WE ARE HERE

THE INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE
A MESSAGE FROM THE JOURNAL TEAM

Dear readers,

We would like to sincerely thank you for reading ISOC’s first published journal, The International Experience: WE ARE HERE.

By showcasing the global creations of international students, The International Experience aims to celebrate the diversity of nationalities, cultures, and experiences found at Mount Holyoke College. In WE ARE HERE, one can find a beautiful array of photographs, poems, essays, and art pieces submitted by international students; work that was inspired by their time spent at Mount Holyoke College that speak for their international experience.

Understanding that the international experience is truly personal, we also encourage students to submit work in their mother tongue if preferred.

To ensure that the history of international students at Mount Holyoke College is never forgotten, The International Experience: WE ARE HERE will also be given to the MHC Archives and Special Collections.

Once again, we thank you for your support and hope that you gain new perspectives and insight from reading this year’s journal.

Much love,
Obaa Yaa Anin-Yeboah’20, Yuchen “Angel” Xiang’20 and Aryaa Rajouria ‘19
The Journal Team of 2017/2018
International Students Organizing Committee, ISOC
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“Hi Mia:

It’s understandable that after the first flush of excitement at being in a new country, you’d come back to earth with a thud. But the last thing you want to do is let the sense of anti-climax take over your life. So right now, when you’re feeling as sick as mud, it’s important to find things to do that will take your mind off all those swirling currents of negativity. You’ll soon be busy enough, and in a week or so you’ll probably be so overwhelmed with work that you won’t have a moment to call your own, but in the meantime, here’s what you can do to climb out of your own little slough of despond: (1) Keep a diary, and if you want to bitch about the place, or the people, do it there; you’ll probably find that putting into print what you’ve been thinking about in your mind has great therapeutic value. And you’ll have great fun reading the diary 4 years down the road, when you’ll wonder how you could have ever been so blue. (2) Walk around the campus and take photographs. The place really is beautiful, and you haven’t seen the half of it. And do it now, when you’ll see everything with fresh eyes and a sense of wonder. And you’ll be doing us a great favour, because we’d like to see the campus too. (3) Get out of your room as much as you can. Take walks. Talk to people. Strike up conversations with strangers. Enjoy the warm weather -- it won’t last. Read a book under a tree.

Above all, as I’ve said before, stay positive.

And talk to us at any time of the day or night. We’ll always be around.

Love.

Dad”
MoHome

I don't actually have a permanent address. the address listed on my passport will take you to my grandparent's old house in Lucknow that no one lives in anymore. if mhc sends us mail there, no one is picking it up. and i have no idea where my parents are going to be living by the time i graduate. so i don't know where i'm going to live after i graduate. Or: i don't know where i'm going to move after i finish my OPT in 2019. Or: i'm moving to Italy in 2019 because i took elementary italian last fall and read jhumpa lahiri over the summer. Or: i'm moving back to India but this time i'm leaving the north for good #byedelhi. Or: i'm emigrating to the Czech Republic cause i had my eat pray love moment in Prague this spring and romanticized all my memories from there even though i mostly spent my time with white people i don't talk to anymore. Or: i'm getting green card gay married to my alum friend, nicole’17 because she offered and then i'll never have to worry about visa applications ever again. Actually, i just realized it's fine because i'm renting an apartment in Northampton as soon as grace hires me back at the communications office :)
六月二十一，夏至，晨，圆明园

霞光特别眷顾清晨的荷花，肉嘟嘟的花瓣伸着懒腰，露珠在空旷的荷叶里打滚。京城还没苏醒，园里更是寂静，偶尔看见白衣鹤发的老先生打太极和湖边悠然的垂钓者。这座风华在乾隆盛世的皇家园林睡得跟个小娃娃似的，好像一切痛苦的往事都不记得了。但无论多么宁静的外衣，都遮挡不住深处狰狞的回忆。太阳愈发升高了，蓝天白云下的废墟，却显得更加不真实。巴洛克式的拱顶颓然碎裂，满地石料砸得七零八落，以至于被杂草吞没。或是徒留汉白玉的柱子，浮雕屏风早烧得灰都不剩，只剩螺旋花纹犹为清晰，可仍想象不出当年的壮观之景。倒塌的石壁上，沙子般的粗砺从指缝滑过，我看见时间好像也拖着伤痛回到曾经，百年间一幕幕充盈血泪的镜头，凿子一样挖着我脆弱的神经。轻轻拂去堆叠的弹壳和白骨，再次掀开最初的竹帘，后面却已赫然立着那座从未出现在任何照片，被雨果誉为“理想与艺术的典范”的无与伦比的杰作。

