

Reflections Journal

Learning From The Living Room

Project By Ehtisham Ul Haq

January 04, 2023

Day. 1



Every Negative Has a Positive

I always thought of my flaws as nothing but flaws, but after yesterday, I'm starting to find the good within the bad.

I'm a control freak, but that makes me a good leader and negotiator.

I'm indecisive, but that allows me to be more open-minded, and take time to consider all angles of a situation.

I'm an over-thinker, but that makes me more observant.

By Alya Alkhemeiri

Being Kind to Others

Yesterday, as I was filling up my tire at the gas station, I was in a bit of a panic as I realized that I didn't know how to do it. But then a man came over and offered to help me. Despite my offer to tip him, he refused and happily filled up my tire for me. Reflecting on this experience, I am struck by the kindness and generosity of this stranger.

It made me realize that sometimes the smallest acts of kindness can have a big impact. His willingness to help me without expecting anything in return was truly selfless and it made me feel grateful. It also made me think about how often we are so focused on our own lives that we don't take the time to help others. And how by just doing a small action like this, we can make someone's day better, and in turn, it can make our day better too.

I also felt a sense of humility and gratitude, that despite my own struggles and problems, there are still people in this world who are willing to go out of their way to help others. This experience also reminded me of the importance of paying it forward and being kind to others, even in small ways.

Overall, I am grateful for the man at the gas station who helped me fill my tire. His kindness was a reminder of the goodness in people and how a small act of generosity can brighten someone's day, and it has made me more motivated to be more kind and helpful to others in the future.

By Ahmad Harmoozi

First Day of Classes

As I walked off the plane and into the bustling airport in Nairobi, I could not help but feel a sense of excitement and familiarity wash over me. After spending a semester abroad in Abu Dhabi, coming home to Kenya felt like a warm embrace.

As I made my way through customs and collected my luggage, the sights, sounds and smells of home surrounded me. The chaos and bustle of the airport were a far cry from the sleek and modern terminal I had just left, but it was worth a comforting reminder of the unique culture and way of life that I had missed while away.

As I stepped out into the warm, bright sunshine and climbed into a matatu to begin the journey home, I could not help but feel grateful for the opportunity to have experienced life in another country. It has given me a newfound appreciation for the beauty and complexity of my own culture and the warm generosity of my fellow Kenyans. Despite the many challenges and difficulties faced by my country, it will always hold a special place in my heart as my beloved home

By Bedan Maiywa

Reflections Journal

Learning From The Living Room

January 05, 2023
Day. 2

A New Year, New Swim: Rediscovering the Joys of Swimming



(written in comic sans size 11, in true not following citation formatting spirit)

My friend Hamd is in her new year new me phase and her resolution this year is to learn how to swim, so she finally started taking up on my offer all of winter break after she spent all of last semester rejecting my offers to take her to the pool. We both had pretty free evenings last night so we went for a quick dip.



It was so refreshing not only because it's early January and freezing cold, but it was so nice to get back into swimming regularly again. I used to (synchro) swim competitively and at some point I started associating it with all the competitiveness and controlling things like restricting our diet and so on. As soon as I quit a few years ago, I avoided pools completely.



But since coming to uni, I've been swimming regularly (mostly because I was also in said new year new me phase, and swimming seemed the least sweaty way to workout in the desert). Swimming just for fun with some music and friends made me remember how nice the water felt before all the competitiveness. It was really nice to associate a swimming lesson with something other than wanting to go home for once.

By Nadia Chan



Inspiring Perseverance to Reclaim Home

I've been thinking of Sandi's story about the Palestinian children in the camps. Particularly, how the children never said that they were from the camp, but rather from the native villages of their parents. This reminded me of my own country's and my family's history. While my home country Lithuania was in the Soviet Union, thousands of people were forcibly deported to working camps and settlements in Siberia. My grandparents were one of them, and my father was born in a forced settlement far away from home. However, while growing up, he always remembered that he was from Lithuania and his parents' native village. My father's family never gave up hope that they will come back, and they were extremely lucky to arrive back in Lithuania when my father was seven years old. I'm inspired by my father's and the Palestinian children's story and how it shows resilience and hope.

By Kotryna Karpauskaite

Intriguing Host/Guest Dynamics

One of the things I appreciate the most about the class is the way in which I was pushed to revisit my understanding of the host/guest dynamic and how hosting serves such an important role for Palestinians who were dispossessed of their lands. I was introduced to the idea of a madhafah, and the "rule" that the host should not ask the guest where they came from until three days into their interactions. I am intrigued by the element of care underlying this rule—the idea of appreciating each other in the present regardless of all else and to refrain from making assumptions because of where people are "from".

