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WONDERINGS

VOICES

Diverge Magazine

Fall 2024 Debut Anthology

Diverge

Join us next semester

We are just different leaves, drifting, growing

Letter from the Editor

I started this letter in July, 2024, when I only just established this magazine, the only member being myself. Now, I am finishing this letter in December, 2024, with 13 people on the executive board and more contributors who have expressed their unique multilingual, cross-cultural experiences, unspoken before. When Dr. Higinbotham inspired me to start this magazine, I was doubtful: Does the campus need yet another international alliance? I can look back and give an affirmative answer now - Diverge is not only an affinity space for people with multilingual and cross-cultural experiences, but also for anyone who finds meaning in challenging the existing, rigid ways of communication restricted to Standard American English (SAE) and American mainstream culture.

Knowing a second, or even a third, language sounds has been a treasure for me, but unrecognized for the most part of my life. My middle school and high school years passed in a swirl as I learned extensively about SAE to prepare for standardized testings. I also remember using the standardized testing English to write my diary entries as my teacher suggested, aiming to ditch my native language Mandarin even in my most intimate form of writing because it wasn't beneficial in helping with college application. I took pride in my ability to be incorporated into a standardized English, which was what brought me to student journalism. In this working environment with an even heavier emphasis on SAE and restrictions, however, I found myself at a loss of words. I thought journalism would be giving diverse people a voice, but those voices were in fact submerged under the journalistic writing and coverage guidelines.

So what if I intentionally say no to these institutions of writing in the U.S.? Working in education and advocacy for a long time, I wanted this space of Diverge to be as inclusive as possible, allowing anyone who feels that current publication standards cannot afford their voices. But this thought risked making the scope of publications "too broad", which had me worry if we could reach a targeted audience. Although initially hesitant, I gained strength from my community in developing this magazine, recognizing that we do not need to have a targeted audience - we target everyone with a call for diverging from U.S.-centric writing traditions, and we find company in the unique words of one another.

I chose leaves as the icon for this magazine, not only to celebrate the infinitely diverse shapes of leaves, but also in hopes that this magazine will grow into a strong tree from a sapling. Starting off, we were only scattered leaves who did not know each other, but our differences and individual experiences brought us together. Let us flow and grow, as leaves.

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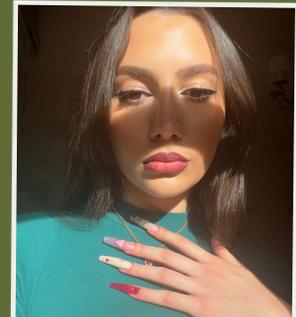
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dIVERGE

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Elizabeth Goodstein, Ph.D, for helping recruitment

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Tom Zhang
Yvette Wang
Alex Minovici
Akira Culbertson
Joey Chen
Sarah Cassell

EXPEDITIONS

I am from [insert]
by Amiee Zhao

I am from a space in between
a bitter gulp of my heart, a dazzling
confusion when
teachers asked us to write this poem
starting every line with "I am from,"
then insert   identities
and yet I have been obedient for my
life, so
I am from a corner filled with wrinkled
scratch papers
I am from the wasted stories they tell,
those which no one cares to recycle
I am from the run-up sentences in them,
choked with breath of tears
I am from the dirt resting on the foreign
characters, left by someone
from a similar place as I am, but with a
different anger, solitude
I am from the lost emotions, tented up on
an enormous skeleton
I am from the excess of feelings
undeliverable by words
those embedded in the skeleton of
recognized language
I am from a void of words, submerged
beneath the organization,
yet above which, total blankness
I am from [insert]
but where to insert myself?
I am from a space in between

yellow skin, words
by Stephanie He

I never understood how our same
rice-colored skin, ebonied hair, the same
language learned from our mother's mother's
mother
can still hold prejudice
so fluid it flows in the blood

your smirk and armpit stains glare
heat like the sun my eyes look at the gum stuck
in your teeth
your daughter, you drawl and I know
jagged embarrassment from two worlds.

how can someone Chinese be so bad at
Chinese, which I say in broken sentences
mixed with another language my parents barely
know/
i am an ugly, white, bespeckled fish in a pond of
red

my teeth don't listen
they twist my intentions when I am brought to
a pond of rainbow—and I try to fit in but
colorless is what I am born to be
fighting your expressive jargon with my caged
mellow
the words I say come out wrong
-ly interpreted
because how can someone, yellow like my skin,
not need help—kind, razor-sharp words they
rake my skin of the freedom to end my own
sentences.

Chengdu, Photography
by Yvette Wang
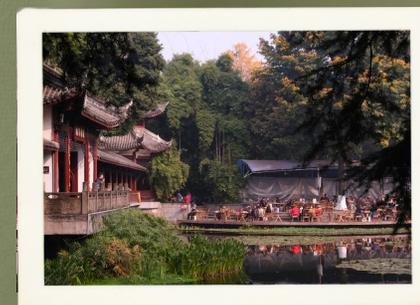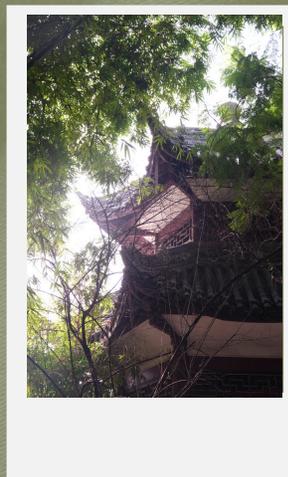
Breakfast
byJoey Chen

In my dream, I died,

Alongside all of humanity,

Buried in the ruins of tomorrow.

The putrid scent attracting maggots,

Feeding on the remnants of my breath.

I woke up startled,

Realizing I had wet my bed,

As if transported back to a winter morning in my childhood.

After finishing that bowl of perpetually available wonton soup,

At the corner fly-infested diner,

They spoke in an unfamiliar dialect,

And sold me greasy pancakes at a low price;

Because the sugary pancakes had already been devoured,

By those who rose earlier than me.

I snatched a bicycle,

And raced against the stolen moments of the sunrise,

Venturing out amidst the clamor

To fill my famished soul.

My burning limbs immersed in the winter chill.

Thin white fibers,

Imprisoned me in solitude.

Rising from the bed,
Gloomy thoughts forgotten
In the casual morning masturbation.
As if I am naked, donning sunglasses
Disregarding the presence of the sun.
Stepping into that small eatery
I accidentally knocked over a half-basket of steamed buns
Reluctantly abandoning them
Carefully wiping my luxurious sunglasses
With a cloth and placing them back in their case
The warm soybean pudding declares
Declares the existence of my memory
Concealed beneath a new signboard
In the brightly lit morning
I toss the bedding, sheets, pillows,
Cassette tapes, dictionaries, pen holders, bike locks, red bandana,
Into the old washing machine
In the damp afternoon of the south
Drying them to seventy percent

Then using a lighter to warm myself by igniting a cigarette
Yet, I can't stop trembling
I swallow colorful pills down my throat
Waiting for them to peel away my emotions
And ferment them into aged double-barreled whiskey
Displayed in transparent glasses
As I drink until dawn
The bedsheets hanging overhead should be dry by then
Just like me

07.10.23 2:03

《早饭》

我在梦里死去了
和所有的人类
埋在明日的废墟里
腐烂的气息吸引了蛆虫
蚕食我尚存的气息
我惊醒了
发觉我尿湿了我的被褥
仿佛回到了童年冬日的早上
吃完那碗永远吃到的馄饨
在转角的苍蝇馆子
他们操着我不熟悉的方言
廉价地卖给了我油饼
因为糖油饼被比我早起的人
抢到了他们的胃里
我夺下单车
和红日抢夺的光阴
在喧闹中走出门外
填饱我饥肠辘辘的灵魂
我炙热的四肢浸没在冬日的寒风里
单薄的白色纤维
把我困在孤独的监狱里