希腊有巴特农神庙，埃及有金字塔，罗马有斗兽场，东方有夏宫

那本是天高云淡的仲秋，冷风穿过圆明三园的宫门，逗弄绮春园池中的青藻。面黄肌瘦的荷叶无力地匍匐，衰弱的荷茎抽筋似的在冷风中七零八落。雾里依稀望见福海中的蓬莱瑶台，白玉石圆形巨台上的三层殿宇间，不知有否传出八仙琴歌酒赋的雅音。黯淡的铜麒麟苦守着长春园，落叶清寥地滑下澹怀堂的歇山顶。游廊尽头五色八角形奏乐亭旁，蓝琉璃番草的墙面和黄铜雕花的石券门寂寂相视。海晏堂心不在焉地扇着大理石屏风，景泰蓝和青花瓷等奇珍异宝都瞧厌了，就这十二生肖兽首铜像还能引起兴趣，各时辰依次辍流，正午时刻一齐喷水。大水法玩得正欢，石鹿奔跑在空心牌坊中，角尖各杈天女散花般流水，后头猎狗穷追不舍，口中水柱复而射回，美其名曰十犬喷鹿。据说这处喷泉若全部开放，犹如山洪爆发，在近处谈话须打手势，嘶声一直飘到几里开外。

落日余辉为何总不消散呢，山后的红光倒有扩大的趋势。兵器间电光火石作为背景音乐，富丽堂皇的幕布被撕裂得不堪入目，好像里头的血淋淋才是真相。戴着黑礼帽的小胡子绅士和手拿玫瑰的金发公爵刚刚踏上这个东方古国，就毫不掩饰地两眼放光，急不可耐地扯下斯文外衣。一个杀人，一个抢劫，一个贪恋绣花长袍，一个挑选珠宝玉石，一个用大斧把檀木家具统统砸碎，一个得意地向珐琅青瓷开枪射击，以此取乐。然后两个胜利者勾肩搭背，眉开眼笑地回到欧洲。临走时为给此等功业画下完满句号，下令火烧圆明园，三昼夜不熄，幻想中亚洲文明的轮廓荡然无存。

大火滚向西郊，几千年来沉寂的香山也浸没在血海中了。御风而行的枫叶，仿佛一只只
灵动羞怯的精灵穿梭在枝杈间，烈焰的魔爪掠过他们顽皮的衣角后就动了淫邪的念头。从那针最细微的叶尖开始，蛮横的污血碾着叶脉爬上来，尖利的指甲刺进水嫩的细胞。就像恶心的水蛭，任凭稚嫩的哭喊在旷远的山谷里回荡，直到最后一丝精神气儿在爪间散去，才挑出一个露着黄牙的奸笑。漫山遍野的暗赤啊，那是割破的手腕，纷扬的血滴从断裂的命脉中扑向九州。古老而生机的香山不复存在，只剩下空洞的外壳被风抓来当埙吹奏，山脚的碧云寺也和着凄哀的小调呜咽起来。威武擎天的哼哈二将，捏成一副狰狞面孔只是撑门面，莫非真能吹口气制敌擒帅？六根清净的五百罗汉，帮帮黄土大地的子民脱离苦难吧，就怕这木质贴金之身反倒纵容了燎原之火。

然后下雪了，各式哗众取宠的五颜六色终于没了气力地消停下来，皑皑苍白颤抖地尝试修补这满目疮痍。漫天的尘埃掉进眼睛，拉扯每一根神经，老鸹百无聊赖地在秃枝上嘶鸣。长城还屹立在东方，从嘉峪关盘旋至山海关，雾灰的石砖倏地战栗，粗砺的垛口凝睇远方，万千烽火台熄灭在肃杀的严冬中。古北口的荒山上，野草已经长得比人要高了。那处伏于崇山峻岭之巅的矫健巨龙去哪里了，与鞑靼瓦刺间的血战仍依稀在目，无往不胜的势头也随着孟姜女的哀嚎倒塌了么？

哦我忘了，这次不是抵御那些来自北方啥都没有的游牧民族，而是八个远渡重洋摩拳擦掌的捕猎者。水和泥堆砌的古旧城墙如何抵挡得住新型的武器，一千多发炮弹使齐化门变为一堆废墟，东直门也顷刻间炸成灰烬，更多不堪一击的守卫自是不攻自破，富丽堂皇的北京城第二次被洋鬼子们踩在脚下，时隔四十年的铁蹄又踏碎耳膜。联军如同一大片连天的蝗虫，盯着可口的麦田滴答口水，所到之处，杀人放火（丰功伟绩），奸淫抢劫（收获巨大），无数村镇沦为荒凉的坟冢，京城尽是断壁残垣。西太后早就拉着皇帝仓皇出逃，临行前还没忘把她眼里的小妖精珍妃推到井中淹死。条约都签过几回了？清政府也毫无知觉吧，《辛丑条约》共有十二个条约和十九个附件，又是几把利刃捅进伤痕累累的东方病龙身里，秃鹫在空中盘旋，伺机饱餐一顿，就等待着这只巨兽轰然倒下的那天。

