchange and relations, notably through water provision, sale of land to foreign investors, and ferry services between the two countries (Hutchinson & Bhattacharya, 2019, p. 3). This goes to show an increasing trend in the inter-connectivity between both countries. The trends on foreign direct investments (FDI), noted by their data, show that Singapore is the second-most important source of investment for Malaysia (Hutchinson & Bhattacharya, 2019, p. 7). These data support their argument that Singapore and Malaysia have become increasingly intertwined economically (Hutchinson & Bhattacharya, 2019, p. 9), and that both countries are significantly dependent on each other for economic growth.

Hutchinson and Bhattacharya provide a valid reason as to why Singapore and Malaysia, despite having differences, are still maintaining a peaceful relationship with each other. This is due to the fact that these two countries, being geographically close to each other, cannot afford to miss out on the advantages that this proximity brings. Both countries have adopted the "prosper-thy-neighbour" mentality, benefitting themselves while helping the other party to expand. However, Hutchinson and Bhattacharya's analysis solely focuses on the economic interdependence between Singapore and Malaysia, and they did not explore situations whereby both countries did not collaborate. The water agreement dispute that happened in 2019 is a good example of how economic relations had almost broken down due to political influences. Malaysia's then Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad claimed that Singapore was overcharging Malaysia for treated water, which was sourced from buying Malaysian water.[1] Singapore's Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong rebutted by saying that the price of water for Malaysia was already subsidised. This created tension between the neighbours as neither side was willing to back down. If tensions were to rise further, and the agreement was cancelled, both sides would be unable to sell water, treated or untreated, to the other party.

This article was written in 2019, before the COVID-19 situation. Hutchinson and Bhattacharya did not cover instances where both countries would have to depend on each

[1] Jaipragas, B. (2019, April 09). Singapore-Malaysia water dispute: Lee, Mahathir 'open' to arbitration. From https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3005377/singapore-malaysia-water-dispute-lee-hsien-loong-and-mahathir

other to sustain their economy. With the trade of goods and services disrupted and tourism coming to a halt, many South-East Asian economies have suffered the crippling effects of this pandemic. Malaysia and Singapore are no exceptions. Malaysia's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) shrank by 5.6 percent[1], while Singapore's GDP by 5.8 percent[2], hitting record lows after almost two decades. In order to recover quickly from this contraction of the economy, both countries need to re-establish their supply chain networks for trade and push for increased inter-connectivity.

Randhawa (2020) analysed the ASEAN economies and their role in the Global Value Chain (GVC) during the COVID-19 pandemic. His main argument is that the ASEAN nations must increase their partnership with each other and "boost their regional free trade agreements with each other and their partners beyond Southeast Asia" (Randhawa, 2020). He notes that during the COVID-19 pandemic, international trade has become more turbulent than ever, and the post-Covid period will create even more hesitation and dangers in international trade. Despite these issues, Randhawa points out that ASEAN nations "continue to draw increased investment from Northeast Asia and the West" (Randhawa, 2020). He also added that intra-ASEAN travel is essential for tourism and business (Randhawa, 2020), thus emphasising the need for "inter-regional connectivity" (Randhawa, 2020).

Randhawa's analysis of ASEAN during the COVID-19 pandemic clearly shows that both Singapore and Malaysia are economically involved with other countries from ASEAN as well as other parts of the world. Even though COVID-19 has cut off many trade routes and supply chains worldwide, Singapore and Malaysia continue to interact with the global economy independently. Both countries are able to attract substantial trade and investments based on their own capabilities, even during such complicated times. With trade and investments coming in from the rest of the world, it might seem like the partnerships between Singapore and Malaysia is not as significant in the recovery of their economies. Since both Singapore and Malaysia are able to rely on the rest of the world during this pandemic, it may undermine the economic ties between these two countries Would these circumstances then mean that Singapore and Malaysia's economic interdependence is not as significant as compared to economic ties with the rest of the world?

No doubt, being geographically close to each other would mean that there would be opportunities for both Singapore and Malaysia to prosper together, as what Hutchinson and Bhattacharya mention. There would definitely be instances where collaboration and interdependence are essential for the survival of both countries. However, as the world gradually becomes more interconnected, the economic gains from the global economy would be much more significant than that from each other. As what Randhawa points out, both countries are able to do well with the investments coming from other countries. Furthermore, the demographics of trade are constantly changing as the global economy

[1] Anand, R. (2021, February 11). Malaysia's GDP SHRINKS 5.6% in 2020, worst performance since 1998. From https://www.straitstimes.com/business/economy/malaysias-economy-shrinks-faster-than-expected-in-q4-on-tighter-covid-19-curbs

[2] Phua, R. (2021, January 04). Singapore economy shrinks a record 5.8% in a pandemic-hit 2020. From https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/gdp-singapore-economy-2020-q4-contract-covid-19-13888300

evolves. There will also be unforeseen situations that would cause many world economies to falter. This is when interaction with the rest of the world is paramount.

Indeed, the fact that Singapore and Malaysia are neighbours would mean that they would have to look to each other for growth and development. This fact would stand as long as these two countries remain geographically close to each other. Ideally, the proximity means that both countries could just rely on each other for goods and services and not depend on the rest of the world. In reality, that is seemingly impossible. Looking at the availability and diversity of resources available, interaction with the rest of the world would have a greater contribution to their economies. They should not just look at how they can strengthen economic relations with each other, but more optimally with the rest of the world. With COVID-19 still rampant, there is no telling when the global economy would return to its pre-COVID-19 state. However, as countries begin to explore alternative ways to expand and diversify their economy, the recovery rate would be accelerated. Likewise, both Singapore and Malaysia should look out for new ways to strengthen their economy, while maintaining the bilateral relations that they built.

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Pioneer Road (2021) 1: 91-93

Disability and the Education System: Educating the World's Second Largest Majority

Luo Xiaoyang

Imagine being born with a disability and put through your same schooling experience all over again. How different do you think it will be?

Inclusive education is a vision for "all children in the same classrooms, in the same schools" and for "real learning opportunities for groups who have traditionally been excluded" (*Inclusive Education*, 2019). The education system in Singapore tries to be inclusive as disabled students have the option of attending mainstream schools similar to their peers, yet this paradoxically exacerbates the division between them. So, how does having a disability affect one's educational experience?

In Singapore's education landscape, there exists a dual education that segregates students with and without disabilities. According to Zachary Walker from National Institute of Education (NIE) of Singapore and Shobana Musti-Rao from Pace University (2016), "Although many of the policies and procedures implemented in Singapore were meant to help build a country that could flourish and develop its human capital, these policies minimized opportunities and excluded individuals with disabilities from mainstream education" (p. 7). The exemption of students with disabilities from the mandatory mainstream education and recommending them to attend special schools distinguish mainstream education from special education. This learning system that demarcates students according to the presence of disabilities does not cultivate a homogeneous learning experience. Having a common educational route instead for all students of varying learning abilities creates opportunities for intermingling and interactions through shared experiences. The meaningful relationships that form teaches every student to look beyond each other's differing strengths and weaknesses, promoting greater social cohesion in schools.

Singapore's local school curriculum places a reasonable amount of emphasis on test results, which is not a conducive learning environment for every student, especially those with disabilities. While "mainstream teachers are encouraged and willing to support students with special needs in classes, emphasis on covering curricular content in preparation for the national exams do not provide adequate support to students with special needs" (Walker & Musti-Rao, 2016, p. 8). In large class sizes of 40-50, a single teacher struggles to attend to the needs of every student and give everyone an equivalent amount of attention. Subsequently, this overlooks students with disabilities who require more academic support in mainstream education. They often seek understanding and patience from their teachers in their learning. A holistic education system means every student's needs should be considered. There needs to be a readjustment in the local education construct such that students with disabilities can have a chance in succeeding within a system consisting of high-stake examinations (Walker & Musti-Rao, 2016). While Walker and Musti-Rao are admirable for advocating change in the local education system to promote inclusiveness, their research does not present a comprehensive viewpoint without accounting for personal experiences of disabled students. What do students with disabilities face when they are in school?

Every disabled student has at least an encounter feeling like an outcast studying in mainstream schools. Maysoon Zayid is a well-known American actress and comedian who has suffered from cerebral palsy since birth and gone through mainstream education in America with the firm support of her parents. She shared the discrimination she faced against her disabilities during college at a TED talk hosted in 2014. While into acting since young, she went on to enrol in the college theatre department but was never once cast. Even during her senior year when her college hosted a show "They Dance Real Slow in Jackson" that features the main character having cerebral palsy, she did not get the part as "they didn't think I could do the stunts" (TED, 2014, 7:08). "College was imitating life" (TED, 2014, 7:33). The social stigma against disability in schools mirrors the outside world.

After graduation, Maysoon's successful career did not come without discrimination. She lamented on her popularity online, "Suddenly my disability on the world wide web is fair game. I would look at clips online and see comments like, "Yo, why's she tweaking? Yo, is she retarded?" (TED, 2014, 11:02). Her unpleasant experiences exemplify online prejudice against people with disabilities. Today, the younger generation in schools constitutes an increasing majority of technology-savvy users. The anonymity of the internet allows for freedom of speech inadvertently giving greater autonomy for its users to exploit and post ignorant sentiments. These can otherwise taint the naïve minds of young students, negatively influencing their perception of disabilities and affect how they choose to face their disabled schoolmates.

Putting myself in the shoes of Maysoon, I would feel weighed down by the deeply rooted societal biases and discouraged to even see a change in societal perceptions. Having a disability significantly affects one's educational experience. With an option between struggling in mainstream schools and attending separate education in special schools, students with disabilities are disadvantaged either way. Therefore, Walker and Musti-Rao (2016) push for inclusive education. However, their proposal does not fit in with Maysoon's (2014) opinion and experiences with discrimination in her education journey. Going through mainstream education with a disability, the instances of social exclusion and feeling of humiliation are inevitable due to a deep-seated social stigma as suggested by the hurtful comments made on Maysoon's online platforms. Biasness, which could potentially be exacerbated by the advent of technology today, will continue to exist even with relevant structural reforms in the education system.

There needs to be a societal level of awareness for how students can learn in the same classroom with disabled schoolmates. Parents especially need to lead the change by replacing their social stigma with greater willingness to let their child mingle and be educated under the route of a common educational system, regardless of their child's abilities. Only then, every student of all abilities has a chance to learn and grow side by side together to reap the benefits of inclusive education. Who knows what kind of cohesive world it would be in the future when kids grow up to be inclusive and accepting of one another? What would you like your schooling experience to be if you were a student with a disability?

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Pioneer Road (2021) 1: 94-96

The Role of Visual Art During COVID-19

Nur Hikmah Fitriyah

Walking the familiar route to the National Gallery felt like a distant memory. Yet, upon entering its majestic gates, it is as if no time had passed since it was forced to close during the circuit breaker period. The air is still chilly, the space is still sparse, and the ambience is still peaceful. Apart from the occasional Safe Entry booths, it was like the COVID pandemic had not happened.

Stepping into the sacred gallery space, I first notice the soft footsteps on the polished wooden floors. The dim orange lighting directed at the paintings creates a sense of warmth and intimacy. Viewing the oil paintings arranged on the wall like a mosaic feels like revisiting an old friend. The granular, impasto texture of the paint coupled with the forceful strokes gives a sense of dynamic motion in the still image.

Calling it a day, I pack my belongings and bid farewell to the gallery. The thundering sound of rain and the harsh breeze that greet me is a stark contrast to the comforting warmth of the National Gallery. In the far distance along the Padang, a cyclist struggles in the pouring rain. The neon pink and reflective silver windbreaker and the large pink box on the back of the bicycle tell me that it is a FoodPanda rider. He couldn't have been older than 30, back hunched as he plugs away to deliver the food.

I couldn’t help but notice the polarising environments faced by the museum patrons and the FoodPanda rider. How is it possible that an institution with artworks worth millions coexists with struggling locals who break their backs to put food on the table? This prompted me to wonder whether art is merely a form of commodity - an exclusive luxury that is inaccessible to those who are grappling to cope with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Can the visual arts play a broader role in society during the pandemic than merely a self-indulgent form of leisure?

In the article “Elitism Prevails in American Art Museums,” Sam Ellefson (2020) explores the contributing factors to the perception of elitism in art institutions. He argues that American art institutions often promote themselves as a place of high culture, where “people who do feel comfortable in [art institutions] are there because they naturally belong to a certain level of society” (Ellefson, 2020). Conversely, it also implies the misconception that the layman is not fit to engage with and appreciate art. This sense of inferiority can perpetuate, encouraging them to avoid going to galleries. Apart from feelings of inferiority, Ellefson also argues that people of low socioeconomic status don’t go to galleries simply because they cannot afford the time and money, unlike those of high socioeconomic status. He emphasises how low-income families cannot afford to “use [one’s] disposable income on museum tickets before [their] basic needs are met” (Ellefson, 2020). The inaccessibility of art institutions to the low-income population then leads to the notion of exclusivity and elitism.

Ellefson’s argument applies to Singapore’s context, especially in this time of social and economic upheaval. The economy has been a hostile environment, where fresh graduates find it challenging to gain employment, workers receive pay cuts, and retrenchment rates rise (Phua, 2020). Who are these people that are most affected? In *Today Online*, Awang and Lee (2020) reported the struggles fresh graduates face when securing a job during the

pandemic. Given the current bleak economic situation, fresh graduates entering the workforce are forced to lower their job expectations, with many resorting to short-term employment such as internships and odd jobs (Awang & Lee, 2020). The economic plight is not limited to fresh graduates. Seasoned workers, particularly in sectors most affected by COVID-19 such as tourism, are laid off. These graduates and retrenched workers make up part of the influx of degree holders working as food delivery riders, a job that is below the job scope of someone of higher education. Despite many safety nets put in place to provide financial support, some have unfortunately fallen through the cracks. In turn, they are turning to more laborious jobs such as delivery workers and cleaners, risking themselves to the virus simply to make ends meet with the paltry salary. While admission to the National Gallery is free for Singaporeans, there is still an opportunity cost when visiting galleries for leisure. It is then understandable that one is unable to afford the time to view art when it could be spent making a few dollars more for a rainy day instead. Their reluctance to visit galleries is also compounded by the misconception of art as exclusive and inaccessible. But does this mean that art has no place for the working class? How then can art still be relevant to them?

In “Singing Away the Social Distancing Blues: Art Therapy in a Time of Coronavirus,” Gupta (2020) argues that "visual arts make the unconscious conscious." That is, the process of art-making allows for the transfer of intangible emotions into a tangible product which can be shared with others. The artwork acts as a source of discussion with other people. Individuals can then share their personal view of the crisis while also taking comfort in the shared human experience in what he calls “collective healing” (2020). With the social distancing measures and self-isolation, art seems to be a way of strengthening human connections.

Art as therapy is relevant now more than ever. As we struggle to adapt to changes in lifestyle and work, we may feel a lack of control over our environment. The uncertainty of how the future will pan out can leave us feeling anxious and helpless. I firmly believe that art has the potential for catharsis. Taking a moment from our hectic life to make art can allow our mind to relax. Art as self-expression is not limited to trained artists. Anyone, regardless of artistic ability, can maximise the meditative trait of art-making.

Gupta (2020) manages to address the gap between art and the people that Ellefson (2020) highlights. By including the people in the art-making process, even the layman can reap the therapeutic rewards of art. However, both authors fail to bridge art as an institution with the masses. Instead, they suggest the emergence of two art communities. The first group consists of art institutions and their professionals. The second consists of those who share art as a source of support and solace. We can see this in Singapore. For example, collaborative artworks in art galleries usually only involve gallery patrons. In comparison, community artworks are often presented in void decks and shopping centres, rather than art institutions. It’s no wonder then that art institutions still appear to be inaccessible to the working class. How then can we blend the two?

Art is, no doubt, a powerful communication tool. Marginalised communities, whose voices are often muted, can easily share their stories through art. However, without a proper platform, there is limited reach. This is where art institutions can bridge the gap by partnering with struggling families amidst the pandemic. With given consent and

remuneration, it would be interesting to see the works created by them hung up in art galleries.

Imagine the work created by a student who shares his experience of studying in a single room flat with five family members during Home-Based Learning. What do you think the work produced by a lonely elderly, whose memory is slowly deteriorating from limited contact with the outside world, would look like? Now try picturing the work created by a child from a dysfunctional family, the feeling of walking on eggshells around the family during the circuit breaker. For most of us, we are fortunate enough to have difficulty imagining their struggles. Luckily, art allows us to gain insight into these experiences framed through the artist's lens.

By presenting the works of the marginalised in art galleries, the stories and message they hold can be shared to a wider audience. When hung next to treasured fine art, their works are elevated to a comparable status. This makes art dignifying and humanising as it gives a voice to the voiceless. As the artist, Joseph Beuys, once mentioned, "A total work of art is only possible in the context of the whole society" where everyone is a "necessary co-creator" (Harrison & Wood, 1992, p. 891). The stories of the pandemic should not be represented by the lens of the privileged. Thus, art collaborations between societal classes are important to depict a more representative image of society. After all, years down the line we will remember the pandemic not by statistics but by the stories and emotions conveyed through art.

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Do Singaporean Teens Build their Successes Through their Family's Wealth?

Tan Jia Min

Even the pouring rain cannot diminish the fascination of the site: the blinking lights of signals, the smell of exhaust fumes, the growl of the engines, the blaring horns, and the sound of tires grinding against the wet asphalt only make for an experience found nowhere else. In the ComfortDelgro Driving Centre (CDC), a row of forest-green chairs acts as the holding area where learners await the dreaded practical test. In neat, casual clothing and mandatory covered footwear, the guys and girls alike are trembling in their seats, twiddling their thumbs and whispering prayers. The name of a candidate is called, and a petite-statured girl in light-wash denim overalls responds. Her eyes light up as she meets her tester for the first time, an elderly man with snow-white hair and a kind smile. She knows she has hit the jackpot, as every instructor raves about how the oldest testers are the most lenient. Another learner on the test unfortunately does not share the same luck. Decked out in all black in addition to his relaxed posture, the driver gives off a 'cool-under-fire' vibe, with which he should pass the test with ease. His left hand glides over the shift stick, switching gears and disengaging the handbrake as he begins to skillfully manoeuvre his vehicle from its parked position. Unfortunately, he mounts the kerb while exiting his lot, a mistake which warrants an immediate failure. His face reveals his utter disbelief, both hands tugging on his bleached curls in comical frustration at his misstep.

The smorgasbord of emotions, extending from the extremes of elation to exasperation, pays testament to just how much rides on this one test. And not for no reason; for the road to earning one's license is long, taxing and most importantly, exorbitant. Yet, an abundance of learners still flock to these schools despite this cost deterrence, revealing the existence of a certain privilege given to these teenagers by their parents. For a country fueled by pragmatism, it isn't difficult to fathom why parents are willing to make this investment. Cars and the ability to drive are measures of social currency, and it is this same driving motivation to give their kids an edge above others that wills "kiasu" Singaporean parents to fork out fortunes, in a medley of aspects that range from higher education to overseas experiences. Slowly, it seems as though many triumphs of today's teenagers bank on their family's financial capabilities. This then begs the question: Do younger Singaporeans build their successes through their "birthright" advantages like a wealthy family background?

Today's society often conflates the concept of success with exceptional academic performance, on the premise that good grades and a higher level of education can lead to greater economic potential of an individual. This is supported by a longitudinal study conducted by Papageorge and Thom (2018), which delves into the influence of innate intelligence versus that of childhood SES (Social-economic Status) on academic achievements and therefore the ultimate economic success of US children. A key conclusion brought forth in their research paper is that being born to an affluent family drastically fades the causal relationship between inborn intellectual capabilities and the likelihood of completing college (Papageorge & Thom, 2018). While they acknowledge that it is plausible for those with favourable genetics to still achieve their utmost economic

potential without a college degree, they also suggest the opposing situation where these advantageous genetic factors simply cannot offset the lack of this crucial educational attainment when they enter the workforce (Papageorge & Thom, 2018).

The research propounds that a wealthy family background undermines the importance of inborn cognitive prowess in achieving academic success, in the form of earning a college degree. It is hence more difficult for poorer individuals to attain this degree, which the paper suggests is an integral key to economic success, as compared to their richer counterparts. In Singapore, this can be attributed to the capacity of the privileged to bear the expenses of tuition, which is well-known to cost a pretty penny. Furthermore, teenagers from rich families are also often spared from laborious responsibilities such as household chores and part-time jobs. They thus are able to divert all their attention towards their academics, a luxury which many from the lowest income brackets are unable to afford. As these effects snowball, a financially-disadvantaged individual may find himself falling further and further from his peers as he progresses to higher levels of education. Horrifyingly, this further validates that a divergence in economic status alone can be behind disparities in success among our nation's individuals.

It is difficult to deny that Singaporean youths do indeed hinge on their family's financial capabilities to reach their positions of success. That being said, Singapore is not a slave to these findings. Having long foreseen the problems of income inequality erecting barriers and hindering progress, Singapore prides herself in operating on the basis of meritocracy, which is a structure in which members of a community are selectively moved into "positions of success, power, and influence on the basis of their demonstrated abilities and merit" (Merriam-Webster, 2020). In a *Straits Times* article published in 2018, Abdul Hafiz cites Mr. Ong Ye Kung, the then Education Minister, as a strong proponent for what meritocracy can do for the progress of the country. The system has been effective in allowing a massive number of students from less fortunate backgrounds to overcome their circumstances, bringing up the statistics that the percentage of those at the very bottom of the socioeconomic ladder who move on tertiary education has increased from 50% to 90% (Ong as cited in Hafiz, 2018). 10% more of this expanding group of people have also received government financial aid to complete diplomas (Ong as cited in Hafiz, 2018). Despite the criticism it receives, Ong advocates that meritocracy remains the most appropriate model for Singapore's education landscape in response to social inequality.