起身下床
阴沉的思绪被遗忘在
清晨随意的手淫中
就像我浑身赤裸地带上墨镜
蔑视太阳的存在
踏入那家小馆
我打翻了半笼包子
它们被我不情愿地丢弃了
将奢侈的墨镜用布
轻轻地擦拭再放入包中
温热的豆腐脑昭示
昭示着我记忆的存在
被新的招牌掩盖在
灯火通明的早晨

我将被褥、床单、枕头
磁带、字典、笔筒、车锁、红色三角巾
扔进老旧的洗衣机
在南方潮湿的下午
晒干到七成
再用打火机点燃烟屁股取暖
可我止不住地发抖
我将五彩的药丸生吞进食道
等着他们将我的情绪活剥
酿成陈年的双桶威士忌
摆在通明的酒杯中
待我畅饮到天明
那梁上的床单也应该干透了
我也一样

07.10.23 2:03

Stale Wine
by Joey Chen

Softly, I counted, "one, two, three",
From yesterday to tomorrow.
The ash, falling through my finger,
Ignited since last night until next evening.
I rolled up a joint with a letter to you, wrinkled and worn,
forcefully inhaled to my burning lungs.
Then, I sent the words to you,
Through your chapped, bleeding lips.

The slanted blade penetrated my sink,
From flesh to boiling blood.
Before the pain could streak my down,
I felt ambivalent.
The clogged vessel,
Bled onto my hungry soul.
From midnight to dawn,
I cautiously peeled off my skin,
Turned it into finely chopped mince.
Stored in a dull glass jar underneath my wooded bed,
Sealing the jar with water.
Brewed into aged Bourbon,
I compelled you to chug it,
Until you uncontrollably retched.

By the third night,
Only my empty skeleton remained.
So I carefully rinsed it with brush
Polishing it until it reflects the dim star lights.
Where the stains took my marrow,
I grabed that rusty axe,
And hire an unpretentious carpenter,
To carve them into elegant wine glasses.

I poured the booze,
Apologizing and toasting,
To you.
To the deserted shack on the ruined prairie,
To the rotten maize in the swaying fields,
To the damp firewood in the cluttered fireplace
To the cigarette burn on the back of you body,
To the burning polytunnel next to the barn,
To the bodies buried outside the cemetery.

I toasted until the last drop of wine,
Then they became useless,
Shattered and forgotten before I can fall into sleep.

《残酿》

我轻数三声
从昨天数到明天
被点燃的烟灰
从昨夜燃到明晚
把写给你的信卷在烟里
用力地吸入肺里
再亲吻你干燥流血的嘴唇

刀斜着刺入皮肤
从嫩白的肉色直至血色
在痛苦来临之前
仍显得利落
喷涌不出的血液
从身上滴落到饥饿的灵魂上

从深夜到日出
我剥离下我的皮囊
碎成细细的碎末
装进床底的瓷坛子里
用水封上口
酿成陈年的酒
强迫你喝下去
直至你无法抑制地干呕

终于到了第三个夜晚
我也只剩下空荡的骨骼
所以用刷子仔细刷
洗净洁白抛面上的污渍
刷不净的地方
我便换上斧子
雇佣一位朴实的木匠
把它们雕刻成杯子

盛上酒
满怀歉意地敬给你
敬给草原上的那座房子
敬给田野里腐烂的稻子
敬给壁炉里潮湿的柴火
敬给你后背上面的烟疤
敬给谷仓旁燃烧的大棚
敬给墓园外葬下的尸体

敬到坛子不再剩下一滴酒
那它也就没用了
连同被杯子一起被摔碎在清晨

09/23/23 1:30 pm

Moonlit Night
byJoey Chen

On the park bench,
We sit on opposite ends.
The wind that grazes your ear
Sweeps directly to the tips of my hair.
I catch the fragrance of spring,
Even in this windless summer night.

The full moon on the fifteenth always seems a bit off,
But I am fond of the new moon on the third.
When it just begins to sprout,
Even that sliver of white hides behind a sheer curtain,
Sneaking a glance at me.
Yet it shines so bright,
Filling my entire pupils
With a round, crimson hue.

You stretch out your arms,
Leaping over ravines and plains,
Skin and wooden table fiercely embrace.
I lean back,
Letting my shadow sink
Into the dark waters.
Your face ripples under the streetlamp,
A biting coldness
Breaks your fingertips,
And cuts through me.

When the summer bell tolls again,
I shall see the full moon on the sixteenth.
What a flawless moon it is.
My body surrenders to the wooden table,
Touching your hair's edge.
In this windless summer night,
I once again catch the scent of the moonlit night.

《月夜》

在公园的长椅上
我们各自坐在一边
从你耳边袭来的风
径直撞向我的发梢
我嗅到春天的清香
即使在这无风的夏日

十五的月亮总是差了些
幸好我偏爱初三的新月
当它刚刚出芽时
连那一抹白都躲在纱帘后
悄咪咪的望我
可它却很亮
占据我整个瞳孔
圆的猩红

你伸着胳膊
跃过沟壑与平原
皮肤与木桌激烈的地亲吻
我向后仰去
让我的身影坠入
暗沉的水中
你的脸在路灯下翻起涟漪
刺骨的温度
折断了你的指尖
划破了我

等夏日的钟声再敲响
我便能看见十六的圆月
多么无瑕的月
我的身体臣服于木桌之上
触及到你的发梢
在这无风的夏日
我再次嗅到月夜的味道

Homesickness

by Stephanie He

Home
sick of your endless torrent of words
Brushing against my scalp stinging
Like anesthesia protecting me from your
Outside world where i am too afraid to
Venture because of the shelter that is
Home
Sick of days being nights black white gray
My world is out of focus warped blurred
take my hand and spin me around in your
love Like a carnival ride I don't ever want to
leave the excitement that comes from the
Expense of security, solace in the bricks of
Home
sick of how the words hatred and love are tossed around
I am unaccustomed to such verbal confrontation so i glitch
and say the same
Raked raw words back and watch
knowing i may be hurting you over again
or we could both be playing the victim in our
Make-belief

Home
Sick of how you try to find things to do with your hands
they shake
As they move to clean the table
Make the food because that's how you've always
Shown you cared/rough and sudden
Your actions and your words they peel me apart again but i
think i am happy not
Home
Sick of the tears despite all that we've been
through arguments screaming thrashing
They still yearn of your embrace
That crushing of your fingers that squeeze
My ribcage against yours and i notice
How you've grown small and powerless
Caged and anxious
i am momentarily surprised because
You seem like you're
Clinging to me like i'm your
Home/

I become a (wo-)man
by Stephanie He

i used to keep my father's rifle
hidden deep within my closet
among the mildew of disturbing thoughts
and the decay of catastrophes
the abrupt conversations
with its abrupt ends

i remember how i killed my mother; dragged and
drowned her in the waterfall's rivulets
of her Naivete
a baby bird: You bought it for her when she asked
silver vines circling intricate bars
an angel: head bejeweled
red like the blood that blossomed
when rust hits flesh
when i fire the Shot
you didn't clip its wings
why, i say, and You smile
the kind of zookeeper smile i learn
when it manages an escape, it will learn to still come back,
you reply
nodding, but not accepting is all I know
but soon, orders come out of my mouth
like bullets
i am becoming my father. A man—!
my voice boasts of my strength
and my stride is prouder than any woman – —!
"shut the lights."