千嶂里，长烟落日孤城闭

黄昏，夕阳西下。威严的午门仍正襟危坐地俯瞰芸芸众生，门楼两侧排开的庑房如同雁翅尖上的灰毛，骄傲的大雁啊，怎么不快快飞离这片水深火热之地呢？许是因为身体孱弱已甚。太和殿前的丹陛隐没在灰暗中，厚重的日晷也没机会使用了，连日的阴沉不知要过多久才能消散。重檐殿顶趾高气扬地披上闪耀的黄瓦外衣，好像一点不知老城已被搅得天翻地覆。九龙壁不过是嵌着彩色玻璃片的影壁罢了，风姿雄健的蛟龙再怎么活灵活现也只知道摆个威风模样，若是真有撕斗追逐宝珠的本事，怎不破壁而出吞食掉那张把懵懂无知的宣统皇帝赶出紫禁城的诏书？袁世凯又拍板定案次月必要坐上中华民国大总统的宝座，剃光头发是小事，就不知这三年后复来的新朝帝制整的是哪一出，病逝后扔下的烂摊子更是把中华民族推进另一锅军阀混战的粥里。
寒意伺机出没在夜晚的空气中，庄严的朱漆校门缓缓敞开，远处正对的玉泉山依依不舍地牵着几缕薄暮。图书馆里，学生早早点上了油灯，微弱的火光透过层层暮气忽隐忽现。未名湖耐不得困意已睡下，和风轻柔地抚摸涟漪波纹，仿佛泛黄的书页夹藏天上偶尔洒落的清凉星光。翻尾石鱼把头埋入湖面，赖在刺骨的水里不肯动。只有巍峨的博雅塔默默地伴着松柏站在湖畔，密檐石砖已经退入夜幕深处，却倏地被礼堂里响彻云霄的谈论声惊醒，你一句我一句激扬愤慨的发言纷纷号召大家奋起救国。天安门都震悚于这声势浩大的游行，三千多面上书“外争国权，内惩国贼”“废除二十一条”“还我青岛”的白旗汹涌地踏过长安街。赵家楼胡同而后被映天火光笼罩，富极一时的曹宅顷刻间烧为黑炭。哪儿还有学生上课呀，工人们也义愤填膺了，工厂和店铺里都找不到影子，街道上到处是他们庞大的队伍。胆小的政府吓得跟蜗牛似的赶忙缩回壳里，就算一纸条约在外头敲得震天响也没敢伸只手出来签字。

人不寐，将军白发征夫泪

永定河畔，潺潺流水轻轻唱着摇篮曲，柳枝垂入水中，鱼儿吐着泡泡避让。宛平城静得连针尖大的声响都熄灭了，小狗梦到了肉骨头而滴答口水。卢沟桥可睡不着，刺骨的河水冲刷出了风湿病，况且她还得逗大大小小的狮子玩。一轮晕开的玉盘红着眼睛给大地娃娃最后一次掖上被角，扯下几缕云彩掩饰泪花，黑暗如狞笑的渔网笼罩住这个无助的小城。远道而来的倭人，博文约礼都被一口唾沫啐到脚下。见面礼是架起的大炮，轰鸣的飞机，满膛的手枪及龌龊的眼神。东瀛啊，西洋人都唆使你些什么，倒不记得百千年前我握着你小手耐心教你用筷子，背了一遍又一遍的三字经不是保证永远不会忘吗？如今却亲手把闪着寒光的刺刀捅入大哥胸口，不必用这种方式提醒我看着你，依偎在怀中看月亮的那个小毛头做梦还经常见到。黄河长江翻滚着泥泞的血液，三山五岳堆积着森森的白骨。可是你小看我了，我的子民们守卫在这片有五千年厚重历史的古老土地上，等着击破你那“三个月内必灭中国”的谎言。卢沟桥即尔等之坟墓，应与桥共存亡，不得后退。

