

*Issue 14*

NU WRITING



# VOYAGES

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# LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

There is nothing new  
under the sun,  
but there are new suns.”  
- Octavia E. Butler

On February 18, 2021, the *Perseverance* rover landed in a Martian crater on a site now called the Octavia E. Butler Landing site. The posthumous dues to the great writer are nothing compared to the legacy she has left us — one we will continue to reckon with for decades if not centuries to come. Many have labeled Butler’s science fiction work as uncannily prophetic, but her insight has more to do with her understanding of the skeleton that has come to shape our world rather than individual events. In *Parable of the Sower*, she writes: “All that you touch You Change. / All that you Change Changes you. / The only lasting truth Is Change.” In more ways than one, Octavia Butler was the ultimate Voyager.

When discussing possible themes for this year’s issue, the one that resonated the most with us was “Voyages” because we realized that it encompassed many of the discussions we were already having or wanted to initiate, conversations about race and racism after the murder of George Floyd, conversations about gender and sexuality amidst the attacks on reproductive rights and the rise of transphobia, conversations around able-bodiedness, mental health and social responsibility amidst the pandemic. “Voyages” allows us to reflect on the voyage itself and not pretend like we had reached the final destination or that an end point is even possible. It is up to every one of us to reflect on the different voyages we find ourselves a part of.

In this issue, Northeastern writers engage in different genres and conversations and allow us to join in, if just for a moment, on some of the voyages they have been a part of or witness to. You will find spatial voyages as well as temporal ones, personal voyages as well as communal ones, and the internal voyage of the self as well as the external voyage of our world. We invite you to join us on all of these journeys that our wonderful writers have presented us with as well as reflect on the voyages you find yourself a part of and to join in on the conversations.

# THE COMPLETE, UNABRIDGED WHOLE

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CYNTHIA CHEN

"La vie en rose." Life in pink, or seeing life through rose-colored glasses. I remember the first time I heard this song was a cover by Cristin Milioti from the sitcom "How I Met Your Mother." I was in 6th grade, and I loved the song. I spent weeks browsing through different renditions, falling in love with each one. I loved it so much that I used the piece for several of my cello auditions through the years. The original piece, sung by Édith Piaf, describes the feeling of falling in love and seeing the world in a new light, a pink hue covering the world, making everything seem more wonderful. It felt like fate that it was played in one of my favorite shows, at a time when I would truly appreciate it and love it. How fitting.

## Piece 1: The Image



*Image of Webb's First Deep Field by NASA*

On Monday, July 11, 2022, NASA's James Webb Space Telescope delivered an image of the galaxy cluster SMACS 0723, also known as Webb's First Deep Field. It was "the deepest and sharpest

infrared image of the distant universe so far.” The image only covers “a patch of sky approximately the size of a grain of sand held at arm’s length by someone on the ground,” but it holds thousands of galaxies and stars.

People love the unknown, the mystique, the extraordinary. We’re drawn to what we don’t know. It’s how our brains are wired. It’s also why we spend billions and billions of dollars trying to explore the universe and find out the extent of what we don’t know. NASA spends upwards of \$20 billion each year attempting to grasp the idea of space and the universe, to keep traversing deeper into the dark and cold to find more pieces to the puzzle. We’re so desperate to make sense of the world, to make sense of something, even if we’re not sure what the full picture is.

According to “The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy,” the meaning of life, the universe, and everything is 42. Douglas Adams might have meant it as a joke, but the desire to know the answer to everything is ingrained in reality. When we look for what’s beyond Earth, what’s beyond the world that we know, what exactly are we searching for? We have no idea what shape or form or number the answer will take on. We’re writing the question as we’re asking it, and trying to make each piece of the puzzle fit. But then again, if we have the whole picture, the answer to everything, do we stop searching? Do we only stop changing the question when we have the answer? Maybe the point of the exploration is never to reach the end but to keep coming back with more questions.

## **Piece 2: The Poem**

There’s a poem I love, from “Field Guide to the Haunted Forest” by Jarod Anderson, called “THE WHOLE.” He talks about wanting to understand the world around us, both past and present. “I wish I could know the whole, / so I could love it more completely.” This

desire to comprehend the world in its entirety so he can appreciate it more wholly parallels our yearning for the unknown, to explore, and to find the full picture.