i dream about bells and windchimes
my coffin as it's lowered
hammering my body six feet below
here lies baby xxx
i teeter down the dark streets
and grow in twilight
the scent of rosemary and thyme floats
like a leaf in the laps
cake baking in the oven
it smells Squeak-y clean—when suddenly
a silhouette grazes my vision
and then i'm running to catch a ghost
the bags of guilt patched from her quilt weighs me down
like a thousand feathers
i struggle against her bent warmth; so suffocating—!
the rifle is in my hands again
i walk back to the dark dry soil and sit
leaning on my tombstone
it's bone-shatteringly cold
but I think it's best if I left
so, I lower myself below the world I know—

wild Mornings!
wild Mournings—
i spend with my head
the wooden thought of life like
caked shoes and candles
when I dance naked in the Rain—
no umbrella of hers over my head;
freedom. freedom?
tell me when I will sleep
—the bird gives but a chirp
the Alarm screams

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by Stephanie He

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Brushing against my scalp stinging
Like anesthesia protecting me from your
Outside world where i am too afraid to
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because
You seem like you're
Clinging to me like i'm your
Home/

Youth Culture:
Differences Across the Red, White, and Blues

As I scroll through my camera roll from this past June, I vividly remember warm mornings at the King's Cross weekday market, and nights gone so long that the sunlight begins to bleach the dark evening sky. Although I've always loved growing up in my NYC-accessible New Jersey suburb, my trip to London felt like the first exploration of my adulthood. Though I feared the horror stories of British food and cautionary tales of switched lanes, I was pleasantly surprised by the change in pace. Something about London instantly felt familiar to me. The lack of language barrier was helpful, of course, but there was something about London that flowed slower than NYC, was more interesting than Boston, more genuinely friendly than Charleston, and had a richer history than Washington DC. I refuse to fall victim to the American romanticization of England, but perhaps there really is just something about being so far from home that inhibits you to be a different version of yourself. Of course, this is just the natural self-realization one may find when solo traveling.

There was one thing that I found starkly different from my experiences in America–the emphasis on youth culture. This is not at all meant to be an encouragement on underaged drinking (seriously), but the accessibility to London nightlife certainly made me feel much more adult. The connectivity of public transportation in the city lays the foundation of such an energetic culture. Taking a legit double decker bus as opposed to the motion sickness-eliciting Oxford Shuttle to Atlanta is just one aspect that made my evenings more pleasant. Cities generally lend themself to be more accessible, which subsequently enhances the youth experience. Very few students have the money to buy their own cars, and even if one has a car, in a larger city like NYC or London, a car only extends the time and inconvenience of one's commute. Although London was incredibly walkable, I did experience more than a few long, introspective rides at night on the Tube – London's main form of transit.

The Tube is unique to US public transport in that it connects to many other stations that can take someone throughout the country or even throughout the continent. The Tube, again unlike the NYC subway, runs for most hours of the day but not all– a funny caveat as most of my nights out in London tended to last until 5 or 6 AM when the rides started again. Luckily, most of those that I bonded with in London were kind enough to let me stay over when I had missed the final stop– thank you, dearest Phoebe. Like any major city, navigating transport takes general awareness and ability to access safe resources if needed. Despite my poor habits of forgetting a phone charger, I became so familiar with the stops and lines that I had little trouble making my way back. Something about the fact that I could stay out for hours upon hours and still make it home was very significant to me. My experience with suburban life could never allow for this, and it was such a joy to feel individual freedom in a more tangible sense.

I have found that especially being at Oxford and a part of the larger Emory University makes experiences with nightlife much more different. Here, you're more likely to share a fake ID in a long line than you are to share a cigarette outside in a bar's smoking section. More likely to convince an unamused frat pledge to let you in than to convince a bouncer to waive your fee– but perhaps that is just the reality of the American college experience. I did rather love the casualness of being able to meet my friends at a pub and chat for hours rather than being glared down by a barista to buy a $10 latte and to be rushed out within the hour anyways. This accessibility felt so natural, and allowed the nightlife experience to be significantly less stressful than my nights in Atlanta. This is not to say that I don't enjoy conversations in cramped Ubers or sharing lip combinations in bathrooms, that I find to be so stunningly American, but the experiences are just different.

I didn't realize how different things were until I mentioned it with my childhood friend whom I was staying with, who moved from New Jersey to London for university. We were standing in the outside section of a gay bar, taking a break from the DJ downstairs, and chatting with someone who had complimented our outfits. He was only 25, but noted how young we were and seemed to be fascinated by our experience in America. I turned to my friend and was not surprised when she answered profoundly how she just adored living in London, and how she thought that the youth culture solidified London as the best city to be our age in. We particularly enjoyed the surplus of queer bars and places for queer folk to feel safe and comfortable, something that is present here in Atlanta, though harder to access under 21 or even under 30. The ability to enjoy these spaces was not something that I took for granted, singing recklessly to DJs that I had never heard of and befriending strangers on drink lines.

I always wonder why I see many American college students face habits of overconsumption and an overemphasis on alcohol, especially as a way to "wind down" after a rigorous academic week. The mysticism of alcohol is something that, in my opinion, makes it ever so enticing in excess . The fact that you cannot consume it or purchase it below the age of 21 makes it feel like an accomplishment when it is finally obtained. I can't help but notice the difference in behavior of those that had indulged in these illicit behaviors prior to college versus after . There is a greater will to go out and party, and a greater desire to drink until one blacks out. I strongly believe that the drinking age being 18 overseas contributes to the furthered development of youth culture, as the normalization results in greater awareness and education. Few of the college students I encountered drank to not remember the night, but instead for the social aspect of buying each other drinks or sitting and sipping outside. The drinking culture was much more focused on social interaction as opposed to drinking itself, which made the London nightlife experience significantly more enjoyable.

As much as I don't know that I could pack everything up and move overseas, this summer left me questioning what my life would be like if I had never left London. If instead of staying for two weeks, I stayed for a semester, or even for a couple of years. There was something so reassuring and exhilarating about going out with no worry of what time to be back or what the next day held, or the anticipation of meeting all the people that I never thought I would meet. I know that life in London wouldn't be just a fairytale forever, that everything would eventually need to catch up with me, but it is a thought that lingers in the back of my mind. Leaving London left me feeling like a dazed American, dreaming of a "European summer" and hooked on the anticipation to return back where I felt so comfortable under the technicolor club lights.
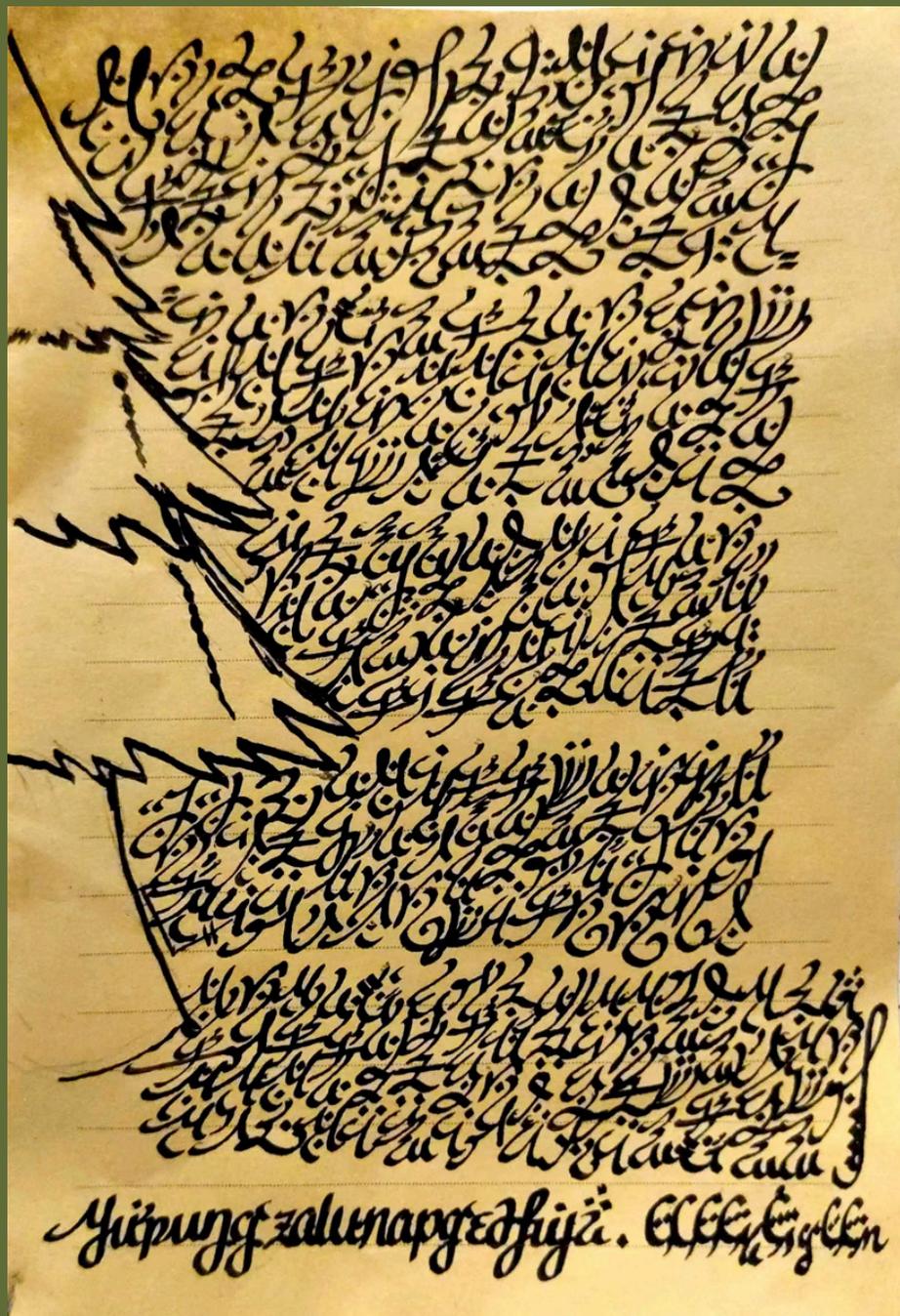
By Tom Zhang