Singapore as a meritocratic society challenges the extent of relevance of the journal study's claims (Papageorge & Thom, 2018) to our nation. Yet, due to the inherent flaws of the model, meritocracy is simply unable to disprove that inherited riches are indeed a driving factor of success. Such shortcomings are prevalent when dissecting the composition of students attending Singapore's "elitist" schools. Even as measures such as capping the proportion of affiliated students in secondary schools are implemented (Ong as cited in Hafiz, 2018), institutions such as Raffles Girls' School (RGS) and Anglo-Chinese School (ACS) still face a high SES-dominated populace. For instance, a RGS student, as a spokesperson for her peers, expressed that the move in campus from the lush neighbourhood in Orchard Road to Braddell in 2019 would allow them to better connect with the common folk of Singapore (Sholihyn, 2019), connoting an elitist standpoint that pervades the student body. ACS is known to be home to many wealthy kids, such that business connections and affluence are hallmarks of the school's culture (Chua, 2015). And

even as more low-income students begin to move into tertiary education, we still struggle to see a good representation of them in the "elite" pre-university schools. In 2015, Mr Chan Poh Ming, then principal of Raffles Institution, admitted that the academy is one that "largely caters to the affluent segment of the population" (Chan as cited in Teng, 2015, para. 1), crediting how meritocracy has been less effective than in the past. These bring light to the limitations of the system that we have yet to overcome.

Fortunately, Ong has also provided us with insights on how we can move away from relying on our privileges through various improvements. For example, he mentions that the structure needs to evolve "to tackle new challenges and move away from a narrow focus on past academic merit to recognise and celebrate a broader range of skills, talents and strengths" (Ong as cited in Hafiz, 2018). Although an affluent family background unequivocally places Singaporean teens in a better position to succeed than those who are not as well off, there are countermeasures put in place by the government to rectify such ramifications of social inequality. However, meritocracy in Singapore still has a long way to go, as it is after all, an inherently flawed system. Even as Ong promises to expand the scope of meritocracy, it is difficult to escape the fact that "merit" can be obtained more easily with the privileges of being born to a wealthy family. The ineffectiveness of the system can be traced back to the very injustice that meritocracy is trying to eradicate. Hence, we must first tackle this "entrenched" meritocracy. Yale Law School's David Markovits believes the solution lies in pushing for inclusivity in a nation's elite institutions (Markovits, 2020). Hopefully then, we can head in the direction we desire: for our youths to reduce reliance on their capital endowments as they work towards success.

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Pioneer Road (2021) 1: 101-103

Draupadi: A Contemporary Role-Model or a Fairy-Tale Heroine?

Vedika Sharma

The air is a heady mixture of palpable devotion and humidity. Even before one enters The Sri Mariamman Temple, the eyes are forced to marvel at the grandeur of the gopuram (the tower above the entrance), a finely detailed gateway enriched with brightly coloured idols of Hindu gods and goddesses. Boasting fine Dravidian architecture, the shrine is believed to be the oldest Hindu temples in Singapore. Tiny gold bells arranged on the large doors ring as one enters. The open courtyard is lined with ornate sculptures depicting scenes from various religious texts. Although looming high-rise buildings can be seen over the low peripheral walls, one doesn't notice them amidst the solemn sound of the aarti and the inexplicable serenity in the air.

The temple's central shrine seats Goddess Mariamman, the deity of rain and epidemic diseases, enrobed in intricate attire, ameliorated by the specks of gold in her dress. The adjacent shrine is dedicated to Draupadi, surrounded by her five husbands and presided over by Lord Krishna. The glimmer in the statue's eyes conceal the ordeal Draupadi had faced. The pivotal episode in her lore was when her husband waged and later lost her in a game of dice and she was dragged by her hair into open court, where a perpetrator tried to strip off her sari. This insult and humiliation acted as the trigger of the great epic Mahabharata. After she was vindicated by his death at the eighteen-day battle at Kurukshetra, she walked unharmed through fire to prove her chastity.

Draupadi's triumph is reenacted each year by disciples as a culmination to the month-long celebrations of Theemithi (Diesel, 2018). Around 4,000 devotees walk barefoot across an eight-metre-long pit of glowing red embers to emulate the virtue and integrity embodied by Draupadi. Although most believe that followers walk to prove their devotion and to have their desires fulfilled by the goddess, the most intriguing rationale is that since only men can walk, it can be a form of penance for the cruel and humiliating acts inflicted upon Draupadi by men.

The Sri Mariamman Temple is a dedication to Goddesses Draupadi and Mariamman whose legends often portray them as independent, fiercely protective women. They are exploited and mistreated by men but eventually avenged themselves with courage and integrity. This is juxtaposed by a Hindu society where the traditionally patriarchal status of women grants them negligible independence or identity separate from their fathers and husbands (Diesel, 2002). Can the Hindu Amman goddesses be considered role models of female empowerment?

In the article "Understanding Draupadi as a Paragon of Gender and Resistance," Motswapong (2017), a Senior Lecturer at the University of Botswana specialising in Hindu studies, analyses how the feminist concept of subversion is used in Draupadi's narrative to undermine patriarchal institutions. Motswapong (2017) defines subversion as "to take oppressive forces and turn them into something that challenges the oppressor." This becomes apparent when Draupadi consents to polyandry, marrying the five brothers, the Pandavas, as well as when Duhasana, the man her husband has lost her in a game of dice to, tries to disrobe her. During that incident, she subverts the concept of equating feminine honour with a virgin or inviolate body. She does not allow the apparent 'impurity' of her body because of being harassed by a man be equated to dishonour to her or to her family.

Motswapong (2017) also substantiates the idea that although polyandry was common at that time, men have humiliated Draupadi by questioning her virginity and integrity. Despite these experiences, Draupadi is not in the least deterred and continues to display her individuality and unyielding determination for justice, hence becoming an empowering character.

This article employs subversion as a theoretical framework, a part of feminist theory to aid the argument on how Draupadi is an empowering role model as she is able to subvert the commodification of women. She is aptly described as "the first feminist of Hindu Mythology" by Motswpong (2017), who gives many incidents from the Mahabharata to substantiate this claim. The article also mentions that her name comes from her father Drupad's, but to gain her own identity she changes her name to Panchali, which further corroborates her desire for individuality. Although the author is justified to note how Draupadi is resilient and determined, Motswapong (2017) does not mention the undue emphasis on virginity, repression of women's sexuality, and unrealistic standards of beauty in the epic. Consequently, while attempting to decipher whether or not Draupadi and other Mother Goddesses are idols of female empowerment, one asks another essential question: Who else is a role model for female empowerment and why do we need more such role models?

In her *Forbes* article on the importance of female role models, Warrell (2020) references a study by Lockwood et al. (2004) which highlights how women need role-models due to the gender biases, institutional barriers, and negative stereotypes they have long faced. Not seeing other women who look and act like them succeeding in areas of interest to them—particularly in the field of STEM and politics—discourages girls from pursuing such careers. This situation can be ameliorated by shining a spotlight on diverse successful women, of the past and present, which can help us break internalised myths about power being intrinsically masculine.

Although Warrell's (2020) article focuses on professional role-models, this "seeing is believing" principle can be applied to socio-cultural problems too. When women and young girls, especially those with limited access to media where more mainstream role-models like politicians or sportswomen are glorified, see goddesses they worship oppose patriarchal forces for justice and to maintain their individuality, they may be motivated to do the same. For instance, during the auspicious fire-walking on Theemithi, an act of veneration, only men can walk. Are there enough women seeing themselves in such a position of spiritual empowerment?

Warrell's (2020) emphasis on the importance of female role-models and how they positively impact young women and Motswapong's (2017) portrayal of Draupadi as a fierce woman struggling for identity and vengeance combine to give a unique view of the Amman goddesses as paragons of female empowerment. They break patriarchy's shackles of equating virginity with feminine honour, all while keeping village interests at heart, being independent from male consorts, and not giving heed to gender relations--admirable qualities which young women can emulate. Both Draupadi and Mariamman were humans and later elevated to divine statuses due to their independent and determined character. In their respective lores, they menstruate and give birth. All these aspects of their myths make them more relatable to women today. However, they have not experienced more modern problems like social media's unrealistic beauty standards and other such pressures

that women today face. Keeping in mind her times, Draupadi was a holistic role-model; she, however, lacks the currency that a contemporary role-model can offer. Perhaps, if Draupadi was placed in today's context, we would find her marching in candle vigils and representing women's rights movements. But until bringing mythical goddesses to life is possible, we must give prominence to women currently in leadership roles to inspire us and serve as role-models to young women globally.

Note to Readers: 'Not Like Other Goddesses: A Look at Contemporary Role Models', an article by the author on goddesses like Draupadi who embody feminism can be read here.

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The Costs of Always Trying to Say Things the Right Way

Nurin Asyura Binte Rosle

I braced myself as I stared at the face of a new blank document. The screen was bright, empty and more than a little terrifying. My hands hovered over the keyboard as I waited for divine inspiration to strike. I let my mind roam freely in order to feel the rub of strange ideas, but this was swiftly accompanied by a background hum of doubts. “Is this idea good enough?” I thought. I quickly repressed this doubt and pushed my fingers into the cushioned keypads to produce a sentence. “But wait, isn’t there a better word or phrase for this?” my inner voice retorted. I hastily pushed the delete button aggressively to start over. My experiences with writing always imbue a feeling of “stuckness” or the vague but nagging notion that something is not quite right. Writing should not be this hard, should it?

Observing my writing practices, I am forced to confront the painful truth that this habit of editing scrupulously as I write has rippled out silently across various mediums of my writing - from essays, to reflections, to the mere day-to-day notes. It strikes me that these written, externalised versions of my thoughts were often simpler renditions of my more complex and compelling internal thoughts. They did not reflect how I truly felt. Was this due to the lack of skills or was it something else? What actually drove this need to edit to no end? How did this affect me, my thinking process, and my writing? What is the cost of always trying to say things the right way?

Juan Enriquez (2021), a Mexican American academic, discusses how technology changes our sense of right and wrong in his TED Talk. He highlights the era of polarisation we are living in right now. In regard to having an opinion about a subject, you either have to be on this side (“right”) or the other side (“wrong”) with no middle ground for you to even consider. There isn’t just this overarching pressure to be on the “right” side, but to be on the “right” side wholly and unequivocally. Anything lesser than an unwavering conviction will have you cancelled. Interestingly, he adds that, “Right and wrong changes, and is now changing at exponential ways.” Hence, confining oneself to a particular side, with no effort to bridge the different perspectives together leads to no discussion and no learning.

This approach has fostered a culture of self-censorship because of the high costs to having the “wrong” opinion. The drive to feel accepted or part of a group is a fundamental aspect of the human condition, but at the same time this undermines our ability to pursue the lives we want to create when the two notions don’t necessarily align. Worrying about having the “right” opinions erodes our sense of self by causing us to pay less and less attention to what makes us *us* - our unique talents, beliefs and values - and instead conform, at least externally, to what others think. Yet, it’s a beautiful thing that we need not look arduously to know that we are, and will always be, intrinsically unmatched. Two people can be in the same year of study, at the same school, with the same family background and yet, they can hardly be more different. To begin with, we are all born with distinct personalities that play a huge hand in shaping how we interact with similar experiences. As a result, our own perspectives, attitudes, and goals emerge from these unique interactions with the world. Even identical twins, who share many commonalities, have unique fingerprints. It is virtually impossible to find the mirrored version of ourselves,

so how can we not think that what we bring to the world is completely original and incomparable?

Self-censorship affects us personally and it will eventually extend to our work. Our writing, for instance, will lack a strong personal voice, and instead portray a selective display of opinions that do not seek to challenge existing problematic conceptions. What this does is assist in maintaining the status-quo. However afraid we are of other people's opinions, we must ultimately ask ourselves: What is the greater risk? Letting go of what other people think or letting go of opportunities to effect change by staying true to how we feel, what we believe in and who we are?

My insistence on a better word or a better phrase was not necessarily about maintaining the status-quo. It seemed to come from an entirely different and not easily accessible place—that was until I found an article by Curran and Hill (2018) titled "Perfectionism Is Increasing, and That's Not Good News." They expressed that "Young people are seemingly internalising a pre-eminent contemporary myth that things, including themselves, should be perfect." Yet, the indisputable truth is that perfection is an impossible goal. Curran and Hill (2018) explained that those who become preoccupied with it inevitably set themselves up for failure and psychological turmoil. Their obsession with demonstrating their worth through flawless performance makes them ruminate chronically about their imperfections, brood over what should have been, and experience burnout, stress, and depression on higher levels.

The energy behind perfectionism comes largely from a desire to avoid failure. What others see as opportunities to grow, perfectionists see as opportunities to fail. Living this way not only incurs a personal cost on our mental and physical health as mentioned by Curran and Hill (2018), but it goes beyond and affects our creative thinking process as well by handicapping us from trying in the first place. Truth is, everyone feels doubt and fear, others are just better off because they manage them differently. I believe there are two types of doubt: self-doubt, which is paralysing, and idea-doubt, which can be energising. Perfectionists cannot extricate self-doubt from idea-doubt because we perceive the quality of our work to be an exact reflection of our self-worth. To us, bad ideas are a result of our personal inadequacies. This stunts our creative thinking process as it shuns us from wanting to explore and toy with different propositions. Perfectionists also have the debilitating habit of viewing their performance from a position of deficit; they focus on what is bad and what is lacking. Although it would be far more beneficial to appreciate our existing ideas, albeit flawed, as a stepping stone towards refinement, we criticise them immediately. We do not see the value in patiently nurturing existing ideas because it means having to admit that they are not good enough in the first place, and this hurts our self-worth. Instead, we beat them down, erase them and force ourselves to conjure a flawless idea. This preoccupation with flawlessness hinders us from realising that the ones who try the most have lots of bad ideas, and they fail a lot, but it's also what makes them great because they utilise these failures as opportunities to learn and grow.

When we are overly consumed with always trying to say things the right way, we are paying a huge price on our potential, our ability to develop new ideas and our capability to externalise these ideas adeptly and profoundly through writing. We waste the privilege to authentically and artistically express who we are when we overvalue other people's judgements. We stop working with more purpose and meaning towards change. We get

anxious, stressed, and exhausted from constantly pushing ourselves to perform at a level that's nothing short of excellence. Lastly, we hinder ourselves from trying, learning, and growing from mistakes that will only make us better, if only we had given ourselves the permission to fail sometimes.

Embarking on this intellectual quest has been an eye-opening journey for me. I have avoided acknowledging these long-standing issues that have impacted my thinking and writing. Although I was hoping that a better, less crushing truth exists, it has become disturbingly clear that my issues were rooted in self-doubt and perfectionism. As cliche as it sounds, you really need to start believing in yourself. Once you have a firm sense of who you are, what your values are, what your unique capabilities are, you will no longer be deterred by others or by failure because you know that they do not define you. Of course, the fear of being rejected and the fear of failure will always simmer beneath. Afterall, we are only human. But it also does not mean that it cannot be subdued. To harness and conquer these fears, it takes conscious decision after decision to be kind to yourself and allow your already perfect, authentic self to shine. Eventually, this newfound confidence will make your writing process easier and more enjoyable, because this time, you actually believe in what you write. Breaking out of your comfort zone may feel uncomfortable at times, but if it's the beginning of a journey towards self-acceptance and fulfilling your highest potential, then isn't that worth a bit of discomfort?

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Pioneer Road (2021) 1: 107-110

Debunking Defiance:
The "Invisible Strings" that Influence Rule Compliance

Ho Yong Qing

Nestled within several housing estates and schools, Sunshine Place has its share of loyal visitors despite its lack of typical attractions and vibrancy of a full-fledged shopping mall. The experience I had while visiting the mall could be described as disorientating. Despite the lack of air-conditioners, the mall did not feel uncomfortably warm. The familiar procedure of taking out our smartphones and scanning QR codes at entry points of malls seemed to have ceased to exist. People were streaming in from the main entrance, side entrances and the carpark without any form of resistance. Standing outside the bakery, a pleasant scent of freshly baked bread was quickly replaced by a strong mechanical stench from the nearby construction works, before being completely overwhelmed by the asphyxiating fumes of second-hand smoke ironically floating around "No Smoking" signs. The incessant clanking of cookware lured me to the food court, its entrance oddly crowded with posters on safe-shopping measures in the four national languages. Naturally, diners in the food court had their masks removed but upon closer inspection, a group of three ladies in Polo T-shirts that read "B.E. Seafood House" were preparing ingredients and chatting with one another with visible smiles on their faces as their masks were crumpled below their chins. With little time to process the horrors of improperly masked food stall employees, the sound of a horn from behind demanded my full attention. Visitors were perilously crossing the busy roads that stood in between the mall and their homes, putting the prominently displayed pedestrian crossing prohibition signs in utter embarrassment.

The blatant nonchalance to rules and regulations was unsettling, as if the numerous prohibitive signs and information posters plastered around the mall were nothing more than decorations. While it is normal to chance upon a few rogue individuals violating rules once in a while, to witness such defiance time and again in an unassuming mall was surprising yet insightful. We can justify rule-breaking behaviours with the transgressor's "poor character and upbringing," but the observations made may allude to the appeal of non-compliance to rules that perhaps many of us are susceptible to. To maintain order in society, it is thus important to understand the mechanics behind rule breaking. Specifically, do individual characteristics or environmental factors play a bigger role in affecting an individual's level of compliance to rules?

To answer this question, van Kleef et al. (2015) reviewed recent existing literature regarding norm-violation and proposed a framework that depicts the interplay of four social cognitive factors that eventually determines the likelihood of an individual violating rules. These factors are broken down into two groups, antecedents and consequences, which exert a unique influence on norm-violating behaviours. Antecedents of norm-violation refer to the individual and social factors that encourage individuals to go against rules, such as the power that an individual possesses and learning that other people also violate such rules. For instance, individual antecedents such as believing that the pandemic situation in Singapore is well under control may have led to the employees breaching the mandatory mask-wearing rule. As for social antecedents, jaywalkers could

have witnessed others violating the pedestrian crossing rule consistently and successfully, thus becoming motivated to do so.

Following this, the consequences of violating rules, characterised by the violator's own emotional responses and other onlookers' responses, exert their influence on the likelihood of future violations (van Kleef et al., 2015). They do so through forming a "feedback loop" that either "self-perpetuates" or "self-defeats" future rule-violating behaviours (van Kleef et al., 2015, p. 28). An example of an intrapersonal response fuelling future rule violations would be being rewarded for breaking rules, such as reaching home earlier as a result of jaywalking. Interpersonal responses such as the public condoning of smokers in non-smoking areas may motivate smokers to continue smoking in prohibited areas.

Through the framework proposed in this article, one may understand why prohibitory signs achieved little in preventing individuals from breaking rules. These signs were ineffective in modifying antecedents and evoking undesirable consequences that serve to deter people from breaking the stated rules. Subsequently, through analysing rule-breaking behaviours on both the individual and social level, the framework adopts a balanced view where both individual characteristics and environmental influences are considered. The equal weightage assigned to each of the factors in the framework also implies the authors' stance that internal and external factors are equally important in the analysis of transgression.

On the other hand, Kotabe et al. (2016) proposed basic disorderly visual cues in the environment as the cause of rule violation instead of the "complex social reasoning" process that individuals engage in upon exposure to such cues (pp. 1713-1714). Through their experiments, disorderly visual stimuli (as shown in Figure 1) were found to increase cheating behaviours in both cheaters and non-cheaters. Two perspectives were proposed as mechanisms behind this phenomenon. Firstly, the visual processing of disorderly visual stimuli demands more cognitive resources as compared to normal stimuli, resulting in greater depletion of self-regulation capabilities in individuals. As compliance to rules requires a certain level of self-control, individuals exposed to disorderly visual stimuli would experience a higher incidence of rule breaking. Second, the activation of metaphors of disorder and lack of control over the environment primed by visually disordered stimulus may also lower an individual's drive to maintain self-control and compliance to rules, thus increasing the likelihood of rule-violating behaviours.

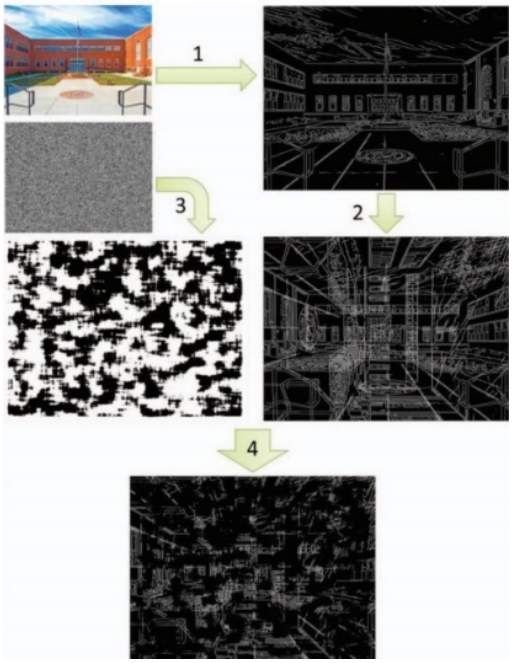

Figure 1. The construction of a disorderly visual stimulus

As compared to van Kleef et al. (2015) who posited social cognition capabilities of humans as the main determinant, Kotabe et al. (2016) supported the notion that environmental factors, specifically the visual quality of the environment, play a bigger role in determining rule-violating behaviours in individuals. In fact, the ineffectiveness of prohibitory signs can also be attributed to the visual disorder present in Sunshine Place. For instance, multiple areas of the mall have been cordoned off for construction work using metal boards, traffic cones, and warning tapes. Furthermore, the ceiling of the mall was insufficiently covered, exposing dirty pipes and messy wirings to visitors.

While findings from Kotabe et al. (2016) account for the repeated violation of rules observed at Sunshine Place, not all visitors end up breaking rules despite being exposed to the same messy environment. Kotabe et al. (2016) imply that individuals are mercilessly controlled by their environment, which may not always be the case. As outlined by van Kleef et al. (2015), individual differences are likely to interact with environmental factors, giving rise to the variance in behaviours observed. As such, considering only one of the factors while understanding transgression would offer a severely misrepresented interpretation of the situation. For instance, the over-emphasis on individual factors would lead to quick negative judgements of a person's character, while claiming that environmental factors are the only causes of rule violation implies that individuals bear no responsibility for breaking rules.

Regardless of the degree of externality of these factors, individuals cannot avoid assuming personal responsibility for their rule-violating behaviours as the decision to violate rules is mostly a conscious choice that individuals make. Nonetheless, it is evident that individuals are often subjected to unconscious influences during the decision-making process as a result of personal, social, and environmental factors such as those raised by van Kleef et al. (2015) and Kotabe et al. (2016). Rather than determining which factors exert a stronger influence on rule-violating behaviours, it may be more beneficial and vital for individuals to be aware of these "invisible strings" that are imperceptible yet important in

determining one's behaviours. By gaining insights about one's own rule-breaking behaviours, individuals can better prevent future rule violations through monitoring and minimising the influence that individual and environmental factors have over their rule-violating behaviours, much like enacting the self-defeating cycle posited by van Kleef et al. (2015). Finally, raising awareness of such factors also aids in building a more benevolent society in which transgressors are treated with compassion and without prejudice, providing a benign and supportive environment for rehabilitation.