By Cadence Cheah

Reflections Journal

Learning From The Living Room

January 06, 2023
Day. 3



Life as a School: Reflections on Refugee Education

Yesterday, when I heard about opening a school in a refugee camp, my first reaction was to imagine a university in the traditional way, just like NYUAD, with different disciplines and majors. But when I asked Sandi what classes the school would offer, she explained that the school's curriculum was relevant to the lives of refugees: English language, international law, human rights studies, nationality and citizenship, refugee studies, humanitarian studies, gender studies, and so on. These topics revolve around the experiences of students living in refugee camps. It sounds that these subjects are very complicated, but life is a school, and these refugee students are closely connected with these seemingly distant topics in their day-to-day lives. As we have been discussing since the first class, we can certainly get some inspiration and reflection from our own experiences. A person's experience is a great reference to the formation of knowledge. Knowledge is both theoretical and practical.

By Rose Chen

Performance and Power: Navigating Social Constructs

After watching yesterday's videos, I kept thinking about performance and how it exists in our everyday lives. This idea that people behave differently in the private sphere versus the public sphere spoke to how what identities are allowed the privilege to true unobstructed self expression but also the various ways in which people empower themselves to present themselves in the ways that they WANT to whereby performance becomes a way of yielding some sort of power that isn't socially or culturally granted to them eg: women in Palestine, but even like women or queer people back home in Pakistan and how they also want to maintain this performance of obedience or submissiveness to authority because it allows them to claim power within the private space or navigate the power structures that they are subject to.

By Ibad Hasan

Learning to Appreciate Leisure Time

I was studying abroad last semester and it was a bit intensive in the sense that besides studies, since we were there for a short time, there was also this inner pressure to explore as much as possible. After that, I went home for a week and it was my sister's wedding so I didn't really get any free time to relax and recharge. Then I came here and fortunately enough, I'm getting a decent amount of time outside class for myself. But every moment I try to slow down and take a break, I end up going on a guilt trip of not being productive. A part of me keeps reminding myself of what all productive tasks I could be doing in my free time. So yesterday night, I was thinking about our discussions in class and reflecting on how we don't permit ourselves leisure or breaks. In the process, I was able to remind myself that by doing so, not only was I not being productive, I was also not able to relax and rejuvenate so I wasn't really winning anywhere. I reminded myself that it's okay to slow down once in a while and that I deserve this free time after all of the hard work I put in the previous semester. I reminded myself that I have a new semester round the corner and I need to start it with a new energy rather than the feeling of burnout.

By Himanshi Lalwani

Somethings don't go as planned, but it's part of life

I'm a very stubborn person, I always push for things that I want and, usually, if I really want something, I eventually get it. Recently I decided to apply for a Schengen visa to travel to Europe during my spring break, but there is one thing: I'm studying away in London next semester and leaving UAE in a little more than 2 weeks, which means that I need to get this visa urgently checked every single Schengen country and the closest appointments to that country and it showed up that the earliest appointments are available for later dates. Honestly, it didn't even bother me because my toxic trait is to do everything to eventually get what I want, so I kind of thought that there will be a way for me to get an appointment. Partially, I also believed that if I truly should visit Europe during my spring break, Allah will give me this opportunity, so, again, I didn't worry about anything. While scrolling the VFS website, I found out that there is a service called walk in without appointment for applicants who urgently need visas (like me). As a matter of fact, it was literally 2.5 hours ago. I already had all the necessary documents prepared, so I just asked my parents for bank statements, printed out everything and headed to the welcome centre to get a cab to the visa centre. While going to the place, I was praying that everything will work out as planned and they will give me an appointment. I walked into the centre VERY confidently, told them that I don't have an appointment but it's okay because I can definitely go in as per their website information. The worker immediately told me "no", which didn't stop me either as I asked her to call and ask if there is at least a 5-minute open slot for me. Thankfully, she called them, but they informed her that the website information is not accurate anymore and is not applicable for tourist visas. I started losing hope but reminded myself to rely on Allah and His decision, as it will be the best one for me. Obviously, I got a little upset but who knows, maybe I'll receive another opportunity to go to Europe that will be even better than I expected.