Tom created the Qeuramantien script in elementry school to encode his diaries, then from the script the Drafision language of his own was developed in 2019. The conlang was later used by Tom in his worldbuilding as the language of the Drafis people (Drafisrakus) (hence the name Drafision). Qeuramantien is the old & holy script for the Drafisrakus while the simplified and common script is the Kuznatien as shown in the last line.

The Name Book
By Joseph Tang

THE NAME BOOK

Burnfoot

The Black Ridge

The Crossroads

the muted and voiceless,

a simple story   difficult to tell.

slation
Change The
Map
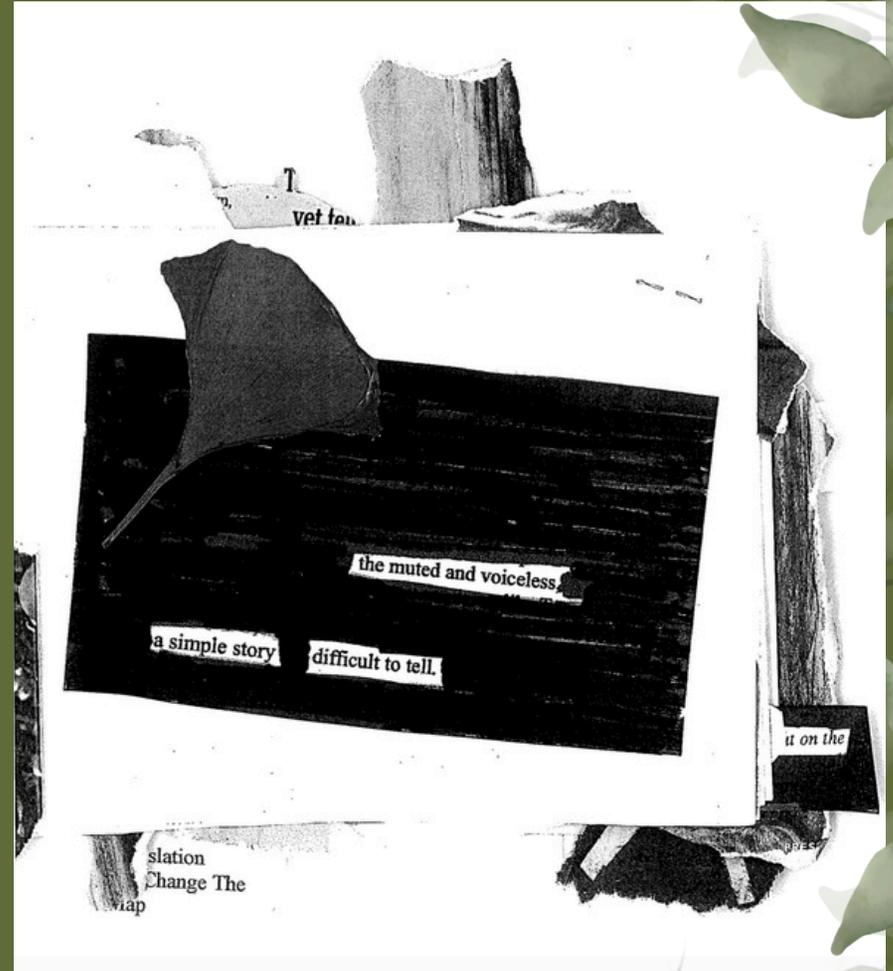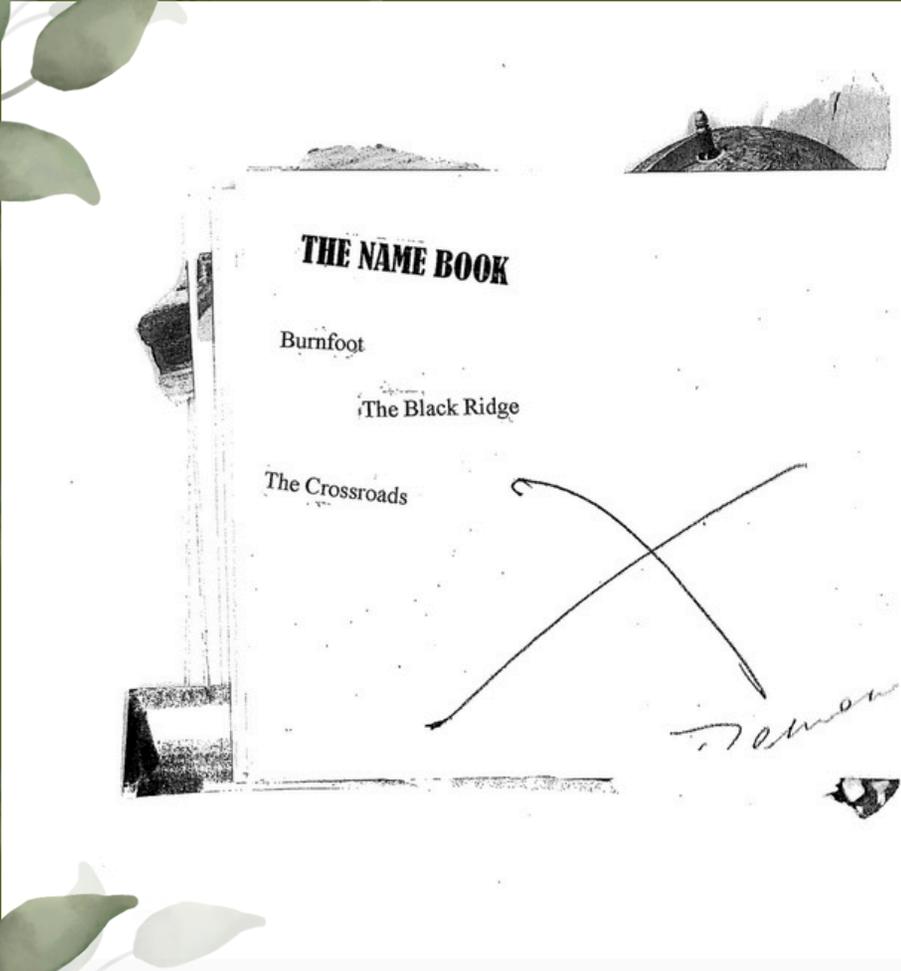
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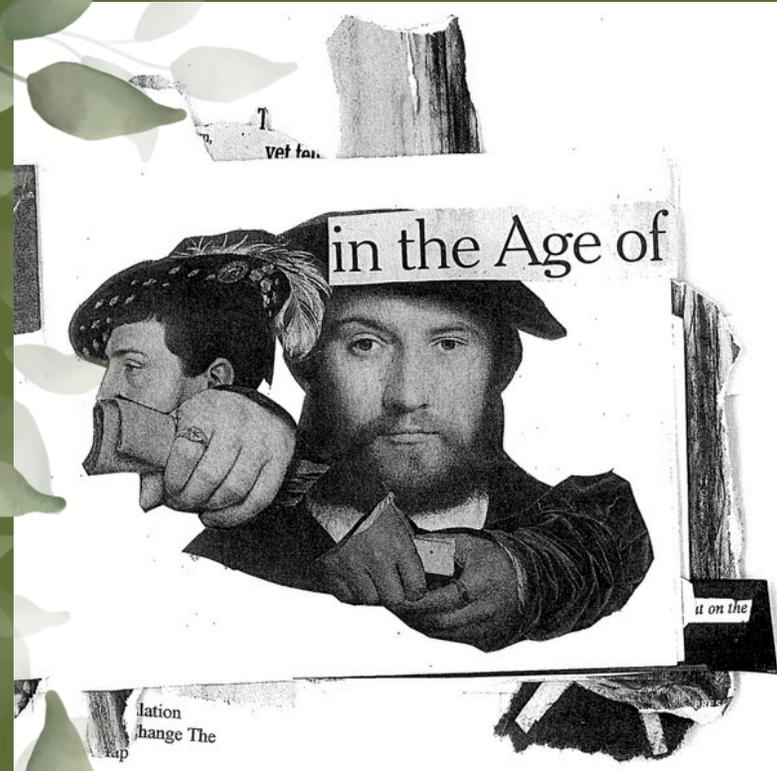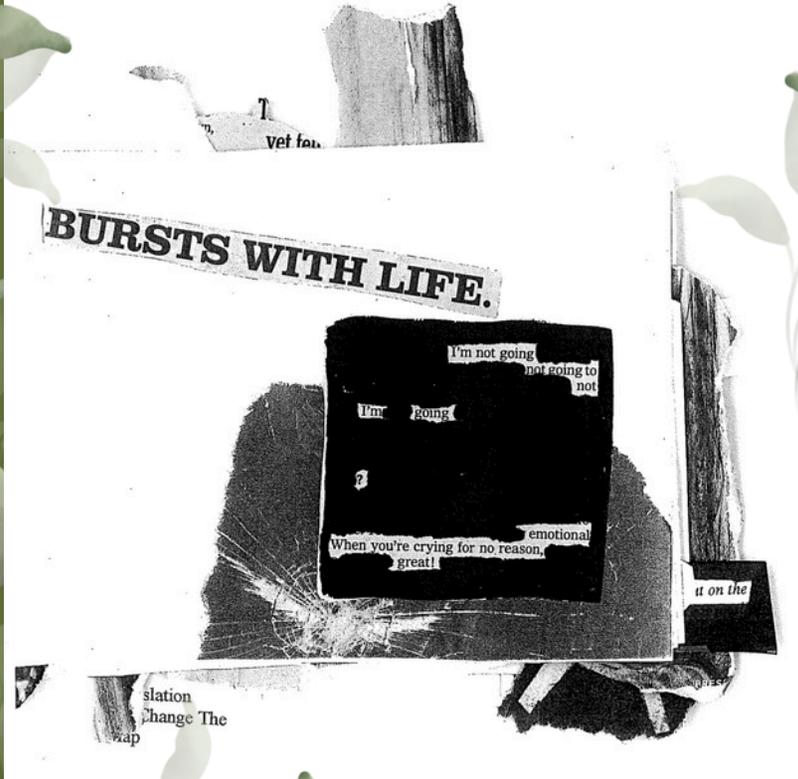
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wonderings