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Pioneer Road (2021) 1: 111-113

Emotions, Illusions

Lee Yi Fan

While beams of light pierce through the body of water which appears to be in a light shade of manganese blue, fishes of various colours and sizes are swimming in all directions in the tanks in S.E.A. Aquarium. While the long fin bannerfish, marked by their signature black, white, and yellow stripes, are certainly the most eye-catching, especially when they move about in shoals, darting in and out of the sea anemones to make a surprise appearance sporadically are the little, lovely clownfish. Dozens of vibrant colours that look dissonant next to each other somehow add a tint of harmony to the mesmerising beauty of the underwater world.

A sudden, instinctive jerky movement directs all attention to a moray eel that would have otherwise blended in extremely well among the rocks with its camouflage. Contrary to its menacing looks characterised by its long, slimy body which resembles a serpent, it twists and turns defensively from side to side as a three-inch long neon goby constantly approaches it and sucks on its skin—in particular, the region surrounding its gills. Despite the disturbance from time to time, the eel remains in the same spot, showing no signs of repulsion from its unwavering stalker. While it definitely seems like a one-sided obsession that is underappreciated by the scary-looking eel, the way it stays calm and composed suggests otherwise. What if it is getting its own body rid of the parasites which the neon goby feeds on, and they are just helping each other out? What if the moray eel actually likes the company of its little friend?

Schooling in the middle of another tank are the glass catfish that seem bleached of colour. The skeletal frameworks beneath their transparent skin are the only feature of them that is conspicuous enough to distinguish them from the water. Against a background of sheltering seagrasses, there is a highly dense area designated for these ghost-like creatures that keep minimal space between one another. The glass catfish's wariness of other fishes becomes prominent as they sway gently within their territory and remained unbothered by their tank-mates, who ride the flow and roam through every corner of the space they have. Perhaps timidity is part of the glass catfish's temperament, and they are taken aback by the peculiarity of the other species' appearance—in the same way xenophobic people can become intimidated by others who have a different skin colour. Consumed by insecurity, swimming in schools could be their way of asserting dominance in an attempt to protect themselves.

After some scrutinisation, it felt almost natural to attribute mental states to the fishes, from basic emotions like fear to something as complicated as love-hate relationships. Maybe it was just fact intermingled with fiction that made up the whole story that I came up with, but it makes me wonder how people could have come to believe that fishes, or in general, animals are sentient beings that are capable of perceiving and feeling things as we humans do. Is there indeed a firm foundation to support the hypothesis that animals do feel?

Historian Peter Harrison (1991) suggested that because animals often exhibit human-like responses in the face of adverse stimuli, people tend to infer from these "pain behaviours" that the animals must have the ability to feel pain (p. 25). Nevertheless, animals' "pain behaviours" do not necessarily translate into the perception of pain, because

with the help of programming, even robots can demonstrate self-preservation, and yet its behaviours "would convey nothing about what it was feeling, for robots, on most accounts, can feel nothing" (Harrison, 1991, p. 27). Besides, "pain behaviours" could simply be a trait that is favoured by natural selection. It is possible that they are just adaptive instincts which animals inherited from past generations, and nothing more than reflexive, automatic responses to the environment (Harrison, 1991, p. 27).

The significance of Harrison's work is this: people could have arrived at the conclusion that animals can feel based on clues that hint at the possibility of animals having mental states. Inferences were made based on how humans decipher each action taken by the animals, for instance, the assumption that an animal refuses to approach or runs away from another vicious-looking creature because of fear. Though the reasoning sounds completely logical, another noteworthy point is that, in philosophical terms, there could exist tons of idiosyncratic possible worlds, each obeying the laws of logic and yet different from one another in its own way. Human beings learn to recognise their own external manifestation of various mental states through experience, and with such knowledge, they tend to decode others' actions in terms of emotions which they believe would lead themselves to behave in the same way in the same situation. However, just because we are projecting our own mental states to animals does not give them the ability to feel. In other words, imposing our opinions on animals does not really help us understand them better; by doing so, we are merely looking through a filter that we created ourselves.

According to Hal Herzog (2017), a professor of psychology at Western Carolina University, "Human beings are natural anthropomorphizers, meaning we naturally tend to [ascribe] all kinds of thoughts and meanings to other things in our lives" (as cited in Rebolini, 2017). Furthermore, based on the findings of a study conducted by Epley and colleagues in 2008, individuals who felt lonely and sought social interactions described their pets more often with words such as "thoughtful, considerate, sympathetic," suggesting their little companions were capable of providing emotional support (as cited in Rebolini, 2017). Arianna Rebolini (2017) a writer of *The Atlantic*, built on this idea and claimed it is possible that lonely pet owners could have taken the initiative to engage their pets in conversations because "they like to believe the animals understand."

Rebolini's view of the topic provides us insight into how human's beliefs could have stemmed from their own needs. In times of hardship, most, if not all, people would need someone to talk to in order to bring closure to the negative feelings that have been building up inside. However, people do not always get what they want, no matter how desperately they yearn for it. In cases where this need of theirs becomes overwhelming, they have no choice but to resort to creating an imaginary friend— in this case, animals or more specifically, pets—that they believe could understand what emotions people are trying to express through words and relate to people. By doing so, they now gain an advantage of having an emotional outlet which is essential for their mental wellbeing; but the fear of losing something this important to them could also undermine humans' rationality. Even in the face of evidence that prompts reconsideration, chances are humans would probably still retain their position which supports the claim that animals do feel, since changing their attitudes towards animals would mean finding themselves back at square one and having no one to turn to.

Although humans do have control over what they want to believe in, and no one should judge them for having a different opinion, getting too immersed in imagination to the point where people just shut out every contrary opinion they come across is not helpful in improving their understanding of the world. The wise adage "What is now proved was once only imagined" by English poet, William Blake (n.d.) certainly stresses the importance of utilising our imaginative powers. But the first half of it also implies that we need evidence to back up the theories that we came up with before they can be considered as truth. Therefore, because of the lack of empirical evidence as well as how humans' emotions could have clouded their judgments, it is safe to conclude that humans' imaginations do not provide a firm foundation for us to believe that animals are indeed sentient beings that feel as we humans do.

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Pioneer Road (2021) 1: 114-117

The Role and Constraints of Heritage Spaces: The Case of Ann Siang Hill Park

Lloyd Jacob Ng

The trendy Ann Siang Road is known for its restored heritage terraces, restaurants, and boutiques. At the top of Ann Siang Road is the entrance to Ann Siang Hill Park. This park is a quiet enclave amidst the hustle and bustle of lively Chinatown. Locals and tourists can meander through vividly coloured shophouses and gain valuable insight into the lives of Singapore's early immigrants.

Known to be Chinatown's highest point, the park is a surprising oasis of green. Upon walking inside, the sounds and sights of nature come alive: chirps and echoes of birds can be heard coming from the tall trees; a flight of butterflies and dragonflies dart around the luscious green bushes. However, in the near distance, the sound of construction work interrupted the peaceful ambience. Past the greenery, the park is surrounded by a concrete jungle. Rows upon rows of shophouses are lined up beside the park with many skyscrapers towering behind them. Most of the shophouses are antique furniture shops, art galleries or hip cafes and bars. A few of them display Victorian architecture, while some showcase significant Chinese influences.

The harmonious blend of architectural styles shows the conservation efforts of old shophouses in Singapore. Although many of the shophouses have gone through elaborate reconstruction and found new life as entertainment outlets, there are still several old businesses that continue their trade, passed down through generations. You can see shops selling medicinal oil and rattan mats, as well as old craftsmen practising arts such as calligraphy and wood carving. The National Park Boards portrays this enclave as a spot that allows people to recall the village atmosphere of the old days. It reminds the public of how Chinatown used to house the Chinese immigrants and preserves the memory of traditional Chinese customs.

Conversely, heritage activists would say that this area now replicates any other typical commercial area in Singapore. They criticise the government for transforming this monumental heritage space to open its urban communes and thick cultural network for global capital and tourism flows (Goh, 2014). They are championing the cause that preservation of cultural heritage is crucial for establishing and anchoring Singapore's national identity (Goh, 2014). The constant battle between the Singapore government and heritage activists on the urban redevelopment of Chinatown is still prevalent today. In this debate, the central question is: How can Singapore strike a balance between marrying economic growth and preserving cultural heritage? The Singapore government has long been criticised for having economic growth as its primary concern. Even if cultural heritage sites have been preserved due to their perceived value, they have been modified in such a manner that almost all their traditional significance has been eroded. Today, Singapore's value system is cultivated as much by British Institutions and American Corporations as by Asian sensibilities (George, 2020, p. 237). As a result, we have been compromising severely on our traditional cultures and identities as Asians (George, 2020, p. 237). Should we be worried about Singapore's Western tilt and how it impacts our ethnic cultures and identities?

As a Singaporean Chinese born in the late 90s, I find it difficult to identify with my Chinese roots and subsequently, national identity. The Singapore that I grew up in seemed to be pillaged with economic interest and pragmatism. The onslaught of modernization and globalization have resulted in the appropriation of many significant cultural icons for commercial uses. To illustrate, to make the district more "aesthetically pleasing", the streets of Chinatown were "superficially themed with Chinese lanterns and restaurants" (Phua & Shircliff, 2019, para. 3). Further redevelopment "replac[ed] Chinatown's unique history with generic Chinese elements" (Phua & Shircliff, 2019, para. 3). Chinatown may be bustling with festivities and famous restaurants, but much of it rings hollow. This illustration then leads me to the question: what constitutes an authentic national identity? Is national identity historically fixed or can it change and evolve?

On the issue of national identity, Kong and Yeoh (2003) present the view that "if the 'nation' is no more than a socially constituted site," then "national identities would be largely conjunctural and socially constructed rather than of the essence and natural" (p. 8). We have seen that many aspects of heritage in Chinatown have been commercialized to attract tourists. Tourism sites are often socially constructed, and they only act as a shallow reflection of our heritage. While some are of the view that tourist sites should reinvent themselves to remain relevant, efforts should not undermine heritage conservation (Phua & Shircliff, 2019). If our Chinese heritage stems from a product of social construction, it will be difficult for Chinese Singaporeans to associate with their national identity. Furthermore, when our nascent nation is under threat of global forces, "the bonds between members of the community and between people and place are, at best, tenuous, and require nurturing" (Kong & Yeoh, 2003, p. 8). Evidently, our sense of national identity will become fragile due to the disruption of global forces. Even though we may be able to preserve our tangible cultural heritage, the intangible aspects – the community spirit, the traditions and expressions – are increasingly disappearing with cultural dilution.

Singaporean sociologist Daniel PS Goh presents a different perspective amidst the urban redevelopment debate. The views that "heritage is essentially a commodity produced for a tourist or domestic cultural market," or heritage plays an "essential role in husbanding community, identity" are "missing the deeper issue" (Goh, 2014, p. 81-83). Goh asserts that it is not heritage production that is the problem, but the problem lies in the production of heritage space. He draws on Henri Lefebvre's "The Production of Space" to define the abstract concept of production of heritage space. Production of heritage space is the work of producing space in which the "taken-for-granted cultural memories and habits of a community's spatial practice are appropriated into the representation of space" (Goh, 2014, p. 83). Representation of space refers to the conceived space, or space at a cognitive level. In other words, defining heritage just at the level of the actual lived space would be incomplete; the "cultural memories and psychical habits of a community with regard to their lived spaces" (Goh, 2014, p. 83) must be taken into consideration as well. Ultimately, this leads to the argument that "heritage does not reflect the evils of capitalism or state power, nor does it reflect the natural or constructed identity of communities" (Goh, 2014, p. 98). From his point of view, there is no need for a debate between prioritising economic growth or pushing the notion that heritage is a crucial part of our identity. Goh (2014) shifts the focus to the fact that "the post-colonial city is finally coming of age and experimenting with urban forms to find its place in the world" (p. 98). Thus, it is more important that we

"match its reflexivity without being caught up with its heritage production" (Goh, 2014, p. 98).

I find Goh's fresh point of view to be more productive in this debate. The methods of heritage production and the question of its legitimacy have become such a heated topic of debate that it has become a distraction. Goh sheds light on the topic of heritage by explaining how we should focus on integrating post-colonial Singapore into the global society without fussing over the origins of our heritage. Both the public and government need to realise that debates over what Singapore's heritage is or should be leads to no meaningful conclusion. Heritage should not be a divisive factor in our society. We can also conclude that the threat of cultural dilution leading to an inauthentic national identity would no longer be a primary concern. Consider the view that "a nation, as an identity or institution, constantly undergoes change and transformation" (Yu & Kwan, 2008, p. 36). This could lead to the conclusion that our national identity is unstable and losing its authenticity. However, we should not be fixating on preserving or accurately defining our national identity. Our national identity should be periodically redefined in the light of present needs and future aspirations (Parekh, 1995).

As much as I believe in the importance of preserving cultural heritage and cultivating an authentic national identity, we can consider the view that Singapore was built on valuable aspects of colonial heritage. Edward Said, in his theory of Orientalism, suggests that "European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself against the Orient" (Said, 1978, p. 11). This suggests European superiority over the East, thereby giving the West more power in dictating global culture. Many people subscribe to the view that colonialism has left only a negative legacy, but as Goh pointed out, we should embrace the fact that post-colonial cities are starting to find their positions in the world. I would like to think that Singapore leveraged on its imperial heritage to offer the best of both worlds: a country where Asian cultural traditions are still evident but where Western knowledge is utilized to build a flourishing society. In this light, we can see how the post-colonial rulers of Singapore harnessed the advantages left by the British empire, namely Stamford Raffles' free-trading vision and the implementation of English as Singapore's official language. Going back to the observations in Ann Siang Hill Park, the blend of East and West is not only found in the juxtaposition of the architectural styles. It is also displayed in the mindset and instincts of Singaporeans today. We can achieve success by integrating the characteristic Asian mindset of hunger for education together with more Western-style social mobility.

All in all, we should not be weighed down by arguments of what heritage should or should not be, but to allow Singapore room for reflexivity and growth in its national identity. Ultimately, Singapore is not limited by its history. Rather than go deeper into the problems of how to accurately define heritage, we should give Singapore the chance to continue to write its own future naturally as it is still a young country. The only way to move forward as a global city is to embrace the state of everchanging culture and accept that there is no definitive culture.

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Pioneer Road (2021) 1: 118-120

Our Unofficial Dress Code and Self-Esteem

Ong Jing Ting

My breathing quickened as I glanced across the silent river creeping forward on my left. The wideness of it isolated me from the fast-paced concrete landscape far opposite. Thrilled by this transient moment of escapism, I hastened my steps. Rows of lush green trees lining my path prolonged my illusion, until the perfectly even and almost mechanical spacing between them pulled me back to reality. I sighed in defeat. Even the natural facade of this park connector masked an artificial and meticulous design.

I snapped out of my thoughts when a gust of wind blew over from my right, brushing stray strands of hair against my cheek. I frowned and glanced over to inspect the source: a tall man jogging past me. His towering silhouette blocked the sunlight momentarily, and I squinted when he overtook me. The back of his green army tee was decorated with damp patches of a darker shade. His heavy breathing and footsteps pierced the silence before fading into the distance. I basked in tranquility again, until another pair of impending steps grew louder, and the cycle repeated. That male jogger was only one of many National Service fanatics as diverse army tees from reputable vocations followed suit. Names of accredited educational institutions were also ubiquitous. Branded athleisure and shoes were staples, and Adidas triumphed. Everyone seemed to be flaunting their clothes. I looked down to my shirt screaming “NTU” in big bold capital letters and my shoes adorned with three stripes, struck by a sense of guilt.

A park does not seem like a place we would think of dressing up for. Yet, we may care more than we would like to admit about it. Why do we need to prove our competence to others, like having the intellectual capacity to study in a top-tier school, the physical ability to enter a reputable NS vocation, or the financial capability to afford branded goods? Clothes have become trophies we display to boost our self-esteem. Albeit picking an outfit is a minor decision, further introspection presents a worrisome reality: even major decisions, like choosing your schools or careers, can be influenced by self-esteem. Countless choices we make are cherry-picked as part of a meticulous strategy to paint a desirable image, much like designing an ideal landscape. I wondered, what is the worth of basing our decisions on fulfilling self-esteem?

Greenberg et al. (2004) illustrates the essentiality of self-esteem using the Terror Management Theory (TMT) in “Why Do People Need Self-Esteem.” “Terror” refers to our innate and unconscious fear from the “juxtaposition of a biologically rooted desire for life with the awareness of the inevitability of death” (Greenberg et al., 2004, p. 2). As sentient beings, knowing that death is inexorable contradicts our instinct to survive and incites fear. To alleviate this, we construct a view on what defines a valuable life and follow it, boosting our satisfaction with life and self-esteem, and bringing meaning to our temporary time on Earth. What we consider valuable is defined both individually and culturally, so “value” is a unique combination of personal ideologies and social norms. Our personalised creation of “value” molds our distinct priorities in life. Those who cherish their private beliefs chase more individualistic aspirations, while those who revere societal standards find solace in normative ones. Pursuing these subjective ideals motivates us to make the most of our fleeting lives, masking the fearful reality that they are no more than “humanly created adornments draped over an animal” (Greenberg et al., 2004, p. 2).

This theory could be extended to our conscious fears as well, like our fear of exclusion. Firstly, when we feel ostracised, our need for social inclusion is threatened, which breeds distress. Secondly, in line with the TMT, we regulate this by pursuing what we define as valuable social interactions and identities. Lastly, this boosts our self-esteem and satisfaction with life. To link this to my observations, maybe wearing a favourite school or army shirt is not only an unconscious act of reducing our fear of mortality, but also a conscious one of evading social exclusion by labelling ourselves with a group identity we value being a part of.

Besides minor decisions, self-esteem influences even political ones. In an opinion piece in *The Washington Post*, Samuelson (2004) investigates the role of self-esteem in political elections. During the US presidential election between Bush and Kerry in 2004, he observes that both candidates shared similar political stances, which only differed in extents. Yet, voters were segregated into two polarized groups, each thinking their choice was superior. Samuelson (2004) infers that the voters' decisions "cannot be explained by objective differences on policies" (para. 3). On closer inspection, each candidate publicised themselves as the 'correct' choice while demeaning the other. Beneath their overt solicitude for improving the country lay their covert agenda of manipulating people's need for self-esteem; voters support whoever appeals to them as the smarter and morally upright choice to elevate themselves. By enhancing their supporters' perceptions of their own intellectual and moral competencies, politicians create a dichotomy of two unwavering groups, each believing they made the right choice. Alas, self-esteem serves as an exploited tool in the battle of politics.

Beyond the realm of politics, Samuelson's perspective suggests that basing our decisions on self-esteem heightens our self-perceived capabilities and accuracy of our judgment. However, this view is distorted because we neglect factual information, which is indispensable for making well-informed and accurate decisions. It seems to me that self-esteem provides a short-cut to a false sense of self-satisfaction and accomplishment. Are we truly contented with these convenient decisions or merely distracted from objective information that may be tedious to interpret or unpleasant to accept? For example, it is easy to hastily choose a course of study or school based on its reputable name and avoid the effortful process of comparing options and soliciting advice, but this relaxed feeling is engulfed by anxiety when you discover flaws you were unprepared for. Self-esteem acts as a warped lens: it zooms in on a radiant romanticised sanctuary painted by our biased perceptions to induce contentment, blocking out the dusky panorama that is stark reality. Perhaps this mirage elucidates the temptation to adhere to our original decisions sometimes, even when their outcomes are unsatisfactory and more accurate possibilities exist.

So, what exactly is the worth of basing our decisions on self-esteem? Indeed, self-esteem is a protective mechanism which shields us from harsh reality – that is our ephemeral existences and worldly fears, by pursuing "value" in life. However, this same mechanism turns self-esteem into a trap: self-esteem occludes objective information, which shapes more precise decisions. Ironically, the worth of self-esteem does not depend on self-esteem itself, but how prepared we are to accept reality. When we feel vulnerable,

self-esteem is paramount to cope with our merciless world by painting a favourable view of ourselves and our surroundings to hide behind. Contrariwise, when we feel resilient, this protection from self-esteem is expendable. For example, when you visit a park to exercise, you may throw on that trendy branded top when you feel wary of judgment from others to protect your self-image. Conversely, when you feel unbothered by external opinions, a trusty old shirt could be just as appealing.

Multitudinous factors influence our ability to think realistically and objectively, like our phase of life, experiences, and even daily moods. "Value" is flexible, and our priorities evolve through space and time. Consequently, the worth of self-esteem is dynamic. Some decisions "feel right", until these factors create a turning point when the lens come off and we wake up to an unsatisfactory reality, putting down self-esteem to make a better choice. For anyone who desires to make an important decision most accurately, it will help to acknowledge the enticing protection self-esteem offers and leave its comfort zone. Introspect what your best interests are and redefine "value" in your current stage of life. Be open to viewing your life's panorama at all angles, even if it is not the most pleasant and radiant view, like the manmade design and intricacies of a natural landscape.

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HW0205: Academic Communication in the Humanities

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Pioneer Road (2021) 1: 122-125

Li Chooses to Write in English as an Act of Defamiliarization

Zhao Xingyu

Li's "To Speak Is to Blunder" (2016) delineates her reasons as to why she decides to "orphan" her mother tongue, Chinese, to write in English. It is important to note that in this essay she considers any language to be an essentially imperfect tool as a means of both communication and definition of one's identity—this is evident from her closing statement of "the grief, to have spoken at all" (para. 39). However, she still has control over her personal narratives and how she chooses to convey it through her "solace [being] the language [she] chooses" (para. 39). For her, Chinese is a "public" language, something she uses when she puts on facades or communicates with people that she mostly has a strained relationship with (she talks about this at length about the guilt-tripping she is subjected to when she converses in Chinese with her mother) (para. 22). Thus, Li elects to adopt English as her primary language—she speaks to the people around her in English and writes in English, because to her it is a "private language" and enables her to "feel a genuine feeling" (para. 25). Crucially, Li explains further that in terms of personal expression, English defies any "confinement" and affords her "hope, freedom, dignity" which she otherwise would not have with Chinese (para. 28).