昔日王榭堂前燕，飞入寻常百姓家

正阳门东站热闹起来了，雨后湿润的阳光滑下伦敦腔的红砖，绅士的钟楼撑着黑伞打量四面八方簇拥来的人。门头沟的工人凌晨四点就摸黑起床急着去乘装煤的黑敞篷车，呼家楼的队伍也要迤逦十几里地，为了赶来看一眼洁白圣洁的天安门广场。记忆里一个月前这还是一片荒芜的野草地，金水河里的清流被深不可测的污泥一口吞掉，苍蝇绕着垃圾山嗡嗡地飞。如今大家可似瞪大了眼睛，马路上绊人的土坑被填得平平整整，来路不明的植物拔得根都不剩。长安街上挂满了红旗和灯笼，却遮挡不住远方坦克和战斗机，还有排排等待检阅的士兵。祥云氤氲的华表之下，昔日万国来朝的金水桥也是水泄不通。仙人走兽装饰着黄琉璃顶的城楼，正中的巨幅画
像审视着子民。主席已迫不及待地从西侧砖道登上观礼台，霎时间地震了般，台下的民众嘶吼“万岁”“万岁”，手舞足蹈地挥动小旗和五角星灯。随着电钮微弱地嘎吱一声，第一面五星红旗稚嫩地爬上旗杆，在这未有雾霾的蓝天中初涉世间。

八月七日，立秋，夜，家中

下了场大雨，晚上越发的清凉了。一个多月里在京城跑了各式各样的地方，还有很多印象深刻的未来及提到，尤其是博物馆，从国家博物馆到宛平城小小的展览厅，一件件柔润的青瓷，肃穆的铜器，淡泊的玉石，古朴的石雕，全都珍藏着千年来每一滴细微的时光。炎黄大地上的文明古国，细水长流般承载着多少璀璨的人类文化。却因为关紧大门的缘故，高高在上的皇帝终究被冲进家里的大炮轰下龙椅。然而我们，一个个手无寸铁的平民，在半壁江山沦陷的困境中，怀揣国仇家恨，漫天风沙里走上战场，直视对岸那些狂妄狞笑的敌人，面不改色。英国佬不懂，八国联军不懂，日本鬼子也不懂，是什么无形的力量让中国人在政治腐败，兵力落伍的情况下无所畏惧地踏着同胞尸体继续战斗，有何种神秘的道义支撑着他们拼死扭转本已无力回天的败局。

《易经》说：“天行健，君子以自强不息。”

司马迁说，“常思奋不顾身，而殉国家之急。”

陆游说，“王师北定中原日，家祭无忘告乃翁。”

文天祥说，“人生自古谁无死，留取丹心照汗青。”

顾炎武说，“国家兴亡，匹夫有责。”

为什么我的眼里常含泪水？因为我对这土地爱得深沉。
part 1
I thought it was a broken pipe; I really don’t like pastoral art,
I like the mountain, water lines running down its sides! Isn’t that cool?
Everyone has such funny faces—very blue, maybe too blue.
I like that too. They are now standing by the bucket, not writing.
the world is becoming so small

part 2
They were examining artwork in a box.
It is a box itself...the entire piece made my heart jump.
It is a map of Uganda, that one Butterfly Sanctuary we were in in Bangalore, or was it Chennai?
I am thinking of how much care they take to sit with the artwork and know it.
There is a golden sleigh in the middle of the room.
There was art that looked Indian.
If I were to turn my head 180°, it would look normal.
I am wondering if I am too critical of white appropriation.
There is a plastic belly mounted to the wall by the map of Uganda.
The painting second nearest the golden sleigh is a woman crying.
I am wondering why I should associate everything with India.
I thought it was a broken pipe; I really don't like pastoral art, I like the mountain, water lines running down its sides! Isn't that cool? Everyone has such funny faces—very blue, maybe too blue. I like that too. They are now standing by the bucket, not writing. The world is becoming so small.

They were examining artwork in a box. It is a box itself...the entire piece made my heart jump. It is a map of Uganda, that one Butterfly Sanctuary we were in in Bangalore, or was it Chennai? I am thinking of how much care they take to sit with the artwork and know it. There is a golden sleigh in the middle of the room. There was art that looked Indian. If I were to turn my head 180°, it would look normal. I am wondering if I am too critical of white appropriation. There is a plastic belly mounted to the wall by the map of Uganda. nearby there is a stool. The painting second nearest the golden sleigh is a woman crying. The text in her bosom reads **ESPERANZA**. I am wondering why I should associate everything with India.

**ANISHA PAI**

1912
they lean only from their torso, walk in an almost semicircle, to sit on a stool.

The belly is called Shield. Their eyes are sharp, but they never stop.