Solo Travel Unleashes Me from Identity

by Amiee Zhao

I need to be sure where I am, who I am. It feels easy to shrink and be small on my day-to-day scuttles to work hard and speak in an unfamiliar language, almost waiting to be misunderstood. When 50 eyes focused on me as I struggled to battle my anxiety and piece together my broken words, I felt myself sliding down a river because the only branch I was holding snapped, as people gradually lost patience and turned away from me. Yet, I started leaning into the freedom of swimming instead of holding on.

So I have always been exploring a safe port of identification, a name that could solidify my ephemeral existence in the world. They call this grasping of certainty "identity" now. I see identity on the streets, in campus groups, in the political climate where people find a sense of belonging through the pigeonholes of identities they fit themselves in. Their voices are thus organized, instead of being thrown off into misunderstandings, through shared experiences, even experiences consolidated into unanimity.

But my voice didn't belong to any of these existing identities. Joining affinity groups of Asians, internationals, LGBTQ+ people, etc. forced me to tweak who I was. I found my experiences vastly different from the centralized narratives in those groups. My understanding of myself always exceeded or undermet the definitions with my personal feelings. Could I be an international student? But unlike most others, I didn't go to an international school. Could I be asexual? But I didn't resonate with asexual friends around me. voice, my experience, my concrete feelings stuffed between the gaps of rocks.

"Just change yourself a little bit," that central voice of the groups said, "and look at all the perks of fitting in that you would win." Yet, I hated tweaking my voice, my experience, my concrete feelings stuffed between the gaps of rocks.

What if I don't belong anywhere? What if I'm an identity-less wanderer? On my first trip alone in Vancouver, I printed my footsteps one after another on the long slope back to my hostel — the only route I knew despite protests from my sore legs — I felt, for the first time in the long months of displacement in college, at ease.
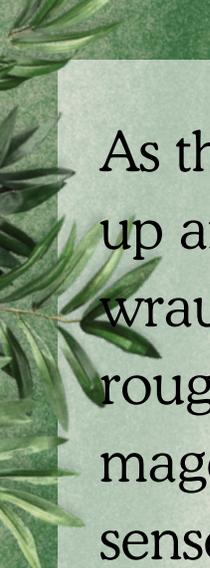
As the sun was setting, stars climbed up amidst the minute changes in sky-wraught color from peachy, coral, to rouge, lavender, and finally, magenta violet. I found my weird sense of peace in worries about my phone battery and about rumors of dangers at night as I struggled to capture the moment of change in the sky. But then I thought of the similarly nervous tourists I met at the train station this morning, a pair of couples, whom I met again at the end of the day at another train station across the country, looking nervous but relieved as we found each other.

I passed countless faces as I journeyed, exchanging conversations, with words or wordless, only in the moments when we were alone and defeated by the maze of this world, the challenges and sceneries of solo travel. With each footstep I printed in my muscles, I found liberation from "identity" in my experience itself, the exhaustion, anticipation, loneliness, and mercurial connections I made along the way.

I thought that if I couldn't belong anywhere, I might as well just choose to belong everywhere, confronting the fixed idea of identity with unfamiliarity.

Previous research has been done on the meaning of solo travel to East Asian women, who use traveling alone as self-discovery as they strip themselves free from traditional social expectations imposed on them. For me, solo travel goes further. It allows me to keep a distance from any identity at all. Traveling alone, I am able to experience life as a local as I slip in and out of residential areas looking for cheap hostels. Yet, meanwhile, I am also a wandering stranger, starting casual conversations with them while leaving the town permanently the second day.