Shklovsky's "Art as Technique" proposes that when we constantly perceive the same things, it becomes automatic—they are inculcated as habit. The author gives the example of "holding a pen for the thousandth time" (Shklovsky, 1917, para. 1). These habits can have the potential of taking over our lives; Shklovsky coins the term "algebrization" as he believes that when we over-automate things, we are approaching every problem and line of thinking as algebra, mandating we follow a similar set of rules and thinking processes regardless of the unique complexity of each situation. Thus, life becomes a banal automation—it is akin to us wandering through a maze and having only an inkling or the barest of outlines of where the exit is. The "technique" of the creation of art therefore is to defamiliarize objects (para. 3). We do not just admire them for their raw aestheticism and their belletristic natures, but they become jarring forces upon our minds, breaking our routineness of thinking and forcing us to consider different issues from other dimensions, or at least provoke us to critically engage with our surroundings. These subsequent images we construct create "a special perception of the object" (para. 8). Crucially, this extends prose, where artfully crafted prose and lyrical poetry "disorders rhythm" and transcends the instinctive and are not just "concussions" upon the brain which feel discomforting but have no value (para 2-5).

Using "Art as Technique" as a lens to interpret "To Speak is to Blunder," we find that the main impetus for Li to write in English is that to use Chinese is to surrender to the banality of habit—her interactions using Chinese were largely unthinking and she felt stripped of agency and dignity afterwards. When Li designates Chinese as her "public language," she calls into question its "reliability"—this can be construed as how when she speaks Chinese, it is amidst larger contextual forces which are pressurizing and coercive; the language is used as an instrument to demonstrate compliance and blind obedience (para. 35). In "Dear Friend," she thinks back to when she was forced to recite communist propaganda in Chinese and looks back at her interactions with peers in her university dormitory as a

point of regret, recalling a political argument whereby she instrumentalizes Chinese as a means to hide behind comforting lies. Shklovsky thus would term Li's most memorable and most conscious uses of Chinese as a rigorous subscription to an "algebraic" method of thought—in this case, Li recognises her struggles with her personal and political identity only as "imprecise extensions" (Shklovsky, 1917, para. 2). Her duty is just to conform in a stifling and authoritarian society. Hence her conclusions to oppressive problems tend to be either over-simplified or inexpressible. For example, when asked about her feelings by her psychiatrist, Li realises that if she opts to talk to her in Chinese, it will be vastly inadequate when juxtaposed to English (even though it is still imperfect) because much of her usage of Chinese is confined to platitudes and tokenistic statements, never expanding to serious discussions of urgent questions or moving beyond the algebraic.

To transcend rote writing, Li writes in English, elevating her literary work to an artistic status. Oftentimes, writers feel constrained when writing in their native language, as they are so used to it that they do not pay heed to the finer details of language manipulation when composing a work, such as how the syntax of a sentence can be upended, or grammatical conventions subverted in order to convey a point more forcefully or bond tighter with the reader. In *Wind/Pinball* (2015), Murakami explains the rationale of writing in a language he is less fluent in. In the preface, he says that he wrote the two novellas in English before translating it to Japanese, saying that it adds another dimension to his work by forcing him to think more carefully on the specific meanings of each word he wanted to impart and then refining his prose through self-translation. In a similar vein, Li aims to "arrange and rearrange words" that would be "neutral, indifferent even" in her native language such that she is compelled to painstakingly scrutinise words and phrases which, if expressed in Chinese, would bring about their careless inclusions and sequencing as she would only think about them in a normative fashion, meanings bound by individual façade and social mores. She thus aims to create work which does not exist simply in a solipsistic vacuum—applying Shklovsky, she impedes her own perception of what she wants to create such that it results in the "greatest possible effect" through this "slowness," and her prose is no longer just an "extension" of her thoughts but a full-bodied "continuity" (Shklovsky, 1917, para. 10-11). Elaborating further, Li states that one "does not always want to subject oneself to self-interrogation imposed by a cliché," and that it is always easy a apply a reflexiveness that is not only superficial but not necessarily hers when it comes to writing in Chinese (Li, 2017, p. 144). Constructing prose in English means that the "conversation [she] has with [herself], however linguistically flawed" will always be in "the exact way [she] wants it to be" (p. 145). She manages to have full ownership over the writing and can flesh it out and express it to the fullest.

Lastly, Smith's essay "The Difficult Gifts of David Foster Wallace" (2009) expounds more on Shklovsky's theories. To Smith, there are two outcomes when you discard the "algebrization" of thinking for perception—either you become more self-aware and reflexive, or you become more aware of other people and your connections to them (Shklovsky, 1917, para. 2). Tendentiously, Smith decries being more "self-reflexive" in this post-modern age, explaining that this effect produced by works which are rich in irony and cynicism makes us dig deeper into a solipsistic hole (p. 283). This is demonstrated by the recursive loop we find ourselves in especially when we are so used to thinking in our native languages—there is always another conclusion to be had or an issue to be addressed. Thus,

when we reflect unceasingly on every aspect of our existence and how this existence interacts with the exterior, we are at risk of being deeply mired in ourselves— we cannot possibly conceive how another might feel in the same situation even if he has the same traits and modes of thinking, inducing an irreconcilable cognitive dissonance when that person shares his experience. Thus, for Smith, we should always find ways to step out of this recursion and solipsism—she points to Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* and its overarching philosophy of how language must always be placed in the context of other people. In this case, another way to escape solipsism is to write and contemplate in a language deeply unfamiliar to us—this prevents us from being reduced to just words, never being able to envision what lies beyond the linguistic confines of our native languages (which in turn affects our cognition) (Smith, 2009, p. 282). In *Dear Friend,* Li comes to an important epiphany when she realises that "the wisdom to adapt is the wisdom to have two languages," and that to continue using Chinese to think and write is to use a language "spoken by others," not in a nourishing or communitarian way but one which feels empty and shallow (Li, 2016, p. 146). To get out of this self-imposed linguistic solipsism, Li starts using English more as a mode of self-expression; previously, she defaults to using language to "assess [her] situations" and to "construct sentences with the right words and the correct syntax" (p. 146). Thus, Li is no longer reduced to the language she wields, inversing the language-person relationship whereby the language she uses is now subordinate to her self-actualization.

We seldom consciously think about language because of how deeply embedded it is within the human experience—however, being oblivious to this is a dangerous cognitive pitfall as working within the limitations of one's native language is an impediment to creative and artistic pursuits. Foucault in *The Order of Things* (1970) expounds that the use of our primary languages can introduce artifice in our thinking. Using a painting as an example, he explains that we follow the painting through the most visible areas and the most obvious brushstrokes, leading us to think by the means of a fixed "order" that oftentimes is meaningless and cannot capture the "infinity" which the painting represents and sublimates (pp. 10-11). Even though every language has its restrictions, we can introduce different languages and different perspectives to move beyond what we are used to, ordering things in sometimes whimsical fashion springing from the imagination, which topples pre-structured thought cycles originating from language, such as grammar and syntax.

Further research could consider Sapir-Whorf hypothesis on whether the learning of different languages fundamentally alters our experiences and perceptions of the world. It is posited that being fluent in a totally different language one is accustomed to has a transformative effect, one that even enhances our basic senses.

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Opposing Colonialism through Art: Jamaica Kincaid

Eunice Kwan Rui Xin

> [The white cliffs of Dover] were so steep, the correct height from which all my views of England...should jump and die and disappear forever.
>
> —Jamaica Kincaid, "On Seeing England for the First Time"

That is a quote from the closing line of Jamaica Kincaid's "On Seeing England for the First Time" (1991). Prior to this, the essay's nameless narrator had walked readers through her lifelong entanglement with English culture as a colonised individual, from naïve impressions of England formed in her youth to revelations reached in adulthood. The essay's end is a cathartic release of emotions built up over the narrator's many views of England, a desperate cry to be free from all that she has perceived of the country. The narrator's voice is deeply personal, so much so that one may find it difficult to separate the creation from its creator. With Kincaid hailing from Antigua (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2021), which was colonised by the British in 1632 (Niddrie et al., 2020), there are echoes of Kincaid's personal experience within the narrative of "On Seeing England." Despite the sentiments conveyed by her narrator in the final line of the essay, Kincaid immortalises the very views of England that her narrator wished to erase. Such an irony could be read as an intentional literary device to establish the futility of attempting to oppose English colonialism, but I contend that is not all there is to her art. I believe that Kincaid actually does the opposite through "On Seeing England"—that it is through her immortalising of the colonised's history that resistance is made a possibility. This present essay will explore the ways that one may perceive "On Seeing England" as a portrayal of Kincaid's resistance against English colonialism.

The concept of perception is a crucial one throughout Kincaid's text, highlighted through the narrator's declaration, "[t]he existence of the world as I came to know it was a result of this: idea of thing over here, reality of thing way, way over there" (Kincaid, 1991, p. 37). The gulf between the narrator's perception and reality is testament to the power disparity between English colonisers and England's colonised, with Kincaid's narrator being forced into the role of the latter. Perceptions imposed upon her by the colonial classroom: English tales of glory, romance, even individualism—ones that she could not attain in reality, serve as bleak reminders of England's control; control that the colonised would never be able to reclaim, not even over themselves. This incongruity in the narrator's perception plagues her, evident from her wish that England had never entered her field of vision in the first place.

Viktor Shklovsky shares Kincaid's emphasis on perception in his 1917 essay, "Art as Technique." Shklovsky's paper comments on the ways art can impact perception through the technique known as defamiliarisation. He delves into the concept of perception by first observing that "as perception becomes habitual, it becomes automatic" (Shklovsky, 1917/1988, p. 1). Over-automatisation then limits one's ability to perceive objects in their entirety, rendering them forgettable as they were never truly recognised. He warns readers that "unconsciously automatic" perceptions eventually lead to life being regarded as meaningless. Yet, there may be one way to avoid automatisation: art. Shklovsky goes on to weigh in on the significance of art, identifying its ability to "impart the sensation of things

as they are perceived and not as they are known" through defamiliarisation. He states that the goal of defamiliarisation "is not to make us perceive meaning, but to create a special perception of the object—it creates a vision of the object instead of serving as a means for knowing it" (p. 3). In doing so, Shklovsky opines, art's defamiliarising effect spurs people to reconsider pre-existing ideas. By allowing subjective perceptions to take hold instead of imposing universally established meanings onto people, defamiliarisation in art imbues perceivers with the ability to break free from convention.

Kincaid capitalises on defamiliarisation to render the act of eating unfamiliar and in turn implore readers to re-evaluate the ways England exerts control over its colonised. The narrator's description of how she eats "the English way: the knife in the right hand, the fork in the left, the elbows held still close to my side, the food carefully balanced on my fork and then brought up to my mouth," reads tediously (p. 33). With the knowledge of Shklovsky's warning on automatised perceptions in mind, Kincaid's methodical listing of instructions for the typically habitual process of eating defamiliarises the act and intrudes upon its automaticity, attuning readers to the narrator's lack of agency. England's dominance is accentuated here; not only has it made itself apparent in the goods consumed by the narrator and her family, it even impinges upon the way Kincaid's narrator eats. Ergo, the narrator appears powerless against England as the enjoyable act of eating is transformed into a strange and unfamiliar performance. This defamiliarisation of eating conveys the narrator's saddened reality as a result of English influence and invites the reader to think deeper about the extremity of England's control as they face a distorted version of an act they partake in every single day.

Kincaid's narrator, in lamenting that unlike the English, her "prejudices have no weight to them" (Kincaid, 1991, p. 40), seems to prove that Kincaid's art merely illustrates the individual's helplessness against England's colonisation. Try as the colonised might to give voice to their opinions of England, however prejudiced, their words are of no consequence to the coloniser. However, Shklovsky's piece counters that impression. He gives weight to the interpretation that Kincaid has presented an opposing force to England and its colonisation of her country by increasing "the difficulty and length of perception" (p. 1). Readers are led to ruminate on their own views of England because her writing forces them to question what they had always been taught to think. Kincaid, in contrast to her narrator, is far from powerless against colonisation; through her art, Kincaid's own seemingly invisible prejudices against England are metamorphosed into words bearing the ability to alter perceptions. Her use of defamiliarisation allows her to confront colonisers with the entrapment that constrains the colonised.

As Shklovsky's paper engenders the adoption of a different perspective towards "On Seeing England," so too does Kincaid's writing remodel an aspect of "Art as Technique." Kincaid's application of defamiliarisation revitalises Shklovsky's definition of the technique. In his essay, Shklovsky exemplifies the use of defamiliarisation with Leo Tolstoy's writing, highlighting how he made "the familiar seem strange by not naming the familiar object" (Shklovsky, 1917/1988, p. 2). However, Kincaid's defamiliarisation assumes a different form, as she identifies the act of eating before presenting it in a strange light. She brings forth the notion that the technique might be more potent when the reader is first acquainted with the object before art renders it unfamiliar. By drawing attention to their familiarity with the object, the reader is led into their comfort zone of unquestioning

contentment; Kincaid then interrupts this comfort by introducing the unfamiliar: the instructional, unnatural performance that eating is transformed into because of British influence. In such a way, Kincaid's essay may be seen to reinterpret Shklovsky's idea of the form that defamiliarisation takes.

Alongside the unconventional form of Kincaid's defamiliarisation is her inversion of the technique's function, as she uses the technique ironically in the narrator's reflection on her first view of England. Kincaid's narrator speaks of herself as a child in the classroom, looking at England on a map. While it would appear natural for a child to simply accept the country's rendered shape as it is, the narrator does not. Instead, she "prolong[s]" her perception (Shklovsky, 1917/1988, p. 1) by parsing the image of England into various components: "a bed of sky blue" and "shadings of pink and green," which seemingly are in a bid to gain a better sense of England. Nevertheless, she is ultimately unable to connect with the country. The narrator realises that despite looking "like a leg of mutton, [England] could not really look like anything so familiar as a leg of mutton" to her (p. 32). Through a twisted instance of defamiliarisation, the young narrator tries to perceive the unfamiliar as familiar, only to see that England cannot, in reality, be what she perceives it to be. This jarring inversion is all the more able to disrupt the reader's own automatised perception of England, and pushes them into the narrator's shoes, allowing them to experience just how alien England was to her. The narrator's perception of the country as a familiar object is belied by the reality England coerces its colonised to embrace. Defamiliarisation here, in spite of the narrator's hopes to reconcile perception with reality, does not aid in her quest to accept England. Instead, it challenges the reader to look inward and think about their own perception of England, now given knowledge of the narrator's struggle with the country that was meant to be "the source from which [the colonised] got [their] sense of reality" (p. 32).

Maya Jasanoff's *The New Yorker* article, "Misremembering the British Empire" (2020), similarly serves as a wake-up call to people lounging within the cosy bubbles of their own preconceptions. Specifically, she spotlights Britain's "blinkered" perception of their imperial history. Jasanoff starts by describing protesters in Bristol, England, tearing down a statue of a slave trader, attributing such a scene to increased questioning across Europe about the lingering effects of imperialism. Thereafter, she looks at the British government's abnegation of responsibility for their actions in ex-colonies, from undermining the importance of history as a school subject to burning government documents days before India's independence, actions that substantiate a narrative of blatant denial and erasure of British colonialism. This narrative is filtered, refined, then given to the British people, leaving them none-the-wiser of the truth. Ultimately, Jasanoff's piece ends with the belief that it is through questioning the imperial past that "historians imagine broader forms of recovery and repair. That, too, could be a kind of progress."

"On Seeing England," as a representation of the ways England sought to exert its influence over weaker countries, is a step towards the questioning that Jasanoff advocates for. The statue of the slave owner, Edward Colston, that "stood on Colston Avenue, in the shadow of Colston Tower, on Colston Street, around the corner from Colston Hall" (Jasanoff, 2020, para. 2) is overwhelming, and eerily echoes the "Made in England" (Kincaid, 1991, p. 33) label that haunts Kincaid's narrator. Still, such an acute awareness of the

remnants of colonialism may be a necessary pain. It is through recognition that questions can be raised, and discourse sparked.

Dr. Sharon Siddique highlights the continuing relevance of British imperial history in her talk at the November 2017 Singapore Platform for East-West Dialogue, titled "East-West and the Post-Colonial." The talk contextualises colonialism to Singapore, as Siddique begins by cautioning her audience of the "dangerous ideological assumption implicit" in the term, "post-colonial," which means that colonialism has relinquished its influence on present perception. She explains that while a Subaltern perspective of the colonial past is important, post-colonialism merely re-considers the past, neglecting to consider how colonialism affects the present, which is equally important. Singapore, having formed its identity within "boundaries which were so drastically altered by intervention of colonisers," Siddique suggests, is unable to move beyond British colonisation.

Siddique broadens the significance of "On Seeing England" beyond Kincaid's presumably White-dominant reader base. Her talk connects the essay to Singapore itself, as Kincaid's portrait of her narrator's colonial past takes on yet another form, that of a reflection mirroring the ways Britain coloured and continues to colour Singapore and its people. Kincaid's art is thereby brought closer to the Singaporean reader. Just two years ago, the nation had a Bicentennial Celebration that came across as a blind celebration of colonisation (Tan, 2018). By directing her readers' attention to the elephant in the room that is a country's colonised history, Kincaid extends an opportunity for Singaporean readers to connect the dots between Singapore's own colonised past and its influence over the nation's present identity. It may be argued that in doing so, she raises the odds of Singaporeans thawing during what Siddique refers to as the nation's "post-colonial frozen moment."

On the surface, Kincaid's writing may be interpreted as a mere depiction of colonisation, limited in its capability to manifest changes to its readers' preconceived notions of colonialism and England's responsibility towards the colonised. Yet, Shklovsky's take on defamiliarisation as a compelling technique in art that brings new perspectives would disagree with such a view of Kincaid's essay. Shklovsky's piece, on the contrary, aids in recognising Kincaid's essay as a forceful work of art that defamiliarises the concept of colonialism in order to successfully evoke readers' recognition of the cognitive dissonance within them, as their values of freedom and selfhood are set against the spoliation that colonialism wreaked against those same values. Jasanoff's article provides a basis upon which "On Seeing England" could be seen as an image of England's past transgressions over its colonised, filling in a history that England has tried to blot out. Finally, Siddique's talk impresses the idea that works pertaining to the topic of colonialism can have far-reaching, meaningful impacts on the world. In this instance, "On Seeing England" may inspire other previously colonised countries to recognise the ways colonialism has bled into their present, and perhaps even see how England has impacted themselves as individuals living in an ex-colony. Thus, I argue that what Kincaid has done through her art is monumental, much more so than forcing "all [her] views of England to jump and die and disappear forever." While England had obliterated one culture and replaced it with another, Kincaid has presented an opposing force of her own against England's colonization, one that presents both sides of the coin and does not reek of erasure. This is Kincaid's opposition against colonialism.

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Blurred Lines: Demarcating Individual and Structural Racism

Lim Yu Heng Frederick

With social tensions growing more volatile, being politically correct is often the safest way to navigate these choppy waters. The tragic death of George Floyd signals the final straw for many to stand against inequality, bringing to light numerous social virtues. However, one would also witness a looming social divide; people were eager to take sides and disavow the opposition, leading down a perilous 'us against them' path. Such generalized divisions tend to overlook the multi-faceted nuances within our social climate — we may need to ask; is there more than just being "racist" vs "nonracist"?

Roxane Gay's "The Racism We All Carry" essay in *Bad Feminist* (2014) confronts a diverse array of social-political issues. Gay, a well-known contemporary cultural critic, contends that most people are in fact, a little bit racist — "Everyone holds certain judgements about others, and those judgements are often informed by race" (p. 290). However, Gay highlights that the majority follows the unspoken rules of being a racist — it is merely a matter of where and to whom we reveal such biases. Gay exemplifies her claim by weaving together observations on the Paula Deen racial slur controversy, where the white celebrity chef was sued by a former employee for racial abuse. Though Deen's nonchalant attitude towards her own racist remarks appalled many, Gay finds Deen's racist attitude "utterly unsurprising" — in turn unveiling her own personal racial judgement towards Paula Deen, who is after all, an "older White woman from the Deep South that harbors a nostalgia from the antebellum era" (p. 291).

In a 2018 interview with *The Guardian*, Gay implores that everyone, "on all sides, try to understand and accept complication, fight against dichotomies" (as cited in Edemariam, para. 13), with the dichotomy being the racist/ nonracist distinction. She claims that we need a different method of viewing dichotomies beyond assigning a higher/lower value to either - one that might affirm both sides as necessarily true, even if they are contradictory.

In *The Uses of Binary* (1993), English Professor Peter Elbow promotes a tradition of binary thinking called Dialectic Thinking, which seeks a non-resolution of two dichotomies, instead of establishing "dominance-some classic terms" (p. 1). Elbow points out that dichotomies allow us to rationalize the external world with minimal resistance. Furthermore, he also highlights our intrinsic psychological tendency to be resistant towards "cognitive dissonance," which is being intolerant of unreconciled or incompatible facts. However, in order to be exposed to the nuances and complexities in reality, Elbow urges us to be more open-minded towards "affirming both contradicting sides as necessarily equal or true" (p. 3). This requires conscious discipline on our end to overcome the cognitive dissonance. Elbow implores that many circumstances that are portrayed in the convenient good/bad distinction lead to conflicts, and we should instead strive towards balance and non-resolution.

This dialectic thinking applies to Gay's argument. On one end, Gay, a prominent social commentator, writes to confront the complex issues of identity and privilege in America's social and cultural landscape. Being a Queer person of colour, she would also experience first-hand the discrimination and marginalization faced by minorities. However, on the other end, as Gay states, her unfazed reaction towards the Paula Deen racial slur controversy "reveals her own racial biases" towards Paula Deen: "Or, perhaps, my lack of

surprise reveals my own biases. Though I know better, I have certain ideas about the South" (p. 291). At first glance, the dichotomy seems perplexing to fathom; how can someone who is at the forefront of addressing America's racism harbour racial biases herself? But as we dispel our cognitive dissonance, we need to instead ask ourselves: can they both exist alongside each other and be equally true? Can one strive to be nonracist while also acknowledging implicit racial biases?

As Gay (2014) vulnerably proclaims, "We're human. We're flawed. Most people are simply at the mercy of centuries of cultural conditioning" (p. 290). It is in our nature to develop systematic means in classifying ourselves based on our avowed social identity, leading to "othering" based on any perceptible differences like skin colour and appearances. Instead of denying our human nature whenever implicit racial biases arise, we should confront and question their origins and credibility, in order to unlearn them from years of "cultural conditioning." As G. K. Chesterton famously proclaimed in his 1929 book *The Thing* — "Do not remove a fence until you know why it was put up in the first place."