By Dilnaz Amantayeva

Reflections Journal

Learning From The Living Room

January 07, 2023
Day. 4

Integrating the Marginalized: Hosting Events to Level the Campus Hierarchy

Hi, y'all! I hope everyone's having a great beginning to the semester. I was taking an online class from A2C 2nd floor lounge and I was asked by SERCO staff if they could print some documents there. It felt as if they were asking for some kind of "permission" to use the printer. It made me feel as if there is some kind of a hierarchy on our campus where students are placed above the contracted staff members of our community. I thought all community members were entitled to access resources such as printers as should be the case. I find this problematic and would like to know if there are ways through which we could discuss this and act on it. I would truly appreciate it if anyone could point me to the appropriate resources. TIA!



Aigerim Zhusubalieva
bumps, i notice how contract staff ALWAYS let students in/out of doors, elevators, etc first and are apologetic about sharing space

48周 赞 回复

60 🎉😊

Last class, we talked about how refugees reverse the power structure by becoming hosts to regain their identity and make their voices heard in a new country. This reminds me of the many non-UAE faculty and staff members on campus. You can find them anywhere on campus, security staff, cleaning staff, equipment, maintenance staff, at D2, cafe, or bookstore. They carry multiple identities: non-locals, non-students or professors, they are more marginal than international students like me. I saw a post on Facebook once that this person thought that there is some kind of hierarchy on campus where students are placed above the contracted staff members. Fortunately, as replied below this post, all contracted members have full access to all of our campus facilities. Now, I am also thinking, instead of granting them rights, permissions and access, is it better for them to host some events to feel more integrated? Because it would be an active inclusion, not a passive acceptance.

By Rose Chen

A Wise Woman in Al-Fawwar Camp

In one of the videos that Sandi showed us yesterday regarding the Al-Fawwar refugee camp, I was really moved by how a wise elderly woman from the camp talked about gender inequality in her culture. I come from a bit of a similar culture as Palestine because of the same religion and hence the same kinds of restrictions that are imposed on the women of our societies. I have found that if any woman has a say in the household or society's matters in my culture, it was the elderly women which are respected because of their age. And in my society, I always found that elderly women show toxic femininity in a variety of ways. For example, sometimes I found them to be overly critical of other women, dismissive of other women's opinions, or exhibit behaviors of manipulation and control in relationships. I also saw them being overly reliant on traditional gender roles and expectations and putting pressure on younger women to conform to these norms. They also view men as superior themselves and think other women must also think the same way. I have strong opinions regarding how such women are one of the most difficult obstacles in our fight for gender equality and freedom of choice and expression. But seeing this woman in the video talking about the traditional gender norms and restrictions as mold, I found something that I always wanted to see from the elderly women in my own culture.

By Ehtisham Ul Haq

Did something change in me?

I was sitting under the palms for half an hour by myself yesterday morning. I had a deep conversation with my friend yesterday afternoon. I meditated for the first time in a while yesterday night. Just looking back at the day before, the realization hit me: my life is finally peaceful. The constant anxiety doesn't annoy me. There is no urge to be socially accepted. There is no competition with the perfect image, created in my head. There might be different reasons for that. Maturing? Self-confidence? Finally, balancing the spheres of life? New year, new me? Less academic pressure? I don't know the exact reason, all I know is that I like how I am feeling internally right now. Surely, life is like a line on the screen of a heartbeat monitor with ups and downs, but I want to preserve nowadays healthy habits such as meditation, time for myself, and expression of emotions to better combat the issues and handle the downs of life.

Writing this reflection, I remembered the quote from the book "The little prince" by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, "All grown-ups were once children... but only a few of them remember it." I feel that just in my 18th, I tried to plan my whole life and put too high expectations on myself. Always making the effort for becoming the best version of myself and get something I don't have in the future, I sometimes forgot to enjoy the things I have now. Maybe sometimes it is better to release the inner child to remember what it is like to live in the moment.

Thanks to the daily reflections, I started looking at myself from the first perspective, asking important questions such as 'How did I feel yesterday?', 'What caused such kind of emotion?' and 'What do you want to do now?' I find this inner dialogue significant because, in the fast-living world, we forget to give space for the inner child and listen to wishes and dreams coming from inside.