It feels liberating, somehow, when I know that I don't have to maintain a long-term connection with the people I encounter because I don't need to develop a personality, a face, in front of them.

In moments of situating myself in unfamiliarity, I've found how human relationships can be stripped off identity tags and a desperate need for belonging. I don't need to strive to fit in in the places I travel, and the passers-by don't evaluate me in relation to themselves as I'm outside of their social web.
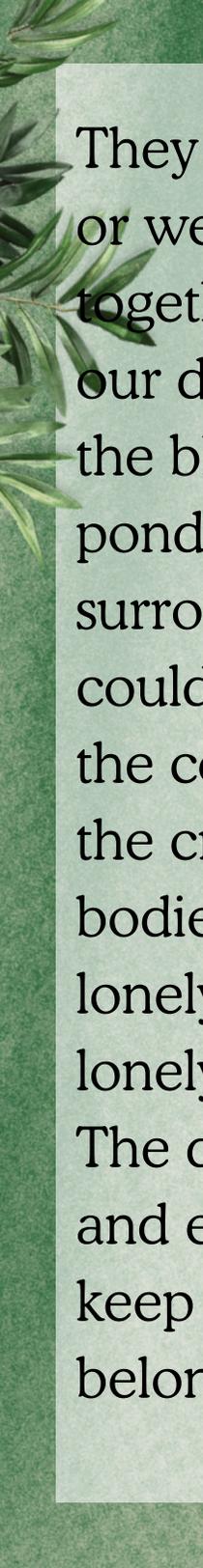
They give me directions and walk off, or we complain about the late buses together and continue separately to our destinations. At times, I stare into the blank walls of my Airbnb, pondering if I'd feel safer with people surrounding me. Yet, with others, I could almost visualize myself sitting in the corner, peaking at the center of the crowd through gaps between the bodies. Perhaps, it is just easier to feel lonely when I'm supposed to feel lonely, that is, when I travel alone. The daily 10k steps, language barriers, and excitement from exploration also keep me from struggling with belonging.

Instead of self-discovery, solo travel, for me. brings more self-experience. It doesn't point to a future of discovering a better self, neither does it point to the categorical pigeonhole of people that supposedly organizes the present better. It takes me down to earth, feeling every bit of awe, pain, and connection that constitutes my life. The only real thing I am certain of feeling is my steps, my tears, and the savorings of my tongue and eyes.
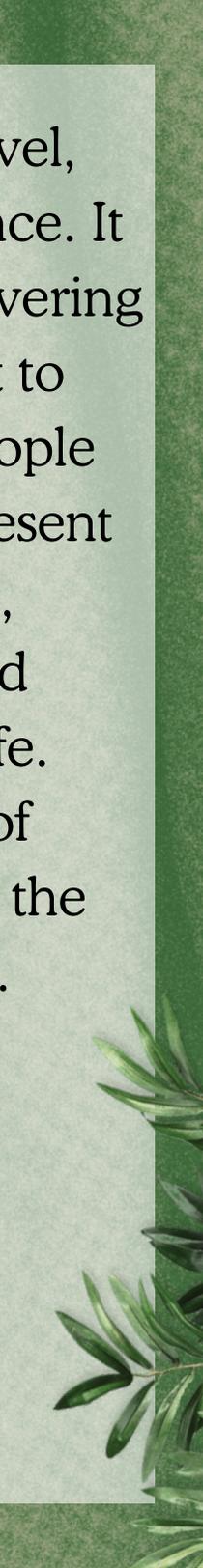
Understanding the rise and Fall of International Regimes

by Mike Yuan

Introduction: What's Regime Legitimacy Anyway?

A political regime is basically the rules and understandings that govern <u>how people participate in politics</u>. Modern political scientists, like Matthijs Bogaards, often categorize regimes on a spectrum from functioning democracies to totalitarian systems, with a <u>"gray zone"</u> in between. When we talk about regime legitimacy, we're looking at where a regime gets its credibility and authority to rule. Take the 2005 movie *Kingdom of Heaven*, for example. It shows how the 12th-century Kingdom of Jerusalem claims its legitimacy by referring to the biblical idea of heaven—"[Jerusalem is] a better world than has ever been seen. A kingdom of conscience. A kingdom of heaven"—to contrast itself with the Ayyubid Dynasty of Saladin. So, the fight between the Crusaders and Jihadists is more than just a political struggle; it's an ideological battle between Catholicism and Islam.

In today's world, regime legitimacy can look very different, from the American idea that "all men are created equal" and have "unalienable Rights" (US, 1776) to Lenin's 1917 Bolshevik Decree on Peace that promises a workers' movement to peace and socialism. Regimes can collect taxes, build armies, regulate trade, and keep the ruling class stable by leaning on certain ideologies—whether that's religion, political ideas, or national narratives—to paint themselves as the "Kingdom of Heaven" while depicting their enemies as the "Tyranny of Hell." This paper will dig into how ideology and power interact in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), looking at different regime types (like democratic, totalitarian, authoritarian) and their ideologies (liberal democracy, theocratic, nationalist, etc.) over time. By examining how regimes rise and fall, we can see a slow shift in MENA from traditional, religious monarchies to modern nationalism and post-modern liberalism.

Traditional Sources of Legitimacy: Monarchism and Theocracy

Ever since Prophet Muhammad united the Arabian Peninsula in the 7th century, the Arab world has put a lot of emphasis on the idea of kingship as a divine right. After that, the Rashidun Caliphate set up a six-person committee under Umar's rule until it ended with the First Fitna. From there, hereditary monarchies continued through the Umayyad and Abbasid Dynasties, all the way to today's monarchies in Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Oman, and the smaller Gulf states—collectively ruling nearly forty million people.

While monarchy and theocracy often get lumped together, they're actually pretty different. Theocracy, or the Imamate in Shia Islam, is more about domestic governance in MENA and goes back to the Quran, which describes the ideal Muslim state where leaders uphold justice and legality, similar to how _Muhammad advised his community_. Monarchies also draw from Islamic traditions, with kings trying to legitimize their rule by aligning it with Islamic values— like how the Moroccan king calls himself Amir al-Muminin and refers to the Moroccan people as the umma. But there can be clashes between monarchy and theocracy, like in Oman's shift to dynastic rule in 1955. Critics of this change argue that the imam, who should be the best-qualified leader, shouldn't just be a hereditary king.

Some argue that monarchy can be seen as a way to promote stability and wealth rather than strictly a religious concept. In fact, research shows that absolute monarchies tend to last longer than constitutional ones and are effective in setting up systems for conscription, taxation, and trade.

Colonialism: How the West Changed the Game

The idea of the Modern West started creeping into the Middle East with Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798. From then on, MENA countries were exposed to a whole new world of sociopolitical ideas.

The 19th century saw the rise of the Nahda movement, which aimed to blend Western ideas with Arab traditions. Nahda focused on creating the necessary social, political, and economic frameworks for an <u>Arab Enlightenment and modernity</u>. Western political philosophies reshaped the legal systems in the region, like how the Ottoman Empire based its penal laws on the French Penal Code of 1810 while <u>keeping some shari'a laws intact</u>. These changes shifted how Middle Easterners viewed the legitimacy of their judicial systems.

However, in the geopolitical realm, colonialism often did more harm than good, creating new regimes like Jordan without any real foundation of legitimacy. New monarchies formed as the West's proxy agents, and while monarchy has its roots in local traditions, many scholars believe its prevalence is largely due to British imperial policies. So, while colonialism introduced ideas like secularism and modernism, these regimes often lacked true legitimacy based on national sovereignty and popular support.