Acknowledging our own implicit racial biases may serve as a first step, but *How to Be an Antiracist* author Ibram X. Kendi implores us to take a step further by redefining our conventional understanding of racism. Kendi argues that racism should not be understood in terms of personhood, but of power and policy. In a webinar organized by the Yale Alumni Association on December 2020, Kendi makes a distinction that one should understand "racism" as merely a descriptive attribute, as "it literally describes what a person is being in any given moment, based on what they are saying or not saying, doing or not doing" (as cited in Belli, para. 5). Kendi urges to not just stop at being nonracist, but strive to be antiracist - one who actively supports policies that opposes racism and consciously promotes racial tolerance through their actions. This forces us to confront the existence of two distinct understandings of racism; the racism that deals with our personal racial biases, and the racism that exists in the system, larger than ourselves.

Kendi posits that society's predominant focus has been skewed; we should focus on the sufferings brought upon by unjust policies, instead of the intent behind such policies. He urges us to sincerely investigate where these implicit racial biases originate, beyond blanketed terms like "ignorance" and "hate." Kendi explains that if ignorance and hate are the issue, "then it would stand to reason that once people are better educated, racist policies would end. But, what if, the perpetrators of racist policies already know what you are trying to teach them?" (para. 13). Kendi believes that education needs to empower people to examine the problem in our power and policies, enlightening how we ought to "challenge and disrupt power and policy" (para. 15).

A similar sentiment is shared between Kendi and Gay — the binary of racist and not racist should not be understood as fixed dichotomies, but a nuanced spectrum. Kendi recognizes his internalized racial biases, stating "That Black youths' hip-hop was ruining their minds and making them dangerous... That we needed to mass incarcerate these folks who were a menace to society" (para. 11). However, we readily observe the genesis of a new binary between Gay and Kendi. Gay's focal point is on an individual's internal racial biases and implies that racism can be addressed if people can recognize cultural conditioning and "try" to be better. On the other hand, Kendi locates the issues of racism in terms of power and policy and shows that individual improvements does not suffice in the fight to eliminate racism. Gay affirms both the existence of implicit racial biases within an

individual, and our need to recognize that within ourselves. But can the same double affirmation be applied when we extend to structural racism? Does racism in power and policy allow for nuances?

The 2011 research study by Evelyn Y. Young seeks to unpack the misconceptions surrounding racism held by American educators. Young (2011) introduces Critical Race Theory (CRT) assessments into critical discussions with participating educators, and the findings reveal the conflict between perceiving racism as an "individual pathology" and racism as a structural issue (p. 1433). This dissonance results in the inception of several "personae of racism." The act of being self-aware of one's participation in the system, albeit unintentional, serves as an important determining factor for classifying the different personae of racism. For Young, this demarcates a distinct difference between "deceived" perpetrators/activists who passionately engage in activism but fail to see themselves as participants in an oppressive system, and "enlightened" perpetrators/activists who recognize the hegemonic nature of racism where they are simultaneously a product and a producer of racism (p. 1443).

CRT academics define racism in terms of the underlying inequalities that exist within structural policies and systems, rejecting the contention that racism is "symptomatic of individual pathology" (Young, 2011, p. 1434). This viewpoint is largely congruent with Kendi's ideation of the issues surrounding racism, whereby racism should be regarded as a structural problem that is "pervasively and permanently rooted in the ideology of the masses" (Young, 2011, p. 1434), and it is our duty to actively dismantle them. As Young elaborates, racism in America has become an "entity of its own" (p. 1443) after centuries of racial discrimination and oppression, as it subconsciously entrenches itself into every crevice of the populace's mindset. Circumstances that are usually perceived as the status quo could very much in fact be the "normalcy of Whiteness" (Young, 2011, p. 1445). Even if the majority were able to recognize and acknowledge their implicit racial biases, they are still very much capable of inflicting racism unconsciously.

This revelation allows us to see that Gay's contention is just the tip of the iceberg. Consciously recognizing our individual racial biases merely serves as the first step into racial discourse; only when we acknowledge these nuances could we then see them in the systems and power relations of the larger society. However, to fully strive towards an antiracist society, we need to also locate our place in society. We need to question whether our worldview is shrouded by a system of privilege, which would in turn reveal to us the racism that only exists in the periphery of our consciousness. Even if our individual biases allow for nuances, the consequentialist nature manifested by our actions is strictly dichotomic in nature. Social institutions could only be either beneficial or detrimental for any particular social group. Even if we were to quantify and weigh the pros and cons of any given policy, we need to recognize that we are doing so from a third person perspective. It is not in our place to judge, as we may never fully grasp and understand the detrimental consequences of racism faced by members in marginalized social groups. Therefore, Elbow's double affirmation could not be applied when we extend to structural racism. Racism in power and policy could not allow for subtlety.

The fight against racism might seem rather overwhelming upon these revelations. However, it is also important to practice some self-kindness. Societal changes are no simple feat, and we cannot expect to dismantle "centuries of cultural conditioning"

overnight. Perhaps Gay's purpose was to illuminate the intolerance towards human imperfection in our current civil rights movement. As we fight towards eliminating racism, we need to remind ourselves that we are also victims of the system, and we will make mistakes along the way. However, it is only through learning from these mistakes, could we better strive towards a more accepting society.

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Displaced Identity: Untangling the Relationship between Eurocentrism and Culture

Nurul Syahirah Nadirah binte Noorrisham

In her essay "On Seeing England for the First Time," Jamaica Kincaid (2000) writes a deeply personal recount of her life growing up in colonised Antigua, when British rule loomed a powerful shadow over local culture and Antiguan identity. She narrates, with an impassioned tone of frustration and anger, the way her childhood memories are centred upon Britain, its influence tinging every part of her life with reverence for the English. Imperialism has overtaken Antigua's sense of cultural identity; England was the source of what was meaningful and meaningless, and "much about the very idea of [Antiguans] headed that last list" (Kincaid, 2000). The Antiguans were made to be more concerned with imitating the British than upholding their own cultural customs, even though many have never gone to England before — a fact that fuels Kincaid's resentment towards the English.

The idea of a colonialist power eclipsing over Kincaid's Antiguan identity is not an isolated concept. The encroaching of British colonialism into traditional culture has always been prevalent in many colonised nations, including the island of Singapore. In particular, aspects of Singaporean Malay culture have been reshaped and reworked to fit the mould sculpted by the British government during the colonial days. Like Kincaid's Antigua, the Singaporean Malay identity has been fraught with the pressures of a Eurocentric reverence brought by colonialism. To be like the English, to speak like the English, and to adapt to the growing secularisation of the nation were considered hallmarks of progression, and years of adaptation has led to the Malays here having a more flexible practice of their traditional customs, embodying the modernisation so often emphasised by the British. Today, the Singaporean Malay is often described by their Malay brethren in the Malay Archipelago as "modernized" and "educated"; they are more lenient in their adherence to customs and attire, and most of them speak English, not Malay, in daily conversation.

But skip a stone across the straits of Johor and you will find a markedly different description of Malay culture. For the Malaysian Malay, traditional custom is at the forefront of local culture, practiced more commonly than the Singaporean Malay. In Malaysia, the baju kurung is a common choice for everyday attire, but in Singapore, the baju kurung is usually reserved for special events such as weddings or festivities; choosing it for daily wear will spark comments about its nostalgia or questions asking if there is a special occasion. The tradition has become a custom reserved solely for special events, and there is an implicit association of tradition with past — the opposite of the secular modernity surrounding Singapore Malays. Western influence has also seeped into linguistic preference. The average Singaporean Malay uses both English and Malay in their common speak. Where a Malaysian Malay might say *awak*, a Singaporean Malay might say you, even when speaking in Malay, reflecting how English language capability is tied to an image of education and modernisation. There is a colonial emphasis on one's assimilation to Eurocentric ideas, which are associated with modernity and power; thus, the English language supersedes Malay, and tradition is eclipsed by modernisation. It is this very notion of displacement, of having colonialism overtaking and redefining local culture that angers Kincaid so greatly.

But is it sufficient to say that local identity is a hidden culture presently obscured by Eurocentrism, or has it evolved to become something more?

In her essay, Kincaid weaponises her childhood frustrations into an incisive criticism of the prevalent Eurocentrism in native cultures. She describes situations in her daily life in which England is upheld as the standard. Breakfasts, Kincaid (2000) writes, were made like a proper British big breakfast, despite how incongruent it is to the Antiguan lifestyle: "No one I knew liked eating so much food so early in the day; it made us feel sleepy, tired." However, the Antiguans continued this unnecessary tradition simply because it was "Made in England like almost everything else that surrounded us." When described this way, the big breakfast ceases to simply be an early morning ritual; it becomes a representation of the ways in which British influence has seeped into the daily lives of the Antiguans. With this, Kincaid has taken a familiar tradition and turned it on its head to make us rethink our perceptions — in other words, she has defamiliarised it.

Famed Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky coined the term defamiliarisation, which refers to the use of art as a technique to prolong one's perception of the familiar. The familiar object, according to Shklovsky (1988), ceases to be acknowledged in its entirety; only its main characteristics are perceived. This process, known as habitualisation, reduces the perceptive effort needed to know an object in full, to the point where "...ultimately even the essence of it is forgotten" (Shklovsky, 1988).

To restore full perception of the familiar object, one must thus defamiliarise it: to make it unfamiliar by describing it "without changing its nature" (Shlovsky, 1988). Shlovsky gives Tolstoy as an example, with how he often described "dogmas and rituals as if they were unfamiliar" in his works, in order to "prick the conscience," forcing the audience to fully perceive and acknowledge such rituals in their entirety. Tolstoy's writing is an example of how defamiliarization can be used to force a reader to re-examine their previously held beliefs, or to critically question the familiar norms around them. By applying the lens of defamiliarisation to Kincaid's essay, we can glean new insight from her works: in writing about her experiences with Eurocentrism, Kincaid is trying to unsettle one's perceptions of cultural dynamics, to defamiliarise the reader to the social norms that are ingrained into them and to start the process of re-examination. With her vivid descriptions of how her childhood was steeped in worshipful imperialism, Kincaid is trying to unsettle in readers the automatic notion of associating England with power.

Shklovsky states that an object, once familiar, becomes "over-automatized"; it is assigned a single defining characteristic, and "[does] not even appear in cognition" (Shklovsky, 1988). Such habituation leads humans to lead lives unconsciously; Shklovsky refers to this phenomenon as life being "reckoned as nothing." In Kincaid's essay, she recounts the way the local Antiguans would mimic the English in their daily lives, from their table manners to their style of clothing. She brings up her father, who often wore a felt hat despite how felt was improper material to use for sunshade, and how he must have worn it because "he must have seen and admired a picture of an Englishman wearing such a hat in England," which must have been compelling enough to make him "wear the wrong hat for a hot climate most of his long life," so much so that it became an integral part of his character (Kincaid, 2000, p. 33). To the reader, such an obsession with wearing a hat ill-fitted for one's climate is absurd. We see it plainly that this fixation on emulating the English makes their lives unnecessarily more difficult, and that it would do them good to

cease this idolatry for the betterment of their own lives. But for these Antiguans, the imitation of the English is, as Shklovsky suggested, so habituated into their culture that they reckon it as nothing. It is this unconscious mimicry that Kincaid thus attempts to defamiliarise, by repeatedly mentioning the way England, not Antigua, is at the forefront of the Antiguan mind for everything. England was "our source of both myth and [...] from which we got our sense of reality" (p. 32). Such defamiliarisation techniques by Kincaid forces one to think about the deep-seated, entrenched forces of Eurocentrism and how we absentmindedly play into these influences without question.

This unconscious way in which colonised nations continue to associate power with the English is a phenomenon that is also explored in further detail in Shehla Burney's book *Pedagogy of the Other* (2012). In a chapter entitled "Erasing Eurocentrism: Using the Other as a Supplement for Knowledge," Burney breaks down the historical and cultural constructions of Europe's supremacy, and how colonial discourse has helped imprint Eurocentrism in the global consciousness as the 'normal' way of living. This is reminiscent of Kincaid's writing; Kincaid opens her essay recounting how most everything in Antigua was "Made in England," and that England was "a special jewel" that "only special people got to wear" (Kincaid, 2000, pp. 32-33). Burney echoes Kincaid's sentiments; "despite the demise of the British Empire," she writes, "the imperial concept that England is the centre of the world is ingrained in the global mind" (Burney, 2012). She details how conquest and empire has given the West the power to rewrite history as they wished, leading to a more Eurocentric focus on the global historical timeline, which is "oppositionally different" from "the Other point of view."

Burney's statement holds true when one delves into an exploration of Malayness; the very concept of the Malay identity itself is one that is fraught with colonial power. According to Anthony Reid (2014) in "Understanding Melayu (Malay) as a Source of Diverse Modern Identities," Sir Stamford Raffles holds considerable regard as "the most important voice in projecting the idea of a 'Malay' race or nation," and it was he who insisted upon a vision of the Malays as a race, rather than as a "cultural complex" hinging upon the use of the Malay language. Western Orientalist narratives also associate Malays with the "lazy native" stereotype to justify the "civilising" function of colonial rule, supposedly bringing Malays forward from a period of ruralness to enlightened society (Alatas, 1977). Such beliefs persist until today, with the enduring stereotype still plaguing the image of Singaporean Malays, leading the Malays to conform in order to combat the myth of being "backwards."

When paralleled with Kincaid's Antigua, the similarity is apparent; the domination of colonial power has led to the centering of the English as a beacon of modernity and influence within the local traditional culture. For Kincaid, who argues that colonialism has led to an ousting of cultural norms, Western power and traditional culture are two distinct spheres, and an overlap of the former onto the latter is an invasive breach upon the space of tradition.

But while there is merit to this perspective, it could perhaps be insufficient to ignore the way that the sphere of tradition has also accommodated to Eurocentric influence to forge a new culture. Colonialism has indeed led to the imposition of Western ideas on traditional Malay culture here in Singapore, but there is merit to be found in the way Singaporean Malays have synergised the two spheres together to form a unique cultural identity of their

own, distinct from the Malaysian or Indonesian Malays. Local religious schools, or madrasahs, now include secular subjects alongside their religious curriculum to ensure that Singaporean Malays studying are "integrat[ing] successfully into the social and economic system," without forsaking their traditional religious education (Hashim, 2007). In response to the decline in Malay-speaking Malay households, the Malay Language Council started initiatives targeting the way the Malay language is taught in schools. Malay customs and traditions, while not as strongly enforced in daily life like Malaysian Malays, are upheld via projects, activities and buildings dedicated to the promotion of the Malay identity, such as with the creation of the Malay Heritage Centre. "One of the conspicuous features of Malay society in Singapore," writes John Clammer in "Malay Society in Singapore: A Preliminary Analysis" (1981), "has been its ability to retain many aspects of tradition in a rapidly modernising society" (p. 27). Rather than being a 'backwards' society in a progressing nation, the Singaporean Malay has become an expert in interweaving modern, Eurocentric elements into the fabric of its traditional culture.

Despite the way the West has historically rewritten the cultural narrative of the Malays, and despite the way secularisation of the state has imposed a need for modernity on the Malays, there is something to be admired in the intrinsic sense of traditional Malay identity found in Singaporean Malays. For Kincaid (2000), the unfamiliarity of Eurocentric elements has understandably displaced the Antiguan culture for generations. However, it could be argued that rather than a passive allowance of imposition in their culture, there is an active interweaving of both modern and traditional elements to forge something new. For the local Malay community, colonial influences have forced their hand into adjusting their traditions and customs to fit the mould; but rather than allowing the traditions to dissolve into obscurity, Singaporean Malays have entwined modern elements into the folds of their culture, thus forging a unique Singaporean Malay identity for themselves: an eclecticism of different cultures and influences; a converging point between tradition and modernity.

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The Influence of Social Swearing on In-group Dynamics of Singaporean Youth

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Introduction

As the predilection for free speech spreads across individualistic cultures, some have voiced that our current society has become rife with taboo language (Gillespie, 2013). Indeed, American books from the mid-2000s feature swear words 28 times more than books from the 1950s (Twenge et al., 2017), and children today adopt swear words at two years old (Jay & Janschewitz, 2012), pointing to the frequent and normalised occurrence of swearing in our present reality.

Swearing, the emotive utterance of non-literal taboo words (Ljung, 2011), has the cathartic ability to reduce high stress levels by purging negative emotions like anger (Montagu, 2001). It is an evolutionary necessity; high stress levels, if left unreleased in the individual, may manifest into primitive violence that has punitive consequences in modern society (Jay, 2009). Simultaneously, swear words are unfiltered expressions of emotions that transmit emotional states. Studies indicate that swearing is associated with honesty and credibility (Feldman et al., 2017; Rassin & Heijden, 2005) – traits that are integral to interpersonal relationships and, by extension, the maintenance of in-groups through a phenomenon known as social swearing.

"Social swearing" is defined as the act of swearing to develop or reflect in-group solidarity (Montagu, 2001). Solidarity refers to the perceived equality and similarity between members (Brown & Gilman, 1960; Abdely, 2016). In Tajfel's (1974) social identity theory, self-esteem is derived from the emotional significance of one's attachments to various social groups (in-groups). This is maintained through solidarity-building behaviours like social swearing, which fosters a sense of belonging and bondedness (Baruch & Jenkins, 2007); swearing at one another can be perceived as friendly banter (Daly et al., 2004), and bilinguals build rapport with native speakers of their second language by swearing in that language (Mohammadi, 2020).

Swearing is also culturally relative; normalised swearing in one context may be perceived as a threatening behaviour in another context (White, 2002). Moreover, the moral principles of individualistic cultures differ from those in collectivistic cultures, which view morality as an adherence to in-group norms by suppressing personal expressions (Jia & Krettenauer, 2017). Yet, few studies on swearing have focused on collectivistic societies where a suppression of personal expressions is prioritised as a societal norm.

Hence, this paper will examine the extent to which social swearing reflects in-group solidarity amongst youth in Singapore. As swear words are often personal expressions (Bergen, 2016), we hypothesise that social swearing occurs at a lower extent in collectivistic cultures despite its function as a solidarity marker, as found in a study on 483 South Korean students (Cho & Tian, 2020). Finally, we operationalise "swearing" as any non-literal expression that violates taboos involving religion, bodily wastes, sexual acts and organs (Ljung, 2011).

Although the distinction between "individualism" and "collectivism" changes and remains an ongoing debate (Wee, 1999), Singapore is largely identified as a collectivistic

society (Chang, 1995). Yet, while Singaporeans aged 17 to 19 mostly display collectivistic tendencies like interdependency (Soh & Leong, 2002), young Singaporeans today hold individualistic attitudes against restrictions on personal expressions (Tan et al., 2011) – thereby emboldening them to be less reluctant than the previous generation to stand out by cussing. This juxtaposition adds an intriguing complexity to our study's chosen location, which adds an Asian perspective to the existing studies on social swearing that were conducted mostly under Western contexts.

Methodology

Structured interviews were conducted with eight Singaporeans between 18 to 25 years old. As swear words in one's first language have more emotional weight than swear words in languages learned later (Dewaele, 2004), selected participants had English as their first language to maintain a common level of sensitivity towards the English swear words used in the interview questions. They were also coded according to gender (four males: M1, M2, M3, M4 and four females: F1, F2, F3, F4). The interviews were conducted face-to-face in a discussion room and lasted an hour each. Using the researchers' smartphones, participants' verbal responses were recorded with consent and transcribed. Through a thematic analysis, relevant responses were coded into labels that described a particular sentiment. The labels were then reviewed and categorised according to the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the interview's questions.

As this is possibly a first study in an under-researched area, the aim was to develop an initial in-depth understanding on the topic without relying on statistical inferences that may lead to assumptive and overly broad generalisations. While we acknowledge that our sample size is a limitation in terms of the study's external validity, the structured interview method was adopted to capture raw insights like perceptions that cannot be adequately gathered from quantitative data. More importantly, it was anticipated that the antisocial nature of swearing would propagate a social desirability bias amongst participants. To project the best image of themselves to others, participants may provide socially 'ideal' answers that are untruthful (Larson, 2019). Hence, strategies to mitigate this, made possible only through the interview method that includes face-to-face communication and rapport-building via informal banter, were used to close the physical and psychological gap between interviewers and participants, as suggested by social psychologists Zimbler and Feldman (2011).

Results & Discussion

Solidarity through social swearing

Six participants agreed that the insertion of swear words in conversations (social swearing) with friends is indicative of their solidarity. The codes used to identify solidarity include expressions that denote closeness, emotional comfort, and a sense of belonging.

> *"I highly agree. I believe in the common expression of 'swearing like sailors'. Swearing as a group boosts group dynamics. It definitely fosters a sense of belonging."*
> *-M1*

"Yes, I think [swearing] is a code that shows a sense of comfort ... some might be offended; I think we must be quite close to the people with whom we swear."
-M2

"Yes. Because by swearing together, it shows that I have some things in common with my clique and I feel comfortable with them, thus I swear."
-M3

"Swearing shows a kind of closeness because you're more comfortable by being authentic. When you swear, you really show who you are to me."
-M4

"Yet, I definitely think that we're more bonded by swearing together because the act is an indication of our closeness and how much we trust each other."
-F1

"Yes! It's like we share the same brain cell. It also fosters a sense of belonging because I won't swear in front of people whom I'm not close to."
-F2

Additionally, M1 noted that an abstention in swearing may lead to exclusion.

"When we form groups, it isn't just who belongs in a group, but who doesn't belong to a group as well. When we use swear words in our conversations, it creates a sense of shared inclusion. If someone is more averse to swearing, it creates a sense of exclusion, like that person is not part of the group. I feel more distant from someone who doesn't swear."
-M1

Most participants indicated that their interpersonal relationships were reinforced by social swearing, which was perceived by M1 to be so effective that those who did not perform it risked exclusion from the in-group. This suggests that social swearing could function as a linguistic "initiation rite" into certain in-groups, as found in Baruch's and Jenkins' (2007) study on several warehouse packers of a British retail company. Jenkins, the undercover researcher posing as a packer, observed that he was accepted into the workplace's dominant social group only after uttering expletives at a senior packer. His willingness to engage in social swearing was perceived as a positive quality by the other packers, who thereby deemed him to be a worthy inclusion into their in-group.

Ritual abuse

To further gauge the extent to which social swearing reflects solidarity, participants' responses to ritual abuse, a component in social swearing that involves the use of swear words as friendly insults (Daly et al., 2004), were noted. All participants agreed that being called a "fucker" when engaging in a hypothetical banter was a positive interaction.