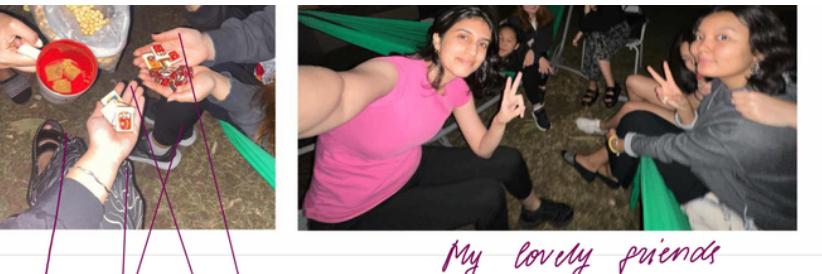
By Diana Alibekova

Reflections Journal

Learning From The Living Room

January 09, 2023
Day. 5

Cultural Exchange and Dancing Under the Rain



Kazakh churp
Mongolian chocolates
Babooris
East Kazakhstan dayworks

= Cultural exchange & dance under the rain. =
Karakhstan & Mongolia

- history
- both were under Chingiz Khan's Empire
- both had the USSR's influence:
 - communism
 - knowing Russian language (mostly by older only in Mongolia)
 - cultural damage → efforts to preserve
- culture
 - nomadic lifestyle in history
 - similar cuisine
 - similar names of food
 - similar music & musical instruments



Imagine dancing under the rain with your loved ones. That's the core memory of the youth, definitely



By Diana Alibekova

January 9, 2023:

This semester I had many conversations with my friends about spirituality, our religious journeys and aspirations. Since coming to this uni, I felt a little intimidated to start conversations with others about Islam, to ask questions and to engage in religious community activities. This sort of fear was coming from my inner thoughts that were dictating me that I'm not educated enough, I don't know much and I felt embarrassed because of it.

A couple of months ago I asked my Karakhi hijabi friend about her experience, her journey and she encouraged me a lot by showing me the beauty of being in this community, how she managed to grow a lot and educate herself in that matter even being surrounded by mostly non-religious friends back home.

By Dilnaz Amantayeva

The Power of a Circle

Yesterday, as we all sat in a circle in class, I couldn't help but notice the sense of unity and togetherness that it created. Despite our varying backgrounds and experiences, the act of sitting in a circle brought us all together. This simple act served as a reminder that no matter our differences, we all possess the ability to connect with one another and share in a common experience.

The classroom, in this case, served as a hub for communication and socialization. It provided a space where we could all come together and share our thoughts and ideas, creating a sense of openness. As I sat in the circle, I felt grateful for the opportunity to connect with my classmates in such a meaningful way and for the moments of understanding and connection that it created. Furthermore, it made me realize the importance of creating spaces where people can come together and connect, regardless of their backgrounds. We all have a role to play in generating a sense of community and belonging, and small acts like sitting in a circle can make a big difference in bringing people together.

In retrospect, I cannot help but appreciate the power of the living room, in this case the classroom, as a symbol of the connections and bonds that we share with one another. It serves as a reminder of the importance of communication, togetherness, and the role that a space plays in shaping our relationships and sense of belonging.

The experience of sitting in a circle in class was a powerful reminder of the importance of creating spaces where people can come together and connect, regardless of their backgrounds. However, most importantly, it created many moments to cherish.

By Ahmad Harmoozi

A Tradition of Welcoming

The conversation in class about hospitality reminded me of one of my family's Christmas traditions. Every year on Christmas Eve, we leave out a spare chair and plate at our table. We do this in case someone was wandering and looking for shelter, we are ready to welcome them and not turn away a person in need. To this day, no one has knocked on our door on Christmas Eve, but I am intrigued by what will happen if it finally happens.

By Kotryna Karpauskaitė

Reflections Journal

Learning From The Living Room

January 10, 2023

Day. 6

Alserkal Arts Foundation Dubai

Exploring the Art World: A Computer Science Major's Journey

Coming to Alserkal was the first time I was in an “art space”. And it was very nerve-wracking. Going to all of these galleries, full of paintings and installations, I had a hard time wrapping my mind around some of the pieces. And I spent a lot of the time trying to figure out if they connected to a greater theme or what was the underlying message. Being a computer science major, I am used to thinking in a very structured and objective way but the art world challenges all of that. But going through these galleries forced me to think more deeply about each piece and I don't know if that was the point or if we were supposed to take the paintings at face value. But nonetheless, it was a cool experience and hopefully, I won't be a pile of nerves when I go to an art gallery in the future.

By Kartikey Singhal



Exploring Cultural Hegemony in the U.A.E.