Arab Nationalism and Populist Authoritarianism

As colonial powers waned after World War II, the Arab world began to reconnect with its roots. Nationalism, a European concept, spread through the MENA region as Pan-Arabism. Inspired by Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser's fiery speeches, a new authority emerged based on nationalism that aimed to protect sovereignty and push back against foreign influences.

This emphasis on sovereignty wasn't just a reaction to lingering imperial forces; it represented Arabs' long-held desire for self-determination, a theme still present in today's political discussions in MENA.

Some argue that Pan-Arabism shares legitimacy with traditional monarchies, given its focus on strong leadership and lack of democratic institutions. However, there are two main critiques to this view. First, unlike the Western idea of democracy, the Arab world often operates on its own social contracts that prioritize non-democratic governance. Historically, Arab regimes have <u>found legitimacy</u> not in liberal democracy but in social-revolutionary ideologies, especially Arab socialism and Pan-Arabism, which peaked during Nasser's presidency. Thus, judging Pan-Arabist regimes by Western democratic standards overlooks their actual capacity to serve their people.
Second, we can differentiate between traditional totalitarian regimes and modern populist authoritarian ones, especially in Nasser's case. His legitimacy largely stemmed from his ability to mobilize grassroots support through powerful speeches and radio broadcasts. In a famous 1962 address, Nasser declared:

"Insistence of our people on liquidating the Israeli aggression… is a determination to eliminate one of the most dangerous pockets of imperialist resistance… When I start a war, I want to take it to the only end I accept – which is decisive victory".

This quote highlights how Nasser framed his message around collective identity, contrasting "our people" with "Israeli imperialists." Unlike the Umayyad monarchy which sidelined grassroots voices, Nasserism claimed to represent the will of the people. While Western democracy often views "the people" as individuals, Nasserism framed it as a unified national identity. Nahda thinkers might have supported democracy but not populism, whereas Nasser didn't believe in traditional democracy but definitely in populism.

The Contemporary Arab World and Post-Modern Liberal Democracy

The relationship between democracy and populism will inevitably shift when a populist regime stops truly representing the people. This idea played out during the Arab Spring of 2011, which kicked off in Tunisia with the self-immolation of a fruit seller and quickly spread across the region, rallying under the banner of democracy as the key to legitimate governance.

Liberal democratic legitimacy emphasizes civil society and grassroots activism. This wave of activism differs significantly from the elite-driven Nahda movement, as it focuses on grassroots mobilization and decentralized governance. Professor Eva Bellin from Brandeis University pointed out that civic unionism and grassroots associations were crucial to the new Tunisian democratic regime: "<u>When</u> the Nahda-led government took steps that undermined press freedom, journalists organized strikes that forced the government to change course". This example shows how civic engagement is vital for a legitimate regime and highlights the new movement's rejection of elitism.

I argue that the new democratic legitimacy partly carries the spirit of Nasserism, focusing on real socioeconomic issues and the ideal of popular governance but differs in interpretation. While Nasserism centralized power, Tunisia values individuals as independent, vibrant participants in politics—the essence of Tunisian legitimacy. The new electoral commission (ISIE) granted legal status to over a hundred parties, including secularists, Islamists, and Communists, aiming for broad participation

This new movement shows some postmodern, anarchic characteristics—"<u>unlike</u> the 1950s, the 'uprisings' have no intellectual or political authority, so they're inherently anarchic". It challenges hierarchical structures, whether they're pro- or anti-Western, Nahda or Nasser.

Intellectually, it critiques both "modern colonialism" and "modern nationalism" from a post-modern perspective of anarchism and civic self-governance. The new legitimacy doesn't rest on specific ideologies but rather on the emotional appeal of anarchism (Tashjian, 5). The core of this new democratic movement is civil society. Instead of replacing one legitimacy with another through organized struggles, the new movement supports democratic processes (like in Tunisia) or grassroots populism.

Conclusion: What Changes and What Stays the Same?

In summary, there's a clear trend of ideological liberalization in MENA, moving from traditional theocratic legitimacy to post-colonial nationalism and finally to liberal democratic legitimacy after the Arab Spring.

While this change might seem natural and straightforward, many complex factors keep historical legacies alive even as regimes change. Two main continuities stand out in the MENA's ideological evolution. First, aside from Tunisia, political power remains centralized, and democratization is still lacking across the region. Many scholars see democratization as a clear process with a specific end, unlike liberalization (Schlumberger, 375). Sadly, the overwhelming desire for change among Arabs hasn't been realized, as seen in Egypt's military coup that ended its democratic experiment just two years after the Arab Spring.

Second, the legacies of Western imperialism continue to threaten the fragile sense of Arab sovereignty, as shown by the post-Arab Spring Egyptian government's anger at American-funded NGO interventions.

To tackle these challenges, Moroccan sociologist Abdelkebir Khatibi proposed a "double critique" to help rebuild a post-colonial MENA identity. On the one hand, future regime legitimacy should break free from the region's theological and theocratic foundations.

On the other hand, these new legitimacies need to be grounded differently than Western ones, seeking to "uproot Western knowledge from its central place within ourselves".
All the ideologies discussed here have been shaped by a range of historical processes, from early Islam to modern imperialism. Future studies could dive deeper into the interplay between ideology and power, examining how ideas can serve specific interests and historical contexts. It's crucial to apply a "double critique" or even a "multiple critique" to these ideologies. Plus, the legitimacy of a regime also hinges on material conditions and socioeconomic progress. More research could explore how wealth and effective ideologies can work together to solidify a powerful regime.

Overall, instead of just labeling ideologies as "good" or "bad," we should analyze them as tools that can address societal issues in their respective contexts. The ideal future for MENA's regime legitimacy would be one that's flexible, drawing from various ideologies to fit specific situations rather than sticking to a rigid "-ism."

POV: You Took a Class on Classical Political Thoughts, But Found the Authors to all be Slave Holders…
by Mike Yuan

Slavery at Emory

America has been plagued by slavery since its very foundation, and its legacy lasts till this very day. During the Antebellum Era, Southern defenders of slavery gradually transforms their narrative of slavery from "necessary evil" to "", arguing that African Americans are child-like population that needs to be governed by <u>nature</u>. For instance, Jamieson's 2011 archival <u>research</u> at Oxford College of Emory University reveals that William Sasnett, a moral philosophy professor at Emory in the late 1850s, joined by other instructors of the institution, offered "proslavery lectures and textbooks at Emory" and "discussions on the evolution of slaveholder paternalism narratives".

Such a pseudomoral, paternalistic approach to slaves and slavery, however, is not unique in the American South. Instead, after reviewing some Platos and some Aristotle's and their ramblings (you know… the kind of books people put on their desks to look smart), I argue that the moralization of slavery has a long tradition rooted in ancient times of the Western world, that is, both pro-slavery and anti-slavery arguments seek to explain the phenomenon of slavery within a well-defined picture of morality. This morality, due to its privileged position shaped by the Western philosophy canon, is still reinforced in many contemporary education systems.

Greeks: Slavery is a Structural Necessity

Ancient Greece is a slave society. In Athens, slavery is the pillar of economic production. Such structural irreplaceability was reflected in Plato's Republic, where he discusses the roles of producers in the ideal city, which implicitly includes slaves as part of the labor force. Plato posits that in his ideal city, one must be diligent, industrious, and committed to the role of economic production as it defines one's role and existence in the society. First, Plato argues that the sole purpose of state formation is that structural mutual commensurability—"between one man and another there is an interchange of giving, if it so happens, and taking, because each supposes this to be better for himself." Later, the discussion quickly posits economic production as the chief task of a state: "the result, then, is that more things are produced, and better and more easily when one man performs one task." Notice that Plato firmly believes the predestination of one's role-specialization, for "one man is naturally fitted for one task, and another for another." Slaves are best to do the works of slaves, and such one-to-one rigidity is by nature.