"I perceive this interaction as a friendly one, almost in a comedic way – we are friends, so I know that he won't specifically insult me. Most of the time the swear word is used to emphasise a behaviour, probably something stupid that I've done. I'm comfortable with it, so I guess it would be a positive interaction."
-M1

"Yes, if they call me 'fucker', I will perceive it to be a positive and friendly banter as I know that it's just a joke. They're just having fun, things that friends do and we're just messing around without any ill-will in it. If they call me 'fucker', I think I wouldn't mind and I would just laugh along because I feel that they are close and comfortable with me."
-M2

"...it shows that he or she is comfortable enough with me to call me fucker. I won't feel offended by that and instead, I will jokingly call back that person 'fucker'. I was also called 'motherfucker' many times during army and I will return them the favour by calling them 'motherfucker' as a form of positive banter.
-M3

"While it's normally considered degrading, if a close friend did that to me, I think it will be a fun way to show that we're really close to each other to afford that kind of insulting names to be called for each other, but still understand that it's not something really mean. It's a way that we call each other."
-M4

"Yes! I'd laugh along with that. I'd definitely swear back at her, like, "Why are you calling me a fucker? You're a fucker too!" (laughs)."
-F1

"Yeah, I think it's a positive interaction. I mean my close friends usually do that and I know it's just a joke so I won't feel offended. Usually, they do it because I'm doing clown shit so not like I can say them back. After all, they are right. Usually, I get called bitch, dumb fuck, etcetera."
-F2

"I guess it will be regarded as friendly interaction because I already know them and have already established this kind of prior dynamic with them. So I kind of expect it from them."
-F3

F4 noted that an absence of ritual abuse may suggest intra-group disharmony.

"I feel that the hypothetical scenario is a positive interaction (laughs). I will feel that they are actually angry [at each other] if they don't swear; something's wrong."
-F4

The ritual abuse component confirms that social swearing is a common occurrence amongst participants. The responses above suggest that solidarity is perceived when the taboo of swearing can be safely broken through acts like ritual abuse, confirming Montagu's (2001) proposed solidarity-building function (2001) and a "I'm close enough to be rude to you" sentiment observed in Daly et al. (2004). Swearing is also perceived as a marker of authenticity, as seen in F4's response above.

In the context of Jungian psychoanalysis that differentiates the real self from the social mask that one dons in public, the unfiltered and emotive act of swearing could moderately unmask one's social facade. The consequent revelation of the real self thereby allows for authentic relations, echoing the association between honesty and swearing (Feldman et al., 2017). Overall, participants' positive attitudes towards social swearing (and its ritual

abuse component) show that – contrary to our hypothesis, social swearing is widely employed as a solidarity marker amongst Singaporeans.

Swearing in defiance

Six participants said that they engage in social swearing as an act of rebellion against Singapore's collectivistic expectation to inhibit personal expressions. The codes for this theme include attitudes against a "conservative" or "self-censored" culture.

"Because of Singaporeans' conservative attitudes in public, I am more likely to counter this by swearing in private with my friends."
-M1

"We swear together and show them that we're not who they want us to be. I don't care about what they think. It's an open act of rebellion against the conservative and self-censored Singaporean views."
-M4

"Yes, it's so refreshing to swear with my friends. I don't have to watch what I say around stuck-up people who force their version of righteousness down my throat. We definitely swear together to show our defiance against this conservatism."
-F1

"When I'm with my friends, we swear to release pent up feelings of being held back by an expectation to be 'family-friendly'. Swearing with them feels like a good relief – like breaking the 'rules' and defying societal expectations. I'm not very religious so it's not a factor that stops me from swearing."
-F2

"In fact, I actively swear with my friends to rebel against the social norm that encourages Singaporeans to keep their opinions and thoughts to themselves. It feels good to be able to say whatever I want."
-F3

"Being able to curse, swear and say anything that I like, it's like a breath of fresh air – a giant middle finger to the repressive social code that dictates what can or cannot be said. It feels good."
-F4

The responses suggest that social swearing is motivated by a defiance against a societal-wide suppression of profanities that echoes the collectivist-oriented emphasis on the inhibition of personal expressions (Jia & Krettenauer, 2017). In Singapore, this social norm is induced by the government's zero-tolerance stance on swearing in domains like the local media (Fong, 2015). We postulate that this has triggered a social reactance, in which people will reassert freedoms they perceive as rights when said freedoms are threatened (Brehm & Brehm, 1981). In other words, social swearing is a personal release valve that individuals use to reclaim their sense of agency against the threat presented by restrictions on personal expressions. As Singaporeans adopt increasingly liberal attitudes against societal

taboos (Mathews et al., 2019), this social reactance will likely produce a rise in social swearing.

Conclusion

This study explores the extent to which social swearing reflects in-group solidarity amongst Singaporean youth, with the hypothesis that the said phenomenon is used to only a small degree due to Singapore's social norm that inculcates a suppression of personal expressions, and by extension, swearing. Yet, most participants reported frequent use of social swearing, and perceived its ritual abuse component as a solidarity marker. More significantly, social swearing is a means for the individual, moored by the aforementioned norm, to regain their individual agency through a social reactance. We therefore conclude that social swearing is employed to a large extent to reflect in-group solidarity by the Singaporean youth interviewed.

It is hoped that we have presented a firm, initial understanding of social swearing in Singapore, where the predilection for personal expression has not been given up entirely. However, it should be noted that this study's qualitative data may not account for the social swearing tendencies of the entire youth population in Singapore due to the small sample of participants interviewed. Furthermore, our purposive sampling technique was applied to include only those with a pre-existing propensity to swear. This omits certain real-world considerations like moral/religious convictions and personality types that limit one's willingness to engage in social swearing.

Future studies could focus on social swearing's degree of influence by a) examining the possibility of a cognitive dissonance when one's personal convictions against the use of profanities is overridden by the need for in-group inclusion that is fulfilled through social swearing; b) using a quantitative methodology with a wider sample size to better capture the social swearing tendencies of Singaporean youth. Swearing is a multifaceted phenomenon; despite its cathartic function on the individual micro level, it entails cultural, social and political identities when considered in a wider macro level.

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Impact of the Phrase "You Sound So Gay" on Gay Men in Singapore

Chiam Wen Qi Ruth and Maki Yoshika Clarissa

Introduction

For many years, gay men have been stereotyped to speak a certain way and much linguistic research has been conducted to figure out the exact quality of their manner of speech. When a person informs another male that "you sound so gay," the former often means that the latter's speech involves a higher voice pitch, with a range of intonations, and exaggerated or precise articulations (Baeck et al., 2011; Rendall et al., 2007). While individuals might have a slightly different idea of what gay speech sounds like, it can be agreed that it revolves around sounding effeminate and is distinct enough to set gay men's speech apart from that of straight men.

This dissimilarity between gay and straight men's speech is not without its repercussions. There is anecdotal evidence to suggest that sounding gay can lead to bullying and ostracization, and further research has reflected the physical and psychological duress that gay men suffer as a result of such stigmatization (Meyer, 1995; Meyer, 2003; Meyer et al., 2008).

Despite such discrimination however, Sarson (2020) notes that gay speech is still a "central component to a homosexual identity" (p. 900), intentionally employed as it plays a significant role in enforcing their sexual identity. This is supported by Piccolo's (2008) study, which also mentions that gay men regard gay speech as part of their identity and modifying it would be equivalent to dishonesty.

It is important to note that Sarson's and Piccolo's studies were conducted in the UK and America respectively, where the LGBT community is gradually becoming more accepted, and gay men have been given more rights, including that of marriage and adoption. Many studies have shown that for members of the LGBT community, there is a proportional correlation between social support and their self-confidence (Doty et al., 2010; Heaney & Israel, 2008; Romijnders et al., 2017). As such, Sarson's and Piccolo's participants' confidence in and their willingness to embrace their sexual identity and speech could have been made possible due to the growing acceptance of the LGBT community in the two countries. Nevertheless, a stigma remains around gay speech even in America, as mentioned above. This discrimination is likely to be more severe in Singapore, a country where the LGBT climate remains highly conservative (Phillips, 2014) and where the LGBT community has yet to receive the same rights as those in America and in the UK. With a lack of social support, it is highly probable that gay men in Singapore might not possess the same confidence in their speech as those in America and the UK. However, there is little research conducted in Singapore regarding gay speech that could provide insight into this topic. Hence, to gain a better understanding of Singaporean gay men's perceptions of their speech, in this paper, we would like to explore the impact of the phrase "you sound so gay" on the gay men in Singapore.

Research Method and Data

To gain better insight on the impact of the phrase "you sound so gay" on gay men in Singapore, interviews with 5 Singaporean gay men were conducted individually. The ages of our participants ranged from 20 – 32 years old, with three National Servicemen and two working adults. A qualitative method was chosen as it allowed for more in-depth and descriptive answers. These interviews lasted approximately 1 to 1.5 hours each and were conducted over Zoom. Conducting online interviews was most ideal for three reasons: firstly, the online interviews reduced face-to-face interaction, ensuring safety during COVID-19; secondly, it enabled participants to be interviewed in an environment of their choice that they felt granted them the most privacy and comfort; thirdly, the platform permits participants to turn their videos off, if they so wish, to maintain anonymity.

The interviews were semi-structured. While a few guiding questions were constructed (refer to Appendix A), most of the questions posed followed the flow of the responses. The guiding questions prevented digression and allowed for the procurement of the basic responses needed for our research. The questions posed in response to the interviewees' answers not only made for a conversational style of interaction that helped put the interviewees at ease during such a personal and sensitive topic, but they also allowed for a flexible interview tailored to the responses of each interviewee. This in turn stimulated more in-depth and less guarded answers.

These answers were recorded through notetaking. While notetaking sets up room for human error, this means of recording the responses was still preferable to a voice or video recording, which could compromise the participants' anonymity. After the interviews, the notes were compiled and analysed to spot trends, similarities or differences in the responses.

Findings and Results

To maintain the anonymity of our participants, we will be referring to them as Participant A, Participant B, Participant C, Participant D, and Participant E.

Impact of the phrase (Questioning[1])

When asked whether they had ever been told "you sound so gay", all 5 interviewees responded affirmatively. We then went on to question how they were affected when told "you sound so gay" during two different stages in their life – when they were first figuring out their sexuality, and presently. Most of our participants gave similar responses. When they were first figuring out their sexuality, which for all of them was during their secondary school years, the phrase "you sound so gay" induced fear and worry that they would be ostracised and bullied by their peers. As such, they attempted to change the way they spoke to sound "manlier".

> *"Last time in secondary school, when somebody told me that I sound gay, I was so worried like oh shit, am I going to be ostracised?"*
> *(Participant A, male, 21)*

[1] The 'Q' in LGBTQ+ can stand for 'Questioning', which refers to those who are still questioning their sexuality.

"Because I didn't want to sound gay, I tried not to talk so fast because my intonation will go up and I wouldn't giggle so much and I will also like talk about things that guys are more interested in like games and shit."
(Participant E, male, 32)

Impact of the phrase (Present)

Presently, however, they did not feel as fearful when they were told that they sounded gay. This is due to their growing confidence in their sexuality and manner of speech which they had credited their female friends' support for.

"Now I don't really mind when people tell me that I sound gay because I'm gay and that's why I sound gay. I mean, I sound like what I am... In JC, my class only had four guys and the rest were girls so I had a lot of girl friends and they were very supportive and always hyped me up and I think because of that I got more confident."
(Participant D, male, 20)

Despite this confidence, there were still instances where they felt the need to alter the way they spoke when told they sounded gay, specifically in front of those whom they were still hiding their sexuality from.

"Now like because I'm in NS right, I still have to be cautious with the way I speak, especially to the higher-ups like the older generation because I don't really want them to find out that I'm gay because they will view me in a different way and I might be outcasted or something."
(Participant C, male, 20)
"I'm like more careful around people who I don't want to know about my sexuality like for example when I'm in my church"
(Participant E, male, 32)

Intention of the phrase

The responses started to differ when the participants were asked how they felt the phrase "you sound so gay" was intended when directed at them. Some found that it could be meant merely as an observation occasionally, while the others felt that it was always intended insultingly.

"Actually sometimes I feel like they mean it as an observation and not like they want to insult or offend me?"
(Participant A, male, 21)
"I think they always mean it offensively."
(Participant B, male, 31)

Discussion

Through these findings, we have come to certain deductions. Firstly, there seems to be an assumption that those who sound gay are gay. We can infer this from the way our participants tended to avoid sounding gay in certain situations where they did not want to be known as gay.

Secondly, from the responses, we can discern the highly negative impact of the phrase "you sound so gay" on our participants. It induced fear and worry and caused them to change the way they spoke to sound "manlier," especially so when they were still coming to terms with their sexuality. It has been noted that the older participants found the phrase to have always been intended in a deliberately insulting manner in their schooling years, while the

younger ones thought that it was a mere observation with no ill-intent in some instances. Despite the neutrality of the phrase in these instances however, it still engendered the same fear and worry in our participants as when it was meant insultingly. This emphasized the negative impact the phrase "you sound so gay" has, no matter how it was intended. The fear and worry invoked by the phrase reveals our participants' awareness of the aforementioned repercussions of sounding gay (Meyer, 1995; Meyer, 2003; Meyer et al., 2008). The disparity between the intention of the phrase when directed at our older participants and when directed at our younger participants (always insultingly for the former, and not always so for the latter) could perhaps point towards the notion that "sounding gay" now is not viewed as negatively as it was ten years ago. This might be an indication that Singapore is gradually becoming more accepting of the gay community. This growing acceptance of the gay community could perhaps also be glimpsed through the participants' mention of having friends who are supportive of their sexuality. These friends are largely female, possibly indicating that women are more accepting of the gay community as compared to men. Their friends' support had given rise to our participants' current confidence in their sexuality and in the way they speak, which brings us to our third point.

Our participants' present confidence in both their sexuality and speech has diminished the negative impact of the phrase "you sound so gay," with it no longer affecting them as much as it did when they were still coming to terms with their sexuality. However, our participants still felt the need to avoid sounding gay in certain environments like NS and religious settings when confronted with the phrase to avoid repercussions. This indicates that while the negative impact of the phrase can be lessened through heightened confidence, it cannot be eradicated completely. Additionally, while there seems to be a growing acceptance of the gay community in Singapore as previously mentioned, the apprehension that our participants still demonstrate in certain circumstances when confronted with the phrase "you sound so gay" points to the reality that the country still has a long way to go in fully embracing the gay community, and perhaps by extension, the LGBT community as well. This corresponds to Phillips' (2014) research which dealt with Singapore's highly conservative LGBT climate.

Conclusion

This research aimed to explore the impact of the phrase "you sound so gay" on the gay men in Singapore. We discovered that the impact of this phrase was fairly negative, as it had affected our participants psychologically by inducing fear and worry in them, causing them to consciously change the way they spoke. Through further deductions, we were able to gain a better insight into Singapore's regard of the gay community. We can infer that while still conservative, Singapore, particularly the women, is slowly becoming more accepting of the gay community.

The merit of our research lies in its revelation of the attitudes towards the gay community. More importantly, in fleshing out the negative impact a simple, commonly heard phrase can have on the gay men in Singapore, we can enable others to be more aware of the ramifications of their words.

This study is limited however, as it focuses only on the impact of the specific phrase "you sound so gay" on gay men. The LGBT community includes other individuals of varying

sexual identities. Further studies could go into researching how these members of the LGBT community are affected by other possibly discriminatory expressions. By increasing the awareness around any potentially offensive language we adopt, we can avoid unintentionally hurting or discriminating against the LGBT community.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions:

Have you ever heard the phrase "you sound so gay?"
How did you feel in that situation and why?
If there is a difference in reaction to that phrase, what caused this difference and why?
Did you change any part of your speech upon hearing that phrase? If you did, in what ways?
How do you think that phrase is intended or meant?
How do you feel when you hear that phrase directed at someone else?
In America, gay men use gay speak to enforce sexual identity. Do you think that's the case in Singapore?
Conversely, it was also found that students get bullied in school for "sounding gay". Do you think the same happens in Singapore?

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HW0208: Academic Communication in the Social Sciences

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Understanding Singapore Youth's Perceptions on Hawker Culture

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Hawker culture is quintessential to Singaporeans' everyday lives, often reflective of Singapore as a melting pot, where people from all walks of life and culture come together. Hawker centres and its culture has evolved from a low-skill trade for early settlers in the 1800s to a symbol of dynamic local encounters today, growing in both functionality and symbolic meaning (Our SG Heritage, 2018; Tarulevicz, 2018; Tam, 2017). Being a part of Singapore's $27.7 billion tourism industry (Hirschmann, 2020), foreigners can be promised a taste of local flavours through Singapore's hawker culture. This culture recently rose to further international acclaim when it was added to UNESCO's Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (Yong, 2020). With such historical achievement, Singapore pledged its commitment in protecting and promoting hawker culture, conserving and continuing its legacy in the future generations (Yong, 2020).

Symbolism of Hawker Culture

While hawker culture remains a pertinent part of Singaporeans' daily food journey and represents an authentic, local experience, it has since come under heavy tourism narratives. Most notably, hawker food appeals to tourists more as physical symbols of Singapore's multiculturalism rather than educational means for discovering Singapore's intrinsic qualities (Henderson et al., 2012).

The lean towards tourism narratives is not a standalone evolution, but one with government interventions. Henderson (2000) identified the hawker business as one that is subjected to many regulations. It is thus suggested that the constant shaping from state agencies to push hawker culture as a function of tourism has resulted in the resonance towards tourists as a unique space of cultural consumption. On the contrary, the hawker scene did not resonate with locals as efforts to safeguard traditions and heritage, but rather, a functional place for "mundane activities, such as eating" (Teo & Huang, 1995). Singaporeans identify hawker culture with less historical significance, but rather as an unremarkable part of their everyday lives.

Hawking as an Occupation

The heavy state mediation to wield hawker culture as a tool for tourism (Teo & Huang, 1995) imposes a superficial symbolism on the subject, often overwriting the fact that hawker culture is also a lived reality for locals and hawking is a source of subsistence (Henderson et al., 2012). A review of case studies has identified sentiments that suggest difficulties in sustaining hawker culture in the future such as the growing adversities faced by hawkers. These adversities include: aging population of current hawkers, difficulties in hiring, long working hours and low profit margins, which in turn lowers the continuity of this occupation (Tan, 2020; Ng, 2018).

Hawkers draw financial difficulties from hawking to two main reasons, the impression that hawker food must be cheap and rental costs. The National Environmental Agency has been critiqued for their asymmetrical reporting of hawker rental costs which contradicts actual experiences of hawkers (Stolarchuk, 2020). The lack of help with rental costs coupled

with the identity of "cheap and good food" integral to hawker food makes it difficult for hawkers to sustain their livelihoods when they are unable to raise food prices or risk lower customers (Tan, 2020). The lack of respectable earnings and manpower crisis makes the future of hawker culture a cause for concern both financially and socially.

In recent years, the social concerns of manpower in hawker culture have started to observe a shift through the emergence of hawkerpreneurs. These hawkerpreneurs provide modern culinary ideas and business plans through the operation of hawker stalls and are often made up of the younger generation (Chew, 2020).

This study thus aims to explore youth's perceptions on hawker culture, as the younger generation is anticipated to inherit the trade and there are fewer studies exploring youth perceptions. By observing the gap between the current symbolic nature of hawker culture and the difficulties in future economic viability from running a hawker stall, this study seeks to gain a better understanding of how youths view hawker culture and the likelihood of them taking over the trade.

Methods

Participants.

33 youths were recruited through convenience sampling and contacted through messaging platforms. Participants were required to be between 18-35 years old and live in Singapore. Informed consent was sought before proceeding with the study, assuring that data collected would only be studied in the aggregate. Participants were reassured of their confidentiality when the study was completed (refer to Appendix A).

Study Design and Material.

This study used an online mixed methods survey and consisted of 3 sections. The first section had 3 qualitative and 2 quantitative items and aimed to understand the extent of youths' interactions with hawker centres. This is operationally defined by the frequency of visitation and range of activities youths do at hawker centres. This section also explored how youths defined hawker culture. The second section had 3 qualitative and 2 quantitative items which aimed to understand youths' impression of traditional hawking and hawkerpreneurship as an occupation. As hawkerpreneuring is a new field in hawking, participants were given a general description of hawkerpreneurs before answering in order to standardise definitions and to avoid assumptions (refer to Appendix B). Youths' opinions on the future of hawker culture were also collected in this section. In the third section, demographic information (i.e, age) was collected in order to confirm the inclusionary criteria for participants. All additional secondary data were collected through publicly available databases and credible news sites.

Results

Two types of analysis were used to process the different data exploring youth's perception on hawker culture in the following section. Descriptive analysis was conducted on youth's interactions with hawker centres to understand their extent of interactions. A Kawakita-Jiro (KJ) analysis was then employed to analyse open-text responses for youth's perception on hawker culture and their thoughts on the future of it. A Pearson's correlation was

conducted to understand the relationship between youth's interactions with hawker centres and their considerations to become a hawker.

Descriptive Statistics

Interactions with Hawker Centres. Frequency of youth's interaction with hawker centres were measured by numbers of visits per week (refer to Table 1). 29 participants (88%) visited a hawker centre at least once a week. Amongst them, 9 (27%) of them visited a hawker centre once a week, 7 (21%) thrice a week and 5 (15%) of them twice a week.

Table 1

Number of visits to a Hawker Centre per Week

No. of Visits per Week	*No. of Respondents*	*%*
0	4	12%
1	9	27%
2	5	15%
3	7	21%
4	4	12%
5	1	3%
6	2	6%
7	0	0%
8	0	0%
9	0	0%
10	1	3%
Total	33	100%

Table 2 reflects the length of time youths spend in hawker centres during each visit. Mostly, 19 (58%) of the participants (58%) spent between 30 to 60 minutes in each of their visits. Subsequently, 11 (33%) spend between 5 to 30 minutes per visit and 3 participants (9%) spend no more than 5 minutes. None spends more than 60 minutes per visit to the hawker centre.