The crying lady is not Latina, she is Spanish. I am thinking about her coming to the butterfly sanctuary.

The first recorded female sculptor in Spain, Luisa Roldán.

Them and I are stood still, in different parts of the room. I want to make connections through time & space & culture. I am gaslighting myself.

It is still comforting: all of Asia, with little or no interaction.

It must be difficult to get art from across the world. I am trying to believe this, but...

Both make me feel like erasure.

Let me return to the museum.

“In ... four decades, [the American] has explored icons and symbols ... from Greek Goddesses and Hollywood starlets to tubes of red lipstick.”

This is the fourth time they have examined it. There is no description.

part 3

I hate the feeling of my fingers on my jeans.
they lean only from their torso, walk in an almost semicircle, to sit on a stool.

never stop.

The crying lady is not Latina, she is Spanish. I am thinking about her coming to the butterfly sanctuary.

The first recorded female sculptor in Spain, Luisa Roldán.

I have not seen them look up.

I am gaslighting myself.

It is still comforting: all of Asia, with little or no attention.

It must be difficult to get art from across the world. I am trying to believe this, but I do not know.

Both make me feel like erasure.

Let me return to the museum.

“In ... four decades, [the American] has explored icons and symbols … from Greek Goddesses and Hollywood starlets to tubes of red lipstick.”
Connecting and Comparing Lived Experiences with Global Movements

My older sister, a Lebanese citizen residing in Lebanon is going to give birth for a refugee this winter. The father is a second generation Palestinian refugee in Lebanon. Had he been born in a different country, both the father and the child would have a legal citizenship. This reality has always been unsettling for me. When my sister and brother in law decided to get married, my family opposed. They believed that my sister is doing something unfair by bringing another refugee to the world, since they knew that with her intention to stay in Lebanon, where the law doesn’t allow a woman to give citizenship for her children, the children will be stateless, and many of their rights will be taken away from them. Some friends are encouraging my sister to give birth in a country that gives the child birthright citizenship; however, her plan is to work hard enough to support her child independent of governmental benefit that come with the citizenship.

This reality makes the questions of citizenship and geographical identity uneasy for me. What qualifies a human being to be citizen of a certain country? What if you were born and lived all your life on a land that rejects you? What does it mean when you’re separated from your geographical identity, and the land of your ancestors is now claimed by a different group of people? The fact that my brother in law is not allowed to enter his hometown, Yafa, in Palestine, because his family left it after 1948, whilst my friends at school can go visit it whenever they want, on a fully funded trip called “Birthright” is striking. When I pause and think of this anecdote I

The previous anecdote presents one of the windows I used to interconnect with the themes that I studied in GEOG 208: Global Movements. What is
unique about this class is that I was constantly going back and forth between the mindsets of Farah the student at Mount Holyoke and Farah the Lebanese child. Many of the concept we covered in class hit home for me, I found myself not only using my personal experience to understand concepts we discussed in class, but also gaining from class discussion to reflect on, criticize, and think deeply of my personal encounters. Many past encounters in my life, like walking through refugee camps or encountering a border checkpoint, passed as trivial habits. Now after my experience in class, I find myself looking back and thinking how significant those incidents were in illustrating my geographic imaginaries and cultivating my geographic emotions.

Growing up in Lebanon, I was surrounded by refugees the entire time. Lebanon is the top third country for hosting refugees, as of 2016, many of my family members are Palestinian, and the area I was born and raised in was very close to the Sabra and Chatila refugee camp. In 2005, I was emotionally prepared by my parents that I might become a refugee myself at any moment if the Israeli-Lebanese war in Beirut was to develop into an Israeli invasion. In 2011, I was living at my grandmother’s house in Beirut when the Syrian refugee spill over to Lebanon occurred. One day, 11 persons with their luggage showed up at our door, they were my grandmother’s relatives from Syria. They stayed with us for three months, and I had to give up my room and closet, share a bathroom with them and get distracted from doing my homework by hearing their stories. I too felt like the place I had always claimed mine, my room at my grandmother’s house, was taken away from me and wronged myself for always taking it for granted.

Given my experience, I walked into the first day of class thinking that I know all about of refugees; however that was not the case. Seeing the refugee camp in Dadaab and hearing the stories at the European borders, made me realize how unparalleled global movement experiences can be. The notion
of refugees itself reflects a group trauma embodied in individualized kinds suffering.