Plato's argument for the role of producers and one's loyalty to one's assigned economic roles can be complemented by his later discussion of class hierarchies. In Book IV, Plato constructs a strict hierarchal order of the society: "so that there are not three but two kinds in the soul, the rational and the appetitive…also in the soul there exists a third kind, this principle of high spirit." The division of labor and class is strict, scared, and unchallengeable in the Platonic state. In his view, slaves are obviously the irrational and the inspired. They are a people of no parts in the intellectual domain and are thus subjected to domain of domestic productions.

Another famous, canonical Ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle supplements Plato in his endorsement of slavery. In Ethics, Aristotle posits that the good of having a slave is not just the "positive good" of having a paternalistic relationship, but is also extended to the dimension of "structural necessities" for household productions. In Part III of Book I, Aristotle makes this point explicit: "seeing then that the state is made up by households, before speaking of the state we must speak of the management of the household…and a complete household consists of slaves and freemen." If slavery is necessary to a household, and state is in essence a magnified household, then slavery is indeed necessary to the state structure's management, production, and more.

The support for slavery remains strong throughout Ancient Greece beyond what has been discussed in this essay. Aristotle, after affirming slavery as economic utilitarian tools as aforementioned, immediately shifts focus to the moral basis of slavery: the institution of slavery symbolizes the nature of hierarchies and dichotomies. Nature, argues Aristotle in Politics, "exists many kinds of both rulers and subjects" and "such a duality exists in living creatures, but not in them only; it originates the constitution of the universe."

One may argue that it is not the Aristotelian belief that one is born into a slave, but one "chooses" to be the direct opposite of virtue and happiness and thus devolves into slavery. Yet that argument is no less detrimental and hypocritical, for whether one can be happy in society depends on the ruling class, which is the slave-holding class in this case, as they decide the morality of the society through the power they hold. The idea that institutional correction is a necessary and positive good for the morally defected population still haunts the modern.

It is always a sad thing to say that America has the world's largest incarcerated populations. Many of them are the byproducts of the legal punitive approach that was precisely based on the afore-discussed philosophy of moral subjugations. The War on Drugs, for one instance, has lasted for more than half of the 20th century in America and peaked during the Reagon administration, resulting in 1.43 million Americans incarcerated in total with the black and brown communities 9 times more prone to the state-sanctioned violence. Immigrants from China, Mexico, Ireland and other financially insecure communities found themselves particularly vulnerable to cultural assimilation crises and became the subjects of both drug abuse and anti-drug corrections, giving the War another cultural dimension of "correcting" the exotic, morally inferior culture through institutional channels. Even for the little kids, many school of urban Chicago choose to militarize themselves, using police force as an replacement of quality education for the so-called "delinquent children".

Another attempt of moralizing slavery is Ancient Rome's philosopher Seneca's view over the "appropriate ways of treating the enslaved". In Letters from a Stoic, Seneca wrote his famous piece on the seemingly humanization of slavery (Letter XLVII). "There are human beings…they share the same roof as ourselves…they are friends, humble friends", said the old wise man Seneca. However, the seemingly benign picture of social hierarchy that Seneca advocates for is in fact a "welfare slavery" approach that if realized, not only normalizes slavery but also moralizes it. Furthermore, Seneca argues that instead of using lashings and beatings as technologies of discipline and punish, shall adopt "love" as the ultimate instrument that bonds a slave to his master. Love is the currency of morality among freemen, and if slaves were to be elevated to the status of freeman, they must love each other and their masters as freemen do. Thus, Seneca explicitly rejects the emancipation of slavery —"someone will tell us that I'm now inviting slaves to proclaim their freedom and bringing about their employers overthrow…Anyone saying this forgets that…to be really respected is to be loved"—and solidifies his reformist position of substituting visible yokes with the invisible ones.

From the Aristotelian perspective of moral duality to the Senecan proposal of "moral enslavement", later narratives of slavery has been drastically changed from the argument of state necessity. Instead of producers, labors and/or war prisoners, slaves become wandering children and beloved "family members" in popular discussions.

Neo-Slavery and Intellectual Slavery

Slavery, unfortunately, is still happening in the contemporary society, around me and you, although on a less explicit basis. Understanding the full range of the implications of the legacy of the slavery world requires a better definition of slavery that transcends what's abolished by the 13th Amendment of US Constitution (i.e. involuntary servitude in physical terms). I would thus like to introduce the Foucauldian discourse of power and the technologies of practicing power: "Between every point of a social body between a man and a woman, between the members of a family, between a master and his pupil, between every one who knows and everyone who does not, there exist relations of power …". Power is not simply a "force of a prohibition", nor it is a code of law that limits individual freedom by saying no, rather, it "traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse". Power, and this "involuntarily" nature of slavery, transcends state functions and state limits, and are diffused into all aspects of human social and economic productions. Therefore it is not surprising that in the classical world, slavery, as the utmost manifestation of power, has quickly ceased to be a mere code of law saying no to the people in chains but expands to a produced and still productive social discourse of morality and corrective punitiveness.

It was still quite accurate to describe that the Civil War and the following Constitutional Amendments did not free the Southern blacks from the yokes of slavery, but merely put them from one form of slavery to another. That new enslavement may take shape in the organizations of factory productions, the ever deteriorating work conditions that leads to the infamous disaster of the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire, or the great railroad project that cost many lives of the laboring immigrants. Every employee has their legal rights to terminate their employment, yet none of them has the "power" of doing so. At this day, it could be a college kid who remorsefully relinquish their history major for career prospective concerns, or the same kid many years later making themselves work overtime for more end-of-the-year bonus, yet only getting laid off by the end of October because of some arbitary economic downturns due to Feds' rising rates. One must notice that these fomrs of dominations rely not exclusively on the punishments or deterrence of undesirable acts, but through a structural construction of a grand picture of culture, an organizational value system that induces natural compliances from individuals.

For every time there is an assignment to be done or a passage to be read for each and every social science/humanities class at Emory, I could not help but wonder if I am myself object of an unconscious project of intellectual enslavement. It might be a conspiracy theory type of argument to describe this process as a group of powerful individuals sit around a table inside a dark, smokey room while discussing the details of consciously modeling students into desirable social products. No, that is not how it works. It is, again, a structural design that is not consciously controlled but an extra-human, organic process that seamlessly proceeds generationally in acdemia settings.

To earn a desirable grade, there are dogmatic norms one's writing needs to be tendered for, structures needs to be followed (say, "use class material only), or ideological scheme that needs to be confronted (say, one is never allowed to draw criticism against American liberal democracy in Political Science classes), all resulting in a self-censorship, self-reinforcement of this slavery, to conform to the structure. There are no words that could accurately or sufficiently describe the scope of the problem nor the fullest extent of such terrifying power. It could only be felt----felt by the international students' inevitable feeling of "weridness" when they are to be tamed or assimilated, or felt by anyone else who feels the same intellectual uncomfortableness at this Emory institution.

Many thinkers and intellectuals seek to devise the cleverest sophistry of justifying the unjustifiable. They may quote the narratives of inevitability, morality, necessity, and more to accomplish the goal. Moral elements in the Classical world could be employed by both pro-slavery and anti-slavery stances, yet that process of moralization is what this paper seeks to point out.

I argue that even the Augustinian abolitionism is insufficiently radical and still relies on a moral construction. Both Aristotle and Augustine believes in the potential of "badness becoming goodness" and rejects natural slavery, yet neither of them are willing to clarify the tangible standard of "becoming" in practice. As a result, a Southern slave holder could argue that his slaves is "always" in this process of becoming, and will endlessly need his paternalistic guidance. As for Professor William Sasnett, who is clearly not an Augustinian abolitionist, I wish he is a sincere Senecan for the best, and a pseudo-moral entrepreneur for the worst.

voices

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