I was intrigued by a local student's perspective that there existed cultural hegemony in the U.A.E. I never really cared to think about this until the discussion about an intentional narrative by the government to make the culture more unified. I'm not saying that the government here does not try their best to preserve all elements of their culture, but the thought was interesting. They have a repertoire of development and unity so it is possible that there is an intentional action where in efforts to homogenise its people, cultural preservation gets sidelined. Talking to a member of faculty at NYU, he was disappointed with the amount of cultural richness that was being lost due to the lack of interest in this country. For example, a lot of collections in the library belong to foreign interventions to preserve U.A.E history. Although I do not know much at all on this subject, and although from the outside it looks like the U.A.E tries to preserve its traditions and history, it seems the historical narrative of the U.A.E is selective and pretty recent.

By Nathan Jacob

Cultural Implications of the Work/Leisure Framework

Sandi got me thinking about the cultural parameters surrounding the work/ leisure framework, that the latter is deemed as substandard within a modern understanding which prioritizes productivity. In class, we learned about how migrants tend to be the most implicated by the parameter: Given their identity as “guest”/ the outsider/ the one who don't belong/ the one who is receiving a favor, they are subjected to expectations of productivity which, as I think about it now, also underlies state-level considerations before granting them the permission to work. This reminds me of my Capstone research findings. Responding to the recent UAE visa ban on 20 African countries, many of my interlocutors pointed out the institutional racism in place which led the government to ban everyone from one country just because of a few bad apples. Consequently, in our conversations, they affirmed that they are innocent, their morality, through highlighting their dedication at work. This speaks to the violence that the modern work/ leisure framework has enacted.

By Cadence Cheah



Exploring Art and Aesthetics: My Al Serkal Gallery Experience

Art, aesthetics, and Pinterest. My first time at an art gallery and exhibition was exquisite. I had a lot of admiration for the work that the respective architects of the art pieces had put in order for us to feed our eyes and barely understand the meanings and background behind specific projects. What boggled my mind is that the definition of art with reference to how I understood it before was completely changed. I had always imagined canvas with paint done by either Picasso, Michelangelo, or Van Gogh. Here, I saw for example the vintage car restoration project and even the happy house. My definition of art that I took from my time at Al Serkal is that art depends on the creator and that anyone can be an artist. Based on our conversations about the Tree school project, It was a great practical reference because it involves incorporating a variety of different mechanisms and ideas in understanding our world view. So I guess, as they say, my mind was greatly expanded and my eyes opened.

By Bedan Maiwya

Reflections Journal

Learning From The Living Room

January 11, 2023

Day. 7

Alserkal Arts Foundation Dubai

Tree School Project and Community-Based Learning

The Tree School project breaks down physical and psychological boundaries between students and the local community and provide an opportunity for students to connect with nature in a meaningful way. It provides them with the opportunity to learn in a non-traditional setting and encourages creative thinking. The project gives us the idea that the environment can be used as a tool for teaching and this type of education is particularly important in areas where traditional forms of education are limited or unavailable. Furthermore, by reclaiming public spaces and creating a platform for dialogue and exchange, we can encourage connection, collaboration, and mutual understanding between cultures, and push for the rights of people living on the margins of society. When we talk about community-based learning or learning in a less pressured and more natural setting, we always face the criticism that it will not work for technical subjects like Mathematics or Sciences. Thinking about this, I remembered a time when my very first and very old car's engine broke down and how my mechanic used that opportunity to teach three of his apprentices about a very sophisticated engine. After they disassembled my car in my garage, I invited them in my living room for some refreshments and snacks that my mother prepared. And in that low-pressure and casual setting, my mechanic managed to teach not only his very young apprentices about my carburetor engine, but also myself and my mother. And I do not know about others but I never got mechanics concepts so easily in my Physics classes.