Palestinians in Lebanon are allowed more mobility, in terms of migration, than refugees in Dadaab. The Palestinian refugee camps have markets, very similar to the one in Dadaab, and Lebanese citizens shop there too, seeking lower prices. However, their sources for living are still pretty limited since they are not allowed to possess any property or access public schools and hospitals. As a group, Palestinian refugees in Lebanon get support from UNRWA to obtain health care and education; however, with their stateless status, they lack agency and autonomy in Lebanon. That being said, refugee youth face numerous challenges to achieve their dreams and goals, especially when it comes to professions like medicine and engineering, since they can’t get licensed in Lebanon. Therefore in my opinion, a refugee camp with an ongoing economic structure, like the one in Dadaab or Sabra and Chatila, is not enough to build a community, especially when their temporary status becomes permanent.

Refugees problem in Lebanon also makes me think of my country’s sovereignty and borders. The Lebanese - Syrian border has always been malleable. Since I was little, I learnt that the entire Levant area was called Syria, including parts of Palestine, and the current borders are relatively recent and set not by the Lebanese and Syrians, but by the British and the French.

Since I was little, I was told that Arabs are one unit and they share same language, culture, history, and values. No one explained to me why, as an Arab, it is hard for me to obtain a visa to enter other Arab countries. What strikes me more is the treatment of Syrian and Palestinian refugees when they seek asylum in neighbouring Arab countries. The discussion on borders in class made me wonder whether opening the borders between Arab countries would have lessened the refugees problem in the Middle East, by allowing more freedom in mobility of individuals, lessening the concentration of refugees in Lebanon and Jordan and facilitating repatriation.
However, the reality showed that ethnic and religious diversity in the Arab countries, which intuitively is a source of cultural richness, spurred division and divergence both geographically and intellectually.

Another key characteristic of the Syrian-Lebanese border is its historic high permeability. In the past, it was very easy to cross from Lebanon to Syria and vice versa, with a small fee and minimal identification documents required. However, after the huge influx of refugees from Syria to Lebanon, the permeability of this border decreased greatly for security reasons, and because of the national ideology in Lebanon towards rejecting new refugees. More power was given to protect the border and block migration; but this allowed a smuggling business to emerge, letting in Syrian families who are willing to pay bribes to cross the border and buy their own safety.

This semester, I read in a piece by Ferrer-Gallardo and van Houtum about Spanish border police methods to partner with Moroccan police in order to make it easier to identify African migrants before they enter European territories. I find it interesting that the same concept is replicated on the Syrian-Lebanese border in a different framework. Syrian police is using similar methods to partner with Lebanese security forces to catch rebels who fled to Lebanon and try to go back to Syria.

On a final note, this class made me realize that global movements vary in scale, and are very different but closely connected. For this assignment, I chose to reflect on the three main concepts of citizenship, refugee camps and borders. Nonetheless, there are many more ways I can think of and reflect back on class discussion and personal experience. This will certainly not be the last time I take a moment to do so, especially that I am graduating soon and will embark on a new journey of migrating internally and globally.
UNTITLED
TEHREEM MELA’19
Home, the ultimate source of happiness, will always be in one’s heart at all times, consciously or unconsciously. No matter how much quarrel, fights, arguments take place; love and contentment will always override them. Being at home might be the most boring thing ever, especially during holidays, like summer holidays, which might seem like a never ending wait for school to start again, but when the time nears by for me to leave to the airport to travel thousands of miles away to go to college, my heart sinks and breaks. Sometimes, I feel like messing up the immigration process so that I will be sent back home again, and never to travel again and live in home forever. But then, I also think about how joyful it will be when I come back home to reunite with your loved ones after a year of successful completion of studies. This cycle of happiness and sadness rotates every year. Distance is a blessing because you learn to appreciate the value of home, but at the same time a curse because you will miss home so much as soon as you land in the other country.

The moment you land in the airport of your motherland, the feeling of euphoria overflows and you can’t refrain from a smile. The greenery trees that surround the airport and, which are visible through the huge windows of the airport remind me of how beautiful my country is. The moment of overjoy is when you stand in the local/native line instead of the foreigner line in immigration, and when the immigration officer speaks to you in your language. The wait for the bags seems eternal because you cannot wait to see your family’s car waiting for you outside of the airport. As soon as you take all your bags, you take big steps and walk fast, and
look around as quickly as possible to spot that car. You take a deep breath, walk slowly and hug your parents/loved ones tightly and might drop a tear or two. Throughout the car ride, you talk about your long, endless flight journey, and tell them about what food you ate and movies you watched.