Table 2

Time Spent at a Hawker Centre per Visit

Time Range	*No. of Respondents*	*%*
No more than 5minutes	3	9%
5-30minutes	11	33%
30-60minutes	19	58%
More than 60minutes	0	0%
Total	33	100%

Table 3

Activities at a Hawker Centre

Activities	*No.*
Dine In	20
Takeaway	17

Casual Meetings	2
Catching up with Friends/ Families	8

Youths interact with hawker centres through multiple ways. Among the 33 respondents, 20 participants (43%) dined in, while 17 of them (36%) took away food from hawker centres (refer to Table 3). 8 participants (17%) caught up with friends or family members, and only 2 (4%) participants held casual meetings. It is noted that participants could choose more than one response. The extent of youth's interaction with hawker centres is thus recorded in Table 4. 12 participants (36%) engage with hawker centres in 2 ways, 9 participants (27%) in 1 way, 7 participants (21%) in 3 ways and 5 of them (15%) in all 4 ways.

Table 4
Extent of Engagement with Hawker Centre

No. of ways Engaged	*No. of Respondents*	%
1	9	27%
2	12	36%
3	7	21%
4	5	15%
Total	33	100%

Perceptions of Present Hawker Culture. Youths were asked to define hawker culture and describe what it meant to them in 3 words. Referring to Appendix C, 3 main themes emerged, namely Singapore, cheap and good food, and descriptive terms about the physical characteristics of hawker centres. Singapore was the most common theme (e.g. “Unique to Singapore. Feels like home”).

2 main clusters of associative words emerged when analysing what hawker culture meant to youths personally, (1) culture and (2) experience. The culture cluster consisted of themes that drew back to Singapore culture, namely: Singaporean, sentimental memories, sense of community and culture. On the other hand, the experience cluster expressed themes that reflected the individual experience with hawker centres, namely: cheap, food descriptions, time-based proximity and location-based proximity. Amongst the two clusters, cultural and food description themes were the most common.

Perceptions of Future Hawker Culture. This section consists of 3 sections, (1) youth’s impression of being a hawker as an occupation, (2) impression of being a hawkerpreneur as an occupation and (3) personal thoughts on the future of hawker culture (refer to Appendix D). 2 main themes emerged from youth’s impressions of hawkers as an occupation - physically exhaustive and positive reputations. (e.g. “Tiring and backbreaking occupation” and “...definitely not an easy feat and therefore being a hawker is respectful as a lot of determination is required”). The most common theme described the physical demand of being a hawker while the theme reflecting respect mostly does so in reference to the hard work required.

Exploring youth’s impressions of hawkerpreneurs as an occupation, 4 main themes emerged. The most common theme expressed positive reputations (e.g., “The people who choose to do it as an occupation deserve respect”). Other themes included the view that hawkerpreneur is a modern and creative repackaging of a traditional trade (e.g., “very

innovative!"). Others raised questions on the authenticity of hawkerpreneurs, while another group had a positive outlook for hawkerpreneurs, but reflected no personal interest in it as an occupation.

Looking at youth's thoughts on the future of hawker culture, 2 main themes emerged. The most common theme expressed that the hawker culture would evolve in the future, taking a different form from what it is at present (e.g., "I think a lot of local flavours will remain, but the younger generation will change it up and fuse a variety of flavours."). The second most common theme reflected that the hawker culture would fade (e.g., "I worry it would be declining due to more and more current hawkers retiring and less and less youngsters willing to take up the role of being hawkers.").

Inferential Statistics

A Pearson correlational analysis was carried out to find if there were any relationship between key measures of this study - number of visits, sum of activities, time spent at hawker centres; and interests in becoming a hawker and hawkerpreneur (refer to Table 5). Results revealed that interest to become a hawker and hawkerpreneur was significantly correlated, $r = .776$, $p < .001$. However, it also revealed that there is low ($r < .5$, $p < .05$) to little ($r < .3$, $p < .05$) correlation across all variables measuring youth's interaction with hawker centres and their considerations to become a hawker.

Table 5
Correlation Matrix

Measure	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*
1. No. of Visits	-				
2. No. of Activities	.338	-			
3. Time Spent	-.03	.217	-		
4. Interest in Hawking	.162	.091	.228	-	
5. Interest in Hawkerpreneurship	.208	.068	.197	.776*	-

**correlation is significant at 0.001 level, 2 tailed

Discussion

Results reflected inconsistency between physical engagement with hawker centers and hawking as an occupation. While 88% of youths visit hawker centres at least once a week, 96% of them would not consider or were neutral about becoming a hawker thus suggesting lower engagement in terms of ambitions. Additionally, responses show that youths primarily have sentimental perceptions of hawker culture. There is a distinct gap between youths' role as regular and fervent patrons and their level of readiness to take on hawking as work.

A combination of participants' perceptions and the extent of their interaction with hawkers highlights how youths typically perceive hawker culture from a consumer's point of view. They recognize that what benefits them as consumers is at the expense of hawkers' profitability and physical capacity. The uncertainty in youth's responses to the future aspects of hawker culture echoes a similar line of thought. While the positive values are advantageous to them as consumers, the conditions become inversely disadvantageous if they were to be in the opposite role of being a service-providing hawker.

Theoretical Implications. This study suggests that hawker culture takes on symbolic meanings in more than just the tourism context found in pre-existing literature. Apart from the cultural significance tourists might associate hawker culture with, results reveal that local youths relate hawker culture more as an economic activity that affects one's livelihood and job satisfaction. Youths have come to identify hawker culture as an economically-ineffective and disadvantageous symbol, which leads to the gap between their perceptions and aspirations. With pragmatic considerations, local youths are concerned with the economic viability of hawking for a living.

The results of the current study parallel the findings from pre-existing literature on the reality of sustaining hawker culture. However, the study showed a different aspect that s challenging the conservation of the trade: Singaporean youths display no interests in succeeding the trade due to pragmatism. Without a line of succession, hawking eventually becomes a sunset industry. Moreover, a major portion of Singapore's multicultural narration would be lost with the disappearance of tourism's gastronomic dimension (Yang et al., 2020).

Limitations and Future Studies. Some limitations for the current research include the small sample size which is not representative of the views of all Singaporean youths. The recruitment was done through convenience sampling, and thus may be skewed towards NTU students. In addition, there is a lack in literature regarding youth's perceptions towards hawker culture, hence the current research topic is scoped towards broader perceptions. Therefore, future studies could build upon the findings of this study to gain a deeper understanding on the relationship between youths and hawker culture.

Future studies could focus on establishing a more comprehensive set of push and pull factors that youths have developed towards hawking from a consumerist point of view. By identifying the pain points of the industry from both ends of the demand-and-supply chain, opportunities can be better sought out to motivate youths from being consumers to providers. Specifically, as the results of this study found positive sentiments towards the creative repackaging of the old trade (in the form of hawkerpreneur), a focus on exploring the modernized rhetorics and reinvented image of hawkers might reveal practical appeals to the younger generations. The rejuvenated image could give a modern appeal to a trade which traditionally vends food for a simple living (Tarulevicz, 2018).

Furthermore, future studies could investigate the likelihood of appealing to youths through use of business logics to bridge between their sentimental values of hawker culture and career aspirations. This could help to advance conversations from recounting hawker's humble past and a sense of nostalgia, to encouraging hawker as a job for the future to the next generation. By highlighting the professional skills required in the job, more can be achieved in decreasing the unfavourable stigmas of being a hawker. The disadvantageous aspects consumers tend to associate hawkers with stems from an insufficient recognition of the myriad of professional skills required in the job. Future research could deduce ways to fill in the gap in promoting hawkers' professionalism as opposed to highlighting its precarity.

Alternatively, more research can be done to explore the viability of having foreign workers to take up hawking, the impacts this move might have on hawker culture and the responses of the general public might have to such a proposal.

Conclusion

The current study explored youth's perceptions on hawker culture. The findings have suggested that there is a distinct gap between youth's passion for hawker culture and their ambitions to take it up as an occupation. It is hoped that the study can broaden the understanding of youth's perception and that the findings are able to inform future methods and possible directions for future campaigns on promoting hawking as a liveable reality. Hawker culture is a crucial part of Singapore's heritage and identity and it is important to sustain the realities of hawker culture beyond its symbolic meanings and prevent it from becoming a sunset industry.

Acknowledgements

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Appendix A
Informed Consent

Hi there!
Thank you for giving us your precious time!

If you are between the age of 18 to 35, we would like to invite you to participate in this questionnaire on Youth's Perception of Hawker Culture! This study will take approximately 15 minutes of your time. This questionnaire will consist of questions regarding your interaction with hawker centres, alongside your opinions on hawker culture.

Note:
Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you feel uncomfortable or do not wish to answer the questions, you have the right to withdraw from the survey at any point with no penalties. Your participation and responses will remain confidential and anonymous as they will be studied only in the aggregate. All data collected will only be used for the research paper for Academic Communications in the Social Sciences. Your information will be coded and will only be accessed by the researchers. There will be no compensation provided for your participation and there are no foreseeable risks to individuals participating in this survey beyond those that exist in daily life.

If you have any questions regarding this study, please feel free to contact the researchers,
Jocelin at JOCE0020@e.ntu.edu.sg
Daphne at DAPH0023@e.ntu.edu.sg

Please indicate your consent to participate in this study:
- I have read and agree to the above informed consent form. By clicking the next button and proceeding with the survey, I indicate my willingness to voluntarily take part in the study.

Debriefing Page

Thank you for participating in this study. As mentioned, your participation and responses will remain confidential and anonymous as they will be studied only in the aggregate. Your participation in this research is greatly appreciated!

If you have any further questions regarding this study, please feel free to contact the researchers:
Jocelin at JOCE0020@e.ntu.edu.sg
Daphne at DAPH0023@e.ntu.edu.sg

Appendix B

Everyday Interaction with Hawker Centres
This section wishes to understand your interactions with hawker centres and hawker culture.

Hawker centres are also known as cooked food centres, and can include any of such places housing many stalls selling a variety of cuisines. This may include the coffee shops around your neighbourhoods and even the canteens and food courts in school.

There are no right or wrong answers to this section and your honest response will be greatly appreciated!

Q1. How many times do you visit a hawker centre in a week

_____

Q2. What do you usually do at a hawker centre (select all that apply)

- ☐ Dine in
- ☐ Takeaway
- ☐ Casual Meetings
- ☐ Catching up with family/ friends
- ☐ Others: _____

Q3. How long do you usually spend at a hawker centre each time?

- ☐ No more than 5mins / Taking away food
- ☐ 5-30mins
- ☐ 30-60mins
- ☐ More than 60mins

Q4. How would you define hawker culture?

_____

Q5. In 3 words, describe what hawker culture means to you?

_____

Impression of Hawkers
This section wishes to understand your impression of hawkers.
There are no right or wrong answers to this section and your honest response will be greatly appreciated!

Q6. What is your impression of being a hawker as an occupation?

_____

Q7. I would consider becoming a hawker as a future occupation

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

Hawkerpreneurs:
In recent years, there has been a rise in "Hawkerpreneurs" which is defined by the new and younger generation of hawkers. These hawkers add a new spin to traditional hawker food we know and love and are also invested in creating a brand for their food, aiming to span across different branches.

Q8. What is your impression of being a hawkerprenuer as an occupation?

_____

Q9. I would consider becoming a hawkerprenuer as a future occupation

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

Q10. What do you think of the future of hawker culture in Singapore?

_____

Demographics

Age: _____

Appendix C

Defining Hawker Culture:

Cheap & Good food	**Singapore**	**Atmosphere/ Characteristics of Hawker Centers**
Cheap and good!	*Unique to Singapore. Feels like home.*	*when there's distinct stalls at one location, and generally cheaper food that normal restaurants*
Cheap and good	*Local Singaporean food, variety of cuisines*	*"Choping", queuing for good food, loud and busy atmosphere*
Variety of food options and its cheap	*It's a vibrant place that reflects Singapore's multiculturalism. It is also reflective of how Singaporeans truly live in the heartlands.*	*"Chope", hot, good and diverse food*
vibrant, a lot of cheap and yummy food	*Uniquely Singapore, something that you can't find elsewhere and will miss when overseas.*	*Open-air environment, "choping" tables with tissue paper, cheap food*
cheap food	*Uniquely Singapore*	*Atmosphere of the hawker centre and behaviour of the people when entering in a hawker centre*
Cheap local food	*It's definitely a trademark of Singapore... like it represents our traditional and cultural aspects? And our good food haha. It's also quite affordable and convenient and has a variety of cuisines, making it a very inclusive culture that makes it suitable for everyone*	*beautiful*
Cheap food, local delicacies and the smell of localness	*Traditional*	*Convenient, comforting*
casual dining with affordable food	*Familiarity among Singaporeans*	*Having a variety of nice local food to choose from*
Affordable good food run by the govt	*Immersion of different cultural foods. Unique to Singapore*	*Singaporean/Singaporean-influenced street food in an open air environment*
Good and affordable food	*something that Singaporeans are very familiar with, a place that people come to gather and eat their favourite local food*	
Good food at affordable prices	*a place with a great variety of food and where people can bond*	
	good way to see the local way of living. extremely vibrant in its own ways. hawkers who work long hours to produce delicious, cheap food	
	familiarity of the hawker centre, habits that we will only see at hawker centres (i.e. chope seats with tissue packets), have a plethora of food options	

Meaning of Hawker Culture:

Culture			**Experience**			
Singaporean (9)	**Sentimental Memories (10)**	**Sense of Community & Culture (21)**	**Food Descriptions (14)**	**Affordability (11)**	**Time-based Proximity (7)**	**Location-based Proximity (5)**
Singaporean	*Memories with family*	*Home*	*Yummy food*	*affordable*	*Fast*	*Convenient*
Singapore	*Memorable*	*Local*	*yummy*	*Affordability*	*Bustling*	*Accessible*
Singaporean culture	*Comfort*	*Heartland*	*delicious*	*Cheap*	*Anytime*	
Singapore identity/culture	*Familiar*	*Multicultural*	*food*	*Budget*	*Always*	
	homely	*Traditional*	*good food*	*Value for Money*	*everyday*	
	nostalgic	*Unique*	*local food*			
		Authentic	*Variety*			

Appendix D

Hawker as an Occupation (Main Themes):

Physical Exhausting	**Respectability/ Positive Reputation**
Tiring and tough job.	*commendable*
very tiring	*I think it is definitely not an easy feat and therefore being a hawker is respectful as a lot of determination is required.*
Tough	*used to be looked upon as an occupation for people who don't study, but now i think it's gaining increasing acceptance and popularity as we realise that it is an important part of our culture*
It's a lot of hardwork. Have to wake up early to prepare food	*Passionate*
Tiring and backbreaking occupation	*COOL! good at cooking*
Exhausting	*they are to be admired because it's a very hard and tiring job but they still do it and bring lots of smiles to people's faces*
Tiring and hot but earns well if its popular	*To be honest I really admire hawkers… cos they work in such hot and tiring conditions the whole day and they don't charge much for their cuisines too… it's usually a job undertaken by the elderly or mature adults I guess. You rarely see young adults or teenagers being/aspiring to be hawkers due to the harsh conditions they work in.*
Tough	*I support!*
Tough, underpaid, unglamorous, undervalued	
Tough but satisfying job	
It's a tiring job	
tough	
tough and laborious work	
very tiring	
Very tough job	
It's a tough job because of the long hours and working conditions	

Hawkerpreneur as an Occupation (Main Themes):

Respectability/ Positive Reputation	**Modern/ creative repackaging of tradition**	**Positive sentiments but no personal interest**	**Questioning Authenticity**
The people who choose to do it as an occupation deserve respects	*I think it's an innovative job idea*	*It is a viable option for some, but I personally will not embark on this route*	*Interesting but spoils the authenticity*

I think they are very innovative	*It is a promotion of hawking to younger generation.*	*It's a valid occupation. If they are passionate in it, they should go for it.*	*not very authentic*
I love to see their new innovative ways of fusing/reimagining hawker foods to appeal to the young people too	*Not bad, it revitalize the impression of boring hawker food.*	*Respectable but not something I would pursue*	*Selling Instaworthy food rather than old tradition.*
I think it's really cool and awesome that the younger generation are stepping up to create new things from the old whilst keeping sentiments of the old alive	*Good to have an interesting spin*	*Not for me*	*I'm assuming it's tough to break out into the market this way as Singaporeans are so used to how hawkers are and may not necessarily be susceptible to change*
It seems like quite a noble occupation as they are trying to preserve the traditional hawker culture and cuisines but at the same time integrate it with modern spins which doesnt seem like an easy feat!	*I think it's great that they're continuing the tradition of hawker culture, but adapting it to new trend for its sustenance*	*It's interesting that a growing number of people are interested in this, and it is definitely a respectable job (for the next generation, I wouldn't do it since I don't enjoy cooking)*	*It opens new doors for hawkers but it can't beat traditional hawkers*
Brave	*very innovative!*		
quite cool! their food pretty cool	*It is a good starting point for new chefs, assuming it is the younger generation. it is a good avenue to be creative with food*		
Daring			
Very zai👍			

Future of Hawker Culture (Main Themes):

Culture will transform	**Culture will fade out**
it will become more creative	*Diminishes*
Going towards a fusion of local food with new taste and presentation	*the old culture of not very aesthetic signboards but good and authentic food dying out*
I hope it will be kept alive. It is representative of our culture in Singapore. With newer and younger hawkers coming into the scene, I think the vibes will change to be more varied – e.g. burger stalls in hawker centres that represent the changing tastebuds of Singaporeans to be accepting of different cuisines	*Bleak with lesser hawkers*
, quite bright	*Dying*
I think with the rise of AI, maybe machines will be the ones cooking	*Uncertain as future generations probably gravitate towards more white-collar jobs*
Food court style.	*It is on a decline but hopefully after attaining the UNESCO status will help to preserve it.*
It may develop into something that is different from the hawker culture that we used to know or now know, but I am	*Declining but there had been government support to sustain it.*

pretty sure that Singaporeans will still ensure that the culture remains authentic and true to its roots and origins.	
i think a lot of local flavours will remain, but the younger generation will change it up and fuse it a variety of flavours	*I worry it would be declining due to more and more current hawkers retiring and less and less youngsters willing to take up the role of being hawkers.*
Alot more fusion / westernized food	*it might die....*
Limitless creativity on food ideas	*It's slowly fading away)):*
from the newer hawker centres e.g. pasir ris hawker centre, it seems to be moving towards more westernised food	*I feel like it may die out simply because not many people want to take over. I feel like this is enhanced by the fact that not many people who know how to cook know how to cook well such that they think about it as a profession*
There is likely to be a large increase in fusion/western food	
fresh cuisines	
The same or people become more polite with each other. It will become a eating main course cafe.	

Hawker as an Occupation (Other Themes):

Long Hours (Time)	**No Impression**	**Economic Element**	**General Statements about Hawker Culture**
Being a hawker is an occupation that requires long hours and hard work.	*No impression? The only impression is the food and the price.*	*Possibly very well-compensated but also hard work*	*Usually done by older uncles and aunties, but an increasing number of young people are starting to do it (+ the hawker course at poly iirc)*
long hours	*It's a valid occupation*	*I feel that is is an up and coming job right now, a lot of young people are leaving their 9-5 jobs for it.*	*Not for me a good on those who are keen - keep the hawker spirit going*
it's a tough line of work requiring working long hours			

Hawkerpreneur as an Occupation (Other Themes):

No difference from normal hawking (neutral)	**Feels that it is carrying on the tradition**	**Physical Exhausting**
Same as hawkers, same industry after all	*Preservation of hawker culture*	*Cool and flexible time, albeit with lots of hard work and long working hours!*
Cool, no negative feelings.	*It is a good investment, undying line of work that is always there and available.*	*long hours*
Cool with that		

Future of Hawker Culture (Other Themes):

Culture will remain	**Hawking will remain but the culture of it will transform**	**Sustainability dependent on new generation**
It will stay. An observation is we will see more and more franchised hawker stalls	*while more young people are keen on taking on such a job, the traiditional recipes and foods are slowly going away*	*More young people need to be willing to step up and step into this role as a hawker to ensure sustainability*
i'm not sure i foresee hawkerpreneur getting big in the near future but hawker culture will definitely still be here to stay	*there are younger generation who will take up being a hawker as occupation. but i think that the original and traditional taste would slowly be scarce*	*Definitely good to have more young people joining and carry on the hawker culture because it will be really sad for it to die. It also allows for people to try new food/cuisine at a more affordable price and convenient location.*
Keep them there	*Sadly be more expensive when they are outsourced to companies like ntuc*	

HW0188: Effective Communication

Language and Communication Centre
Nanyang Technological University
SINGAPORE

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The Conan's Cloth

Yip Ying, Wong Wei Jie, and Chua Kai Jian

1. Background

The first case of Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) was confirmed in Wuhan, China, December 2019 (Ministry of Health [MOH], 2020). Since then, the disease has evolved into a global pandemic; as of Jun 08, 2021, there are more than 173 million confirmed cases around the world, with 3.73 million lives lost (refer to Figure 1) (World Health Organization [WHO], 2021).

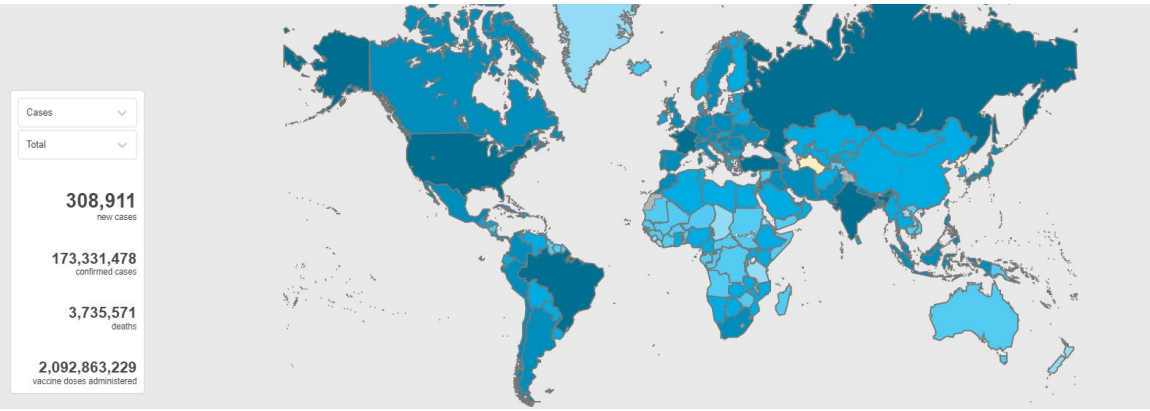

Figure 1. Overview of COVID-19, Worldwide, WHO

The deadly pandemic has heightened the importance of cleanliness – evident from the frequent wipe-downs of public and personal spaces and the greater emphasis on personal hygiene (Kang, 2020). This has been reported to be an effective method of containing COVID-19 transmissions, and it is expected to become a long-term trend (Rakshit, 2020). Therefore, a continuous increasing demand for personal hygiene and household products, such as surface disinfectants and disinfectant wipes, is expected (Rakshit, 2020). This would lead to a rising concern regarding the increased waste generated from the single-use products, thwarting past efforts to reduce plastic pollution (Sarakodie & Owusu, 2020).