By Ehtisham Ul Haq

Experiencing Dubai Beyond 10 PM

I have always lived in Dubai with my family. Being a girl in an Arab family I had a curfew. My father would allow me to go out with my friends but I would have to be back home by 10 pm. Sometimes if I asked for an extension it'd go until 11 pm. However, my brothers had no curfews growing up. They would go out and come back whenever not being questioned. At first during high school especially this annoyed me a lot as to why my brothers would have this freedom but not me and my sister. I would sometimes argue and fight over that with no conclusions but you are girls. Over time growing up I started understanding how my parents thought about this topic and adapted to the situation. It no longer bothered me as much. I just accepted the fact of having a curfew. Coming from the university to Dubai and staying in a hotel with my friends for a class was something I wouldn't imagine my parents accepting. My father would have never allowed me to stay at a hotel with my friends. However, the fact that it is with the university and for the cause of education was allowed. It reminded me of the story told earlier of young women joining public spaces in the refugee camp for the sake of studying was something people accepted. As long as the outing wasn't for leisure then it was normal although it was in the same circumstances. I thought that staying in Dubai with my friends in a hotel was acceptable to my parents as it was for the sake of education which is similar to the case of young women in the refugee camps. Although I have lived in Dubai for so long, I have never got to experience it past 10 pm alone with my friends. It felt very different as I have always been around the same space but never at different times with different people. This sort of brings me back to the concept of home and what home means for each person. One can have different experiences of the same home once the frames are moved around. It felt liberating in a way for me as it was the first time, I got the chance to jump out of my boundaries. It felt like I was fulfilling the wish of the teenage me. Yes, I got over the fact that my brothers can stay out all day and live happily with the fact that I have to come back home early, yet, trying it for the first time gave me a sort of a different feeling. It made me satisfy this want that was covered with acceptance.

By Yasmin Alshurafa

Exploring Learning Through Conversation: The Tree School Project

I remember mentioning in the very first class how I love listening to people talk about their stories and how oftentimes these conversations can teach you so much more than what you'd learn in a conventional institution. So the whole idea behind the tree school project - that is - conversing with each other and learning from each other based on our lived experiences really resonated with me.

However, as much as I love the idea, as someone who's used to following syllabus & preparing beforehand, I also find the unknowns & the overall lack of structure a bit intimidating.

But on the other hand, I also think that once I am out of these educational institutes, I won't always have a syllabus or an instructional booklet to follow and a lot of times I'll have to hold conversations with my peers, reflect on my own experiences to learn about & navigate different situations.

So I was thinking how beneficial it would be to incorporate some of the principles - as you put it - of the tree school within conventional learning institutes such as a school, especially at a much earlier age. For instance, something like our class. Because I think the earlier you're exposed to it, the earlier you get comfortable with it and start thinking critically, start taking different perspectives into account, start self-reflecting and just learn so much more in general.

By Himanshi Lalwani

Reflections Journal

Learning From The Living Room

January 12, 2023

Day. 8

Alserkal Arts Foundation Dubai

Finding Myself Through Reflections

My reflection today was about these reflections that we've been doing for class. I'm really not used to being in tune with and listening to my thoughts (I realize I listen to music a lot so I don't have to sit alone with my thoughts, or being consistent with it whenever I try to either (I don't think I've ever managed to keep a diary for more than like 2 days).

The first few times, I found it really hard to come up with anything to share; and when it came time to, I just wanted to get it over with as fast as possible. But over the past few weeks, I think I've become more in tune with my thoughts and have managed to come up with and word my reflections much faster and with less stress than before. It's become a really nice start to the day so I hope I can keep this up after the semester ends.