When the car enters the residential area, all the memories bombard you and fill you with bliss. As the car stops in front of our beautiful house, our pet dog continuously barks to welcome us home, without knowing that I am back! As soon as he sees and smells me, he jumps and licks my face to welcome me home, and of course he says, “I can’t believe you are back!” When I see my grandmother, I bow down and touch her feet to pay respect, and hug her while she bursts into tears. She will tell me to go and feast on her delicious home cooked food, and I will tell her that I have to go and take shower first because I have been travelling for more than 24 hours. While I take shower, my grandmother will be impatiently waiting for me downstairs watching television, and as soon as I ring the bell to pray, she will get ready for me to come down to eat her delicious meal. When I come down after prayers, I will go to the kitchen, grab my plate, and take the home cooked food. I will bring the plate of food to the living room, sit down with my grandmother and tell her all about my year and how it has all been being away from home. We will be sharing our stories while I dine on the most awaited food, and be thankful to God that I am home.
I chose to tell my own story with geography through a painting. As many of you know, I am from Lebanon. I always take pride in my origins and it brings me joy to tell people where I’m from and talk about my hometown. Turkish coffee is an essential part of the everyday life of my people, and coffee grounds reading is a very popular practice among women from back home. Coffee grounds make artistic and interesting drawings, and many people try to interpret their meanings. Many people believe that an expert coffee grounds reader can tell your past and future through the grounds of your cup. After a huge number of Syrian refugees settled in Lebanon, many Syrian women used their expertise in fortune telling through coffee grain reading as a way to socialize, and Lebanese women loved that. It turned out to be a powerful and useful skill for some Syrian refugee women to integrate into the Lebanese society.

I chose to use this art to make a statement and reflect on my own journey and aspirations by drawing my own coffee grounds, using coffee paint. This painting reflects my personal journey from my origins represented by the cedar tree, Lebanon’s national symbol and the most famous tree in my town, Arz, the Empire State building that represents the city where I’ve accomplished most of my important endeavors so far, and my next destination: Rome. The drawings go clockwise, same as how the reading is done. The Globe on the bottom of my cup is something static, because I’m constantly seeking to become a global citizen. I’m a still somewhere on the beginning of the path of global citizen. I’m a still somewhere on the beginning of the path of global citizenship, and I will linger there for a while, opening my eyes and trying to figure out the tools and
coffee divination
There’s no way in hell.

That sentence reverberated during the two-year campaign. They know better. That was what people back home reassured me with.

Of course not, I thought.

It was pure denial. Why? Because believing he could win meant believing I was not welcome.

No one wants to feel unwelcome.

Sir,

You have no right to say anything about my people.

You know nothing about us. How dare you label us as terrorists when you barge into our states uninvited, kill us, and make us refugees in our own lands?

What's worse than one man believing this is overhearing a breakfast conversation about the terrors of the Middle East, ‘If you study abroad there, you won't receive our letters because you'll be dead.”

You ignorant. You educated ignorant.

Let me tell you about my Middle East.

My Middle East is a dream where 19 religious groups can float in harmony amid the hustle and bustle of beautiful Beirut.

Where you find a church and a mosque adjacent to each other and their calls for prayer issue symphonies into the sky.

Nowhere has seen more violence and exploitation than the Middle East. Yet, it rises. Every single time, it metamorphoses into something more beautiful than before.

The scars define it. They shout, resilience.

My Middle East is a hub of intellectuals who can tell you more about your history than you know.

It is music. It is food. It is family. It is love.

We carry our history as a stamp of honor even if the world never actually learns it. We carry the blood our ancestors have shed wherever we go.

We want you to question what you're being fed. Go read a book for God’s sake. We are fed up with the nonsense you say about us when you've never stepped foot on the beautiful shores of the Mediterranean.

You can't even point to my country on a map, so how dare you tell someone they're going to die on the soil that fed me?

Back to you, sir.

I am glad you got to where you are now. The world needs to see you as its true mirror. Your ban is nothing new, I always feel like a criminal passing through customs. Not because I have ever done anything, but because this is what the man behind the glass is told about me.

And before I leave you, I just want to tell you this.

We don’t want to be here.

Sincerely,

Your Next Door Muslim
To the brilliant non-binary community here,

I am sorry for the times you catch my sweaty palms and shaky voice every time I refer to you in conversation; the way I struggle with weaving your pronouns into my sentences and the sudden inability to conjugate the verbs fast enough despite breezing through English classes.

I am sorry for the times you catch me boasting about my love for diversity, as I surround myself with friends from a range of cultures, socioeconomic backgrounds, religions, interests, sexual orientations—yet I have not gotten to know a non-binary peer beyond their name.