2. Problem

Due to increased awareness of hygiene, disinfectant wipes have become essential in our lives. However, consumption of these wipes, which is projected to increase by 9.3%, will be environmentally detrimental due to their non-biodegradable nature (Intrado Global Newswire, 2020). They will thus join plastic waste – another key concern in sustainability efforts – to be a major contributor to the already dire situation of waste pollution (George, 2019; Garrity, 2020). Hence, it is fair to say that the convenience of single-use wipes outweigh their eco-friendliness.

However, there are alternatives in the market like compostable wipes that are biodegradable – being able to break down within 180 days in industrial composting facilities (Garrity, 2020; DDC Dolphin, n.d.). However, the composting process bears additional cost and multiple other disadvantages that makes these wipes extremely inconvenient to use than the normal ones (DDC Dolphin, n.d.). Therefore, this is not an

economically sustainable model as consumers will still opt for the cheaper and non-eco-friendly wipes.

3. Solution

Currently, there are products in the market that are targeted towards having antibacterial growth and reusable properties. One such product is the Mizu Towel, which prevents 99% of bacteria growth by using natural silver (Team Mizu, n.d.; Nielsen, n.d.). This might not be the best approach as some bacteria, such as the most commonly found bacteria, Staphylococcus Aureus, are resistant to silver and it does not destroy the bacteria instantly (Durán et al., 2016; Hosny et al., 2019). Another product is the Livinguard Mask, which was distributed to the community by the Temasek Foundation. Livinguard Mask has been scientifically proven to destroy more than 99% of coronaviruses, which are targeted towards reducing the chances of transmission in the community during this pandemic. However, there are currently no such environmentally-friendly alternatives targeted at surface cleaning. Therefore, Conan's Cloth is born.

Conan's Cloth is an improved version of wet wipes. It is a wearable, multi-purpose product that allows live bacteria detection and sterilisation, which aims to provide a reusable disinfectant functionality.

3.1 Working Principle

Conan's Cloth is a two-sided cloth weaved together over a cotton glove as an inner wear and a different unique mechanism on each side of the cloth.

The desired surface for cleaning can be wiped down with the sterilization side to eliminate any bacteria. After disinfecting the area, the other side of the cloth can be used to detect any traces of bacteria to ensure that the area is clean. Since we are not able to see the bacteria with our naked eyes, Conan's Cloth is able to give a sense of security that the surface is clean due to the detection mechanism. This is especially beneficial to end users during this pandemic.

3.2 Bacterial Detection Mechanism

Litmus paper is a paper to determine the pH values of an aqueous solution. Initially, litmus paper can be either blue or red. The blue litmus paper can indicate acidity with a change to red. While in the presence of alkaline solution, the red litmus paper would turn blue (Helmenstine, 2020). This is very similar to the bacterial detection mechanism that will be incorporated into Conan's Cloth. Conan's Cloth uses proprietary solvatochromic dyes that are engineered to detect the presence of bacterial substances through doping (Team Mizu, n.d.). Due to the change in polarity from bacteria, a shift will occur. This shift significantly increases the dye's wavelength, resulting in a visual change in colour from blue to red (Team Mizu, n.d.). Therefore, Conan's cloth will only change from blue to red in the presence of bacteria (refer to Figure 2). Furthermore, the polarity can be easily reset by washing with regular water.

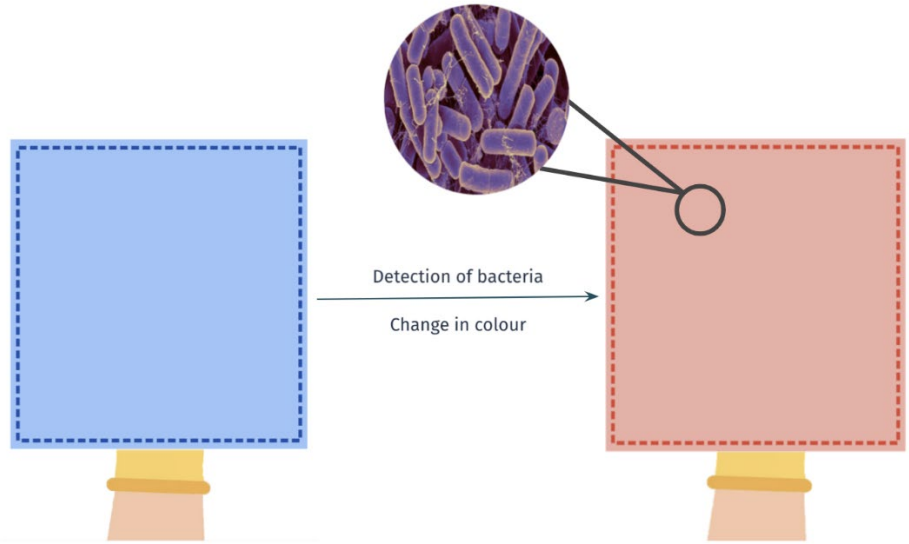

Figure 2. Change of colour from blue to red in the presence of bacteria

3.3 Bacterial Sterilisation Mechanism

Conan's Cloth adopts the idea of using Titanium Dioxide (TiO2) nanopillars that are inspired from the nanostructure of an insect's wing for its antibacterial properties (Jenkins et al., 2020). Conventional cleaning chemicals, such as soap, dissolves the membrane of microorganisms (Liu, 2020). In a similar fashion, the TiO2 nanopillars are capable of causing mechanical rupture and lysis of bacteria by inducing envelope deformation and penetration, effectively killing the microorganisms (Jenkins et al., 2020).

Mechanical rupture of the bacteria cell wall has a similar concept of a pin piercing a water balloon. When the pin pierces through the balloon, it bursts and loses its ability to hold water. Similarly, wiping Conan's Cloth across a surface causes the nanopillars to come into contact with the bacteria and penetrate the membrane. Subsequently, the movement will result in membrane stretching and induce a disruption of the bacteria membrane, resulting in cell death and the release of cytoplasmic compounds (Jenkins et al., 2020). Figure 3 illustrates the process of destroying bacteria with nanopillars.

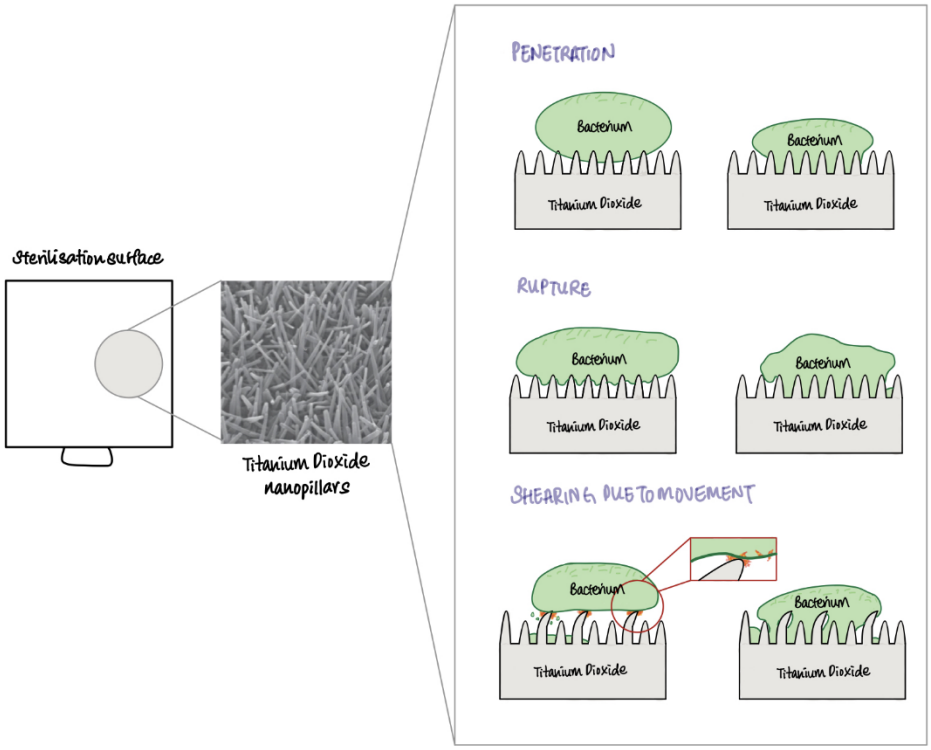

Figure 3. Sterilization Mechanism of Conan's Cloth

3.4 Conan's Cloth Material and Design

Organic cotton, which is largely biodegradable (Salagubang, 2020), is the main material being used in Conan's Cloth. The makeup structure of this biodegradable cotton is easily broken down by the natural microorganism (Rinkesh, n.d.), making Conan's cloth less harmful to the environment. Since cotton fibers are hollow, they are easily degradable and also are soft, cold, breathable, and have absorbent properties. Thus, they provide maximum comfort to users.

The solvatochromic dyes are doped into one side of the cloth, which provides a "detecting surface" (shown in blue in Figure 4). Meanwhile, the titanium dioxide nanopillars are weaved into another side of the cloth. This gives Conan's Cloth a "killing surface" (shown in yellow in Figure 4). With these two different surfaces and an inner glove, Conan's Cloth is complete (refer to Figure 4 and 5).

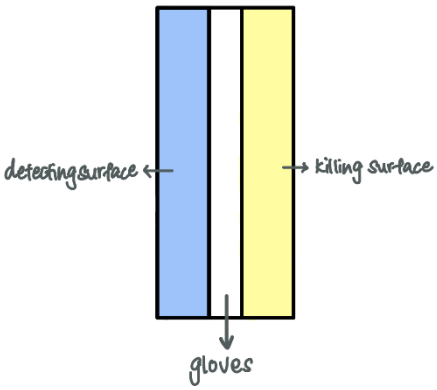

Figure 4. Cross-Section of the Conan's Cloth

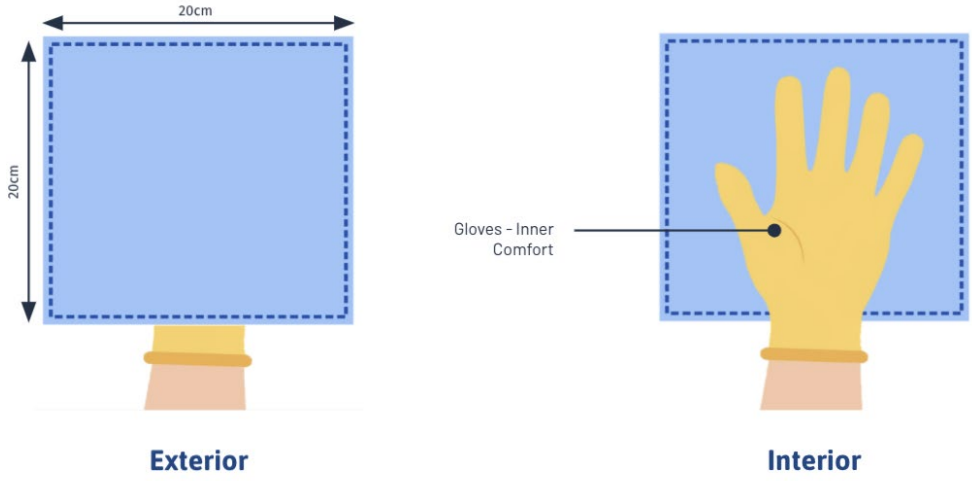

Figure 5. Exterior and Interior Design of the Conan's Cloth

4. Benefits

Conan's Cloth is an environmentally-friendly alternative to single-use wipes. Being reusable and recyclable, it can reduce plastic footprint and the amount of waste and chemicals generated in the long run. Due to its unique mechanism, Conan's Cloth is highly effective in ensuring the hygiene standard of any surfaces through bacterial detection and sterilisation, even if the bacteria has higher chemical resistance. Furthermore, with organic cotton used as the innerwear material, it is versatile, comfortable to use, and durable, which can be used in many areas, such as households and in hospitals.

5. Implementation

Please refer to Table 1 for the implementation plan

Phase 1 (3rd quarter 2021 to 2nd quarter 2022):

Research and Development Team will come up with a plan and outline of the product idea and go through product validation with companies such as Titanium Dioxide Manufacturers Association (TDMA), Ishihara Sangyo Kaisha, LTD and Mizu. Once the product design has passed the initial screening stage, the designers will go through materials sourcing and procurement and come up with a user-friendly design that both appeal to customers while adhering to the mechanism criteria.

Phase 2 (2nd to 4th quarter 2022):

Assembly team will confirm all of the materials required and proceed on to the prototyping phase of product development. Subsequently, 500 prototypes will be shipped to healthcare facilities to conduct preliminary testing on the product's ergonomics and efficacy.

Phase 3 (4th quarter 2022 to 1st quarter 2023):

Research and Development Team will collect feedback and make any necessary changes to address any shortcomings. Any changes during this phase will be implemented directly into the final product.

Phase 4 (2nd quarter 2023):

Marketing team will collaborate with healthcare centres to market and promote the product through a marketing campaign. Commercial marketing will be carried out at this phase, including selling to the public.

		Phase One		Phase Two		Phase Three	Phase Four
		Research and Development (R&D)	Design	Assembly	Testing	Refinement	Launch
Y1 - 2021	Q3						
	Q4						
Y2 - 2022	Q1						
	Q2						
	Q3						
	Q4						
Y3 - 2023	Q1						
	Q2						

Table 1. Implementation Plan for the Launch of the Conan's Cloth

6. Costs and Budgets

Items	*Costs*
Titanium Dioxide	$200/Tonne (Venator Corp, 2021)
Colour-Changing Bacterial Detection Cloth	$70/Piece (Team Mizu, n.d.)
Inner Glove	$15 for 6 pairs (Esslinger, n.d.)

With mass production, the estimated cost for 1 Conan Cloth: $53

7. Conclusion

The increased usage of disinfectant products in recent times has caused an increase in waste products. The waste produced must be sterilized before being dumped into landfills to prevent an outbreak of infectious microorganisms. Conan's Cloth will provide a long-term solution to facilitate local surface disinfection without the use of special chemicals while reducing the waste from single-use disposable wipes. With Conan's Cloth, not only is less waste generated, more resources can be directed towards disinfection of cloth rather than waste decomposition — all of which contribute to a clean and hygienic living

environment and a better quality of life. Investing in the Conan's Cloth will help reduce the overall waste production and resource cost generated worldwide.

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Antimicrobial Hygroscopic Mask

Teo Lian Wei Vesy and Vincent Teo Ting An

1. Background

On 11 March 2020, WHO announced COVID-19 as a pandemic (Ducharme, 2020). Masks are used as a form of protection against the spread of this airborne disease which infects one through close contact (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021). According to the National Environmental Agency, Singapore's humidity levels are at an average of 84.2% (GuideMeSingapore). According to an article from MIT, humans tend to sweat more when humidity increases. The rationale behind this phenomenon is the slower rate of evaporation of sweat as the air is saturated with water (Tcharkhtchi, Abbasnezhad, Zarbini Seydani, Zirak, Farzaneh, & Shirinbayan, 2020). This amount of moisture in the atmosphere coupled with the sweltering heat would take an hour for a surgical mask to get drenched in sweat (Heng, 2020, para. 7). Besides, a wet mask causes greater resistance to airflow, making it harder for users to breathe (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021, para. 27). Lastly, the risk of bacterial penetration from the mask's surface exists for both surgical and cloth masks which also increases the risk of transmission from the virus. (Tcharkhtchi et al., 2020).

2. Problem

The effectiveness of masks plays a vital role in combating the transmission of COVID-19. Damped masks as a result of saliva and sweat reduce effectiveness of the surgical mask, increasing the risk of transmission for users.

Currently, cloth masks are used universally, with their market size expanding at an exponential rate of 23.5% (Grand View Research, 2020, para. 1). However, cloth masks do not offer the same amount of protection as surgical masks. According to a randomised trial on cloth mask and surgical mask. Cloth-mask wearers are 13 times more susceptible to influenza-like diseases than surgical-mask wearers as it is easier for aerosol particles to penetrate through cloth masks compared to surgical masks (Fox, 2021, para. 7).

Novel ideas such as masks with an absorbent core made from wood pulp impregnated with super absorbent polymers are found to reduce humidity in masks(Whitaker & Hoge, 2000). Despite that, it was found that contaminated aerosol particles such as COVID-19 were able to penetrate the surface of the mask, rendering the mask ineffective in terms of protection (Tcharkhtchi et al., 2020).

Therefore, the reduced effectiveness of wet mask and cloth mask, as well as the neglect of bacterial penetration from the novel ideas, call attention to an alternative solution which is capable of tackling both underlying problems of humidity and bacterial penetration.

3. Solution

The proposed product, Anti-microbial hygroscopic mask (AMH), as shown in Figure 1, functions at maximal effectiveness while protecting the user from COVID-19 through eliminating factors of humidity and bacteria penetration. Apart from blocking off large-particle droplets, the base material of our mask - sodium polyacrylate, a superabsorbent polymer (SAP) eliminates humidity within the mask and from the environment. The SAP

absorbs up to 300 times its weight in terms of aqueous fluids. The polymer chains form a chain-fence like structure, making up a 3D network. The polymer chains are coiled when dry and expand upon absorption of liquid. The liquid is then trapped within the polymer network through the formation of a gel. The second component of the mask - silver ion, combats bacteria penetration as well as bacterial growth. The silver ion disrupts the bacteria's metabolism by interfering with its ability to convert nutrients into energy, effectively killing the bacteria on the surface of the mask (Edana, 2019).

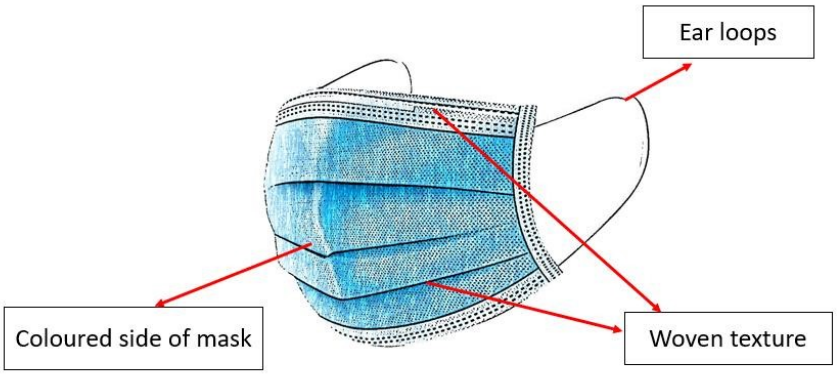

Figure 1. AMH surgical mask (Silca, 2020)

The manufacturing of the product involves the use of a fibre production method - Dual Spinneret Electrospinning, as shown in figure 2. (Wang et al., 2015). The silver ion infused polymer is first made by incorporating the silver ion masterbatch from a dosing unit into the polymer's extrusion machine (Biocote, 2012). The woven texture mask is then manufactured through dual spinneret electrospinning of both polymers.

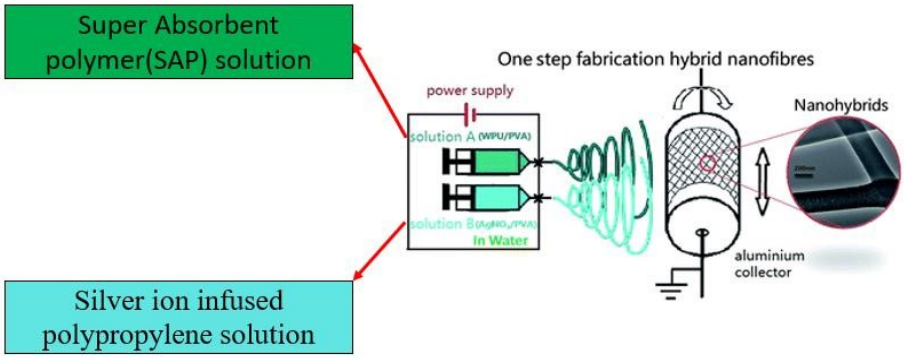

Figure 2. Dual Spinneret Electrospinning, RSC Advances, Issue 50
(Wang et al., 2015)

4. Benefits

Anti-microbial hygroscopic (AMH) mask benefits global mask users by incorporating greater effectiveness in its protection against COVID-19. Our mask does not decrease in effectiveness over time due to its superabsorbent properties, providing maximal protection against airborne transmission. As the AMH mask effectively removes humidity within the mask, allowing for airflow and smooth breathing through the mask. Also, users who sweat more often can be reassured that their skin will stay fresh and dry throughout the day. Furthermore, the silver ion eliminates bacterial growth within the mask, thus putting an end to problems such as maskne and bad breath faced by users. Overall, our mask provides greater effectiveness without sacrificing comfort properties.

5. Implementation

In manufacturing this product, the following steps are required:

- Purchasing stock supplies from Edana and Microban for SAP and silver ion infused polypropylene
- Collaborating with a research and development team, with expertise in dual spinneret electrospinning for design of woven texture
- Collaborating with material engineers to carry out the mechanical testing, tensile test, permeability test and flammability test
- Working with Alcare, a product distributor and wholesaler of surgical masks

6. Costs or budget

SAP	$2.24 - $2.77 / kg (Jinan Huijinchuan Chemical Co., Ltd, 2021)
Polypropylene	$1720 / kg (Zhang, M., Yeo, M., & Ng, E, 2020, para. 1) $0.0344 / mask (Safe Healthcare, n.d.)
Silver nanoparticles	$375.70 / 20mL (NANOCS, 2013)
	$0.000845 / mask (Benn, T., Cavanagh, B., Hristovski, K., Posner, JD., & Westerhoff, P, 2010)
Ear Loops	$6-7 / kg (Yang, C, 2021)
Nose edge	$8.65/100 pieces (BathBull, 2020)
Total	$0.63 / mask

7. Conclusion

With the current pandemic costing millions of lives worldwide, it is our responsibility to protect ourselves and others. The reduced effectiveness of wearing a damped surgical mask

poses a serious threat to users as it increases their risk of transmission. Despite efforts being poured in, the future is uncertain, and we may have to put on our masks for years to come. Thus, the AMH mask guarantees its effectiveness without compromising on comfort. Donning the AMH mask is all it takes to play our part in making the world safe again.

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