By Nadia Chan

Learning From the Desert

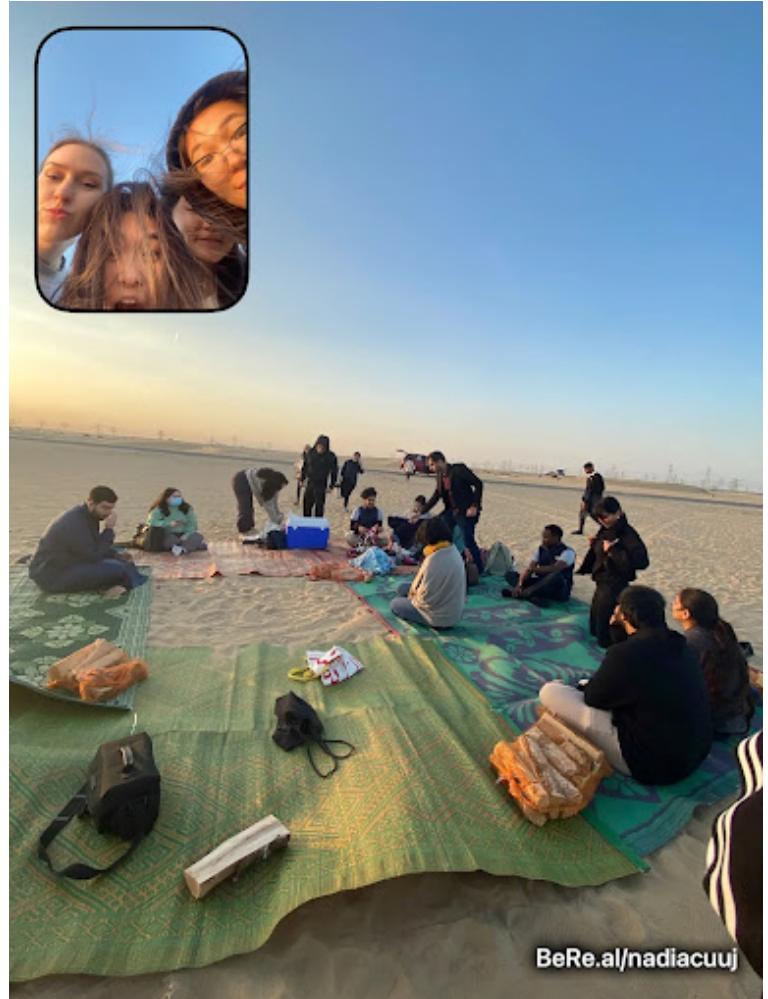
Taking a class in an outside setting in the desert with a campfire and members from the Alserkal team was a valuable learning experience because it provided me with an immersive experience that helped me better understand the course material and topics of our discussion. Additionally, I think the campfire provided a unique way for us all to collaborate and learn from one another, as well as a great opportunity to bond and form meaningful relationships with each other and Alserkal team. Our discussion session in the desert provided a much-needed break from the daily routine, giving us an opportunity to appreciate and engage with the natural environment. The experience helped foster a sense of community and collaboration among us all, as we were learning collectively in an unfamiliar environment (which was a departure from traditional classroom setting). The desert was the ideal place to reflect, relax, and meditate, providing us with an opportunity to gain a new perspective on different important topics like modernity, collectivity, framing. Learning in my mind always brought up a picture of a traditional classroom and the feeling of stress and pressure that surrounds that room. That feeling was not there that day. I think I found a safe space among people who I never met before taking this course and felt like I could say anything without feeling judged or fearing the possible mistakes I would make.

By Ehtisham Ul Haq

A Memorable Class Experience in Desert

After the class outing to the desert in Dubai, I am filled with a sense of joy and contentment. The experience was fun, and I enjoyed it a lot, even though it may not have been the best outing. It was a reminder that it's the small things that truly count and make an experience memorable. As we went into the desert, the sense of freedom and adventure that it evoked was invigorating. But what truly made the experience special was the sense of connection that I felt with my classmates. We laughed, joked and talked with each other as we sat by the fire. It was a reminder that it's not the destination, but the journey and the company we share it with that makes an experience truly memorable. I enjoyed the small moments of connection and understanding with my classmates, and I felt grateful for the opportunity to bond with them in such a unique way.

By Ahmad Harmoozi



BeRe.al/nadiacuuj

Reflections Journal

Learning From The Living Room

January 13, 2023
Day. 9

Hosting a Multicultural Dinner Party in an Emirati Household



Being a host was not something entirely unfamiliar to me; it was almost a bi-weekly role I would claim as a daughter of an Emirati household which, ordinarily, would have family over at the house all the time. However, being a host to the class at my house was a completely different experience for multiple reasons. I had realized first, that I have never hosted anyone who wasn't either Emirati or Indian even though I have seen my house door open for guests to walk in and out for my entire life. The first plan that I had trouble with was selecting the cuisine for a buffet catered for 9 different nationalities and different continents; this also stressed my mother out, and for the first time, she asked me for my opinion on choosing the buffet. Although I would always have to help out with hosting, I was never myself the host of the house, even if it's a gathering for my friends, since my mother always takes the lead in preparations. Aside from that, for the first time, it would be a gathering free of many

cultural traditions such as it being a non-gender-segregated gathering, or the absence of welcoming the women to my house by kissing them on the cheek. I wasn't so sure how to navigate hosting a traditional dinner at my house without the traditional part. However, after the dinner, I reflected on how the turn of events was not so surprising given how the country is developing. The UAE is always known to be one of the few rapidly developing regions in which heritage is still held in high regard; the dinner felt like a direct mirroring of that idea.

By Fatma Albastaki

Cats Join Our Conversation!

We were talking about how people weren't joining us in our conversation outside, and then what I didn't expect was for not people, but cats to join us. Maybe they were attracted by the smell of chips or they were looking for some warmth in the cold, but I'd like to think it was because they wanted to join our living room.