I am sorry for the times you catch my glances as I subconsciously admire the way your hair falls differently from others I’ve seen, a look of interest that can understandably come off judgmental and attention that can reasonably be unwanted.
To every one of you,

I am sorry that for me, every small interaction is still a realization that you are different from the world and culture I was exposed to as a child. I am sorry for my lack of knowledge and experience, my nervousness, my questions, and any discomfort that my subconscious actions bring you.

But please believe me when I say that I want to know you as the brilliant individual you are; that I want to learn about your passion in your work and interests, the thoughts you have about world issues or campus events or the latest Sherlock season or why you love dogs, as well as your favorite foods and the countries you want to visit—just as I would with any other friend; that I want to be able to talk about you both here and back home, with a big smile on my face and not a sliver of concern in the way my sentences are said.

Please believe me when I say that I want you to be a part of my rich college experience.

And please believe me when I say that I am trying every day, and that I am making slow but steady progress to do so.

Sincerely,

A first-year international student
I looked at the people in the crowd. “Are they thinking about Yemen?” I wondered to myself. “I am from Yemen.” I said again, while I let the awkward silence settle. I laughed nervously and started reciting my poem.

Sometimes I walk around Blanchard, looking at people’s faces. Am I the only one that constantly thinks about Yemen, every second of every day? How is something that has taken over my life, nothing or just some random news to others? How is it that when I talk about Yemen and war and death and pain, topics that overwhelm me everyday as I deal with them and continue to exist here, people consider it such a source of nuisance and “discomfort” to them. “You just talk about Yemen so much. It’s fair that some don’t want to hear about it anymore.” How is it fair for some humans to exist with war and others not. How did God choose me and how did he choose Yemen?

The truth is, Yemen has been a source of joy and sorrow, some days I try to strip myself from every memory, and others I cling to all the memories that keep me alive.

But my memories in Yemen no longer seem real to me. My home, my family, Sana’a, my brothers sometimes don’t feel real anymore. It seems so far away and so distant. Sometimes I wonder if this is all in my head and Yemen doesn’t exist. Sometimes I wonder how this could be real. It’s so unreal.

How can I exist here, while people from Yemen, souls that are like mine struggle to remain alive.

Should I be home right now, struggling with my people, worrying about death and life, or should I complete my computer science homework?

All I want to talk about is Yemen. But all I don’t want to talk about is Yemen. I talk to everyone here about Yemen, anyone that listens, but in a few minutes, people forget and carry on with their lives. I don’t forget, I never forget. As I get off the stage after talking about Yemen. Everyone forgets. Why shouldn’t they?

People here claim to be activists. “I care about all human life”, they tell me. But why is it so hard for people to listen to me when I talk about Yemen? Why do they run away at the sight of me?

Are Yemeni lives less important than other lives? This war is not normalized to me, but it definitely is to others around me here. What should they say? What should I expect? don’t know.

I checked the news again, “20 people lost their lives in a deadly airstrike in Taiz”, I took a deep breath, and continued to exist.
It all started with a bowl of fruit
Actually, no -
Nobody knows when it started
Maybe it was when the first trade port opened in Parameswara’s Melaka,
Or when the British first colonized Penang,
Or in 1957, when our tanah melayu became Malaysia.

Who knows?
Somewhere along the way, all of us
From different parts of India, China, Sumatra, Java, Borneo
All started sharing languages that soon became one language.

Now when we speak in Malaysia, it is known as rojak
Like the bowl of mixed fruit with spicy dark sauce and crushed peanuts
But unlike rojak, we can speak all languages at once and sometimes not at all.
It depends on where you are.

If you come to Kuala Lumpur, you may hear a Malaysian go,
“Eh, you want to makan here or tapau?” or
“So mafan lah, I don’t want to do this.”

Our sentences could be made up of
Mandarin Hokkien Cantonese English Malay Tamil
Or any other languages known to Malaysians.
Sometimes all at once, sometimes not at all.
One thing’s for sure - every Malaysian knows what rojak is -
It’s a dish that we enjoy,
Yet also a language that flows through our veins
And makes us Malaysians.

* Bahasa means language and rojak is a typical bowl of mixed fruit in Malaysia and Indonesia.
Luxor, Egypt; 2017 August

It seems like the boy Abel is enjoying a hot-air balloon tour.

The balloon is round.

It is also bright.

It brings bird-eye view and makes people happy.

It looks hopeful.

But it is not colorful.

What was the boy doing, then?
He was asking for money, in Chinese.
Just as what his father did when he was at this age.

And where is his mother? Mothers don’t work there.

Who is he?
He is Abel, with veil, and he can be everybody.

* Abel: Hebrew for “breath” and “life”
INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ORGANIZING COMMITTEE (FALL 2017)
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ISOC.MHC@GMAIL.COM