By Alya Alkhemeiri



Celebrating Lohri: A Happy Accident

Today is the Indian festival of Lohri, which marks the end of winter and the beginning of the season of harvest. I forgot about it but then woke up to a call from my mom wishing me on the occasion. During the festival, we make a bonfire, make popcorn, roast corn, sing, and dance around the fire. So talking to my mom, she asked me what I did last night and I told her that we went to the desert, set up a bonfire, made popcorn, and roasted corn, and then she said: "Oh so you celebrated Lohri". And then I realized as part of a happy accident, I ended up celebrating Lohri. The last time I celebrated the festival was probably 4 years ago, right before coming to college and even though I hadn't thought about it for the past 4 years but all the memories of the missed celebrations and the missed time came back. Being back home, you take this shared time for granted but only when you are removed from the situation, and you take a step back you realize how much value those moments held.

By Kartikey Singhal

Exploring the Values of the Tree School

Since this is the last day of our trip as a class and a cohort of the Tree School, I can't help but think of how I felt at first when I first found out about the initial concept of the activity. Like many people in the class, I had many questions and was confused. However, over these last four days, talking to people in the class that I probably wouldn't have talked to if it weren't for the trip and the people at Alserkal, I realized how one can practically implement the values of the tree school by understanding conversations with individuals as a source of knowledge production whereby our individual experience is enriched by the knowledge of the collective. I also understood that the tree school is not offering an alternative to the kind of academic education that we are used to, but an adjacent avenue for the expression of things that cannot be expressed with the limited resources and tools offered by a regular academic setting of a typical university or college.

By Ibad Hasan

Reflections Journal

Learning From The Living Room

January 16-20, 2023

The Last Week
Concrete Tent at NYU Abu Dhabi



The Last Class: A Reflection of Full Circle

For my last reflection of the class, I decided to write in Sandi's concrete tent. I didn't realize how full circle my day really was until I was reviewing my earlier reflections to get some ideas for this one.

After our class ended (slightly early) this evening, we finished a few rounds of looking at each others' projects for the websites, and called it a day. I uploaded the last of the pictures that I have to the google drive folder and then went for a swim; which was actually somewhat similar to what I did after our first class of the semester. Couldn't have asked for a better way to close our (second) last living room class.

By Nadia Chan

Goodbyes Are Always Hard!

This is the third and the last week of the J-term. It means the time to say Goodbye.

During the class, along with the discussion on various topics such as the liberation of mind, tree school, art projects, and hospitality, we shared our feelings, ideas and memories, which tightened the connection between us. I really got close to so many people, but the professor is going back to her home and other projects, while the majority of students are leaving this week to study away. It is wonderful and sad at the same time that the people can truly get close to each other and share common memories for a short period of time, but then they say goodbye. What's even more melancholic is that we never know whether our life paths meet again or not. The only thing we can do is appreciate the time spent together and, thanks to technological development, try to keep in touch through social media.

I am sincerely grateful for the opportunity given to us by J-term to learn from the experiences and stories of each other, have an incredible trip in Dubai and work on the collective project on tree school. Goodbye and see you soon!

By Diana Alibekova

The Living Room: An Eternal Journey

The sun rises on our final day in the living room and the weather is perfect. It's not too humid, not too windy, just perfect. Although the course is ending, our living room will live on. It'll grow and reach out to other people like branches from a tree, and we can create so many more living rooms and watch them grow and thrive. This course is finite, but the living room is eternal.

By Alya Alkhemeiri

The Final Week

This past week, I was worried about my creative capability and side. Whether it was finding the confidence to properly articulate and give answers to the numerous questions I was subjected to in my colleagues' interviews or finding the perfect idea and initiative for my final presentation and project, I felt so pressured, on the other hand, I was dealing other issues related to finding an on-campus job and also feeling anxious about the spring semester which starts in a very few days. To my surprise, I had some of the best memories and moments working with my classmates and the professor who provided valuable guidance and input for my project. Just like how the class has been, this past week has really honed my communication and social skills and also my presentation skills. To be honest, I feel somewhat sad that this is the last week of my learning and participating in this amazing class. I don't know if my future J-terms will be anyway comparable to this session that I had, but one thing is for sure, the interactions, moments, challenges, and fun shared with my wonderful classmates and professors will always be nostalgic to me.

By Bedan Maiywa

Let



Creativity



Fly



High



By Rose Chen