But when we finally piece together “the whole”, whatever that may look like, maybe we’ll look into the meaning of it and what it does for us. I’ve heard the phrase, “the universe told me,” countless times, and I’ve said it myself too. Maybe it thundered while you were asking a question to the sky, or you bumped into someone from your childhood at a new job. These coincidences are often interpreted to mean something different. Something more. Instead of seeing something for what it is, we want a reason, a greater intention, or a bigger purpose, for why things happen the way they do.

### **Piece 3: The Show**



*Ted (Josh Radnor) meets the mother (Cristin Milioti) in How I Met Your Mother (2014)*

I’m a big sitcom person. Most people these days aren’t, but in a world where everything has irregularities, there’s something about the predictability and sameness of these shows that brings me

comfort. I binge-watched the entirety of “[How I Met Your Mother](#)” at once, over the course of a month. I stayed up a little later than I was supposed to and watched episode after episode, mesmerized by the stories and characters. Granted, I was pretty young and a lot of the jokes went over my head, but I loved it. The show tells one big story of how the main character, Ted, met the mother of his children, Tracy. Each episode was a smaller story that leads Ted closer and closer to meeting the mother, in the sense that each episode was a piece to a much larger puzzle. Every little thing had a ripple effect that ultimately guides Ted toward Tracy, the most notable being the yellow umbrella.

There’s the saying, “Everything happens for a reason.” In this respect, every effect has a cause. A yellow umbrella is an object that gets passed around between Ted and Tracy throughout the years, starting with Tracy leaving it behind at a bar after St. Patrick’s Day. Ted visits the same bar the morning after in search of his phone from the night before and gets caught in the rain, so he picks up the umbrella. Then after a series of events, Ted ends up dating Tracy’s roommate, leaving the umbrella at her apartment one day, returning it to its original owner. Years later, at a friend’s wedding, Ted bumps into Tracy, who was a part of the band playing, holding the umbrella, and finally, they meet. Of course, there’s a lot more that happens that leads up to that moment, but this is the main gist. I found it fascinating how the creators of the show were able to craft such an intricate web of actions that all had an effect on one another. While these singular events can be interpreted as coincidences, merely correlating with one another, the collection of all these near-chance encounters feels like fate.

#### **Piece 4: The Other Poem**

Webb’s image is also the inspiration for [one of my favorite poems](#), written by Michelle Awad. She writes about finding pieces of

someone and a grander meaning to life when looking at the picture of the universe. “Maybe I’m foolish to see the universe so clearly / and think it has nothing to do with you,” I remember reading the poem for the first time and feeling entranced, overwhelmed, and in love with how she wrote and what she created. I loved how she boiled down the human experience. She articulated exactly how it feels to be small in a vast, boundless universe, grasping at every straw to find the true purpose of living. One specific line, “Maybe I’m hopeless. (The human urge to see patterns where there aren’t any.),” propelled me to think about how I try to find a reason, a pattern, for everything, to make it all make sense.

According to Wikipedia, pareidolia is “the tendency for perception to impose a meaningful interpretation on a nebulous stimulus, usually visual, so that one sees an object, pattern, or meaning where there is none.” It’s the way I find faces in everything I see, cars, lamps, my dinner plate, that one stain on the back of my favorite white t-shirt. Maybe that’s the reason they created the movie “Cars,” which I have never been the biggest fan of. I can see the faces too, but it’s something about the way the animators saw some cars and crafted a whole story, a whole universe, around them. I don’t hate it, but I don’t love it either. Maybe I don’t see the faces of people from my past, like Awad, when I see an image of the universe, but I am hopeless. And I am romantic, which by her definition is “the human urge to make out through the apocalypse like it’s a bad movie.” But I think for me, romantic is the human urge to make something out of nothing. Because seeing something for what it is, without relating it to some part of myself, is just impossible. I have the urge to find pieces of myself in everything I see so that I can be a part of everything that exists.

## Piece 5: The Movie



*John Cusack and Kate Beckinsale in Serendipity (2001)*

My Mom loves the movie “Serendipity,” the 2001 film starring John Cusack as Jonathan and Kate Beckinsale as Sara. As a child, we would watch it together all the time. The film explores serendipity, both as a concept and as the name of a restaurant in New York. Serendipity, as defined by Google, is “the occurrence and development of events by chance in a happy or beneficial way.” What my Mom loved most about the film was how the characters kept missing each other, just barely. She found it anxiously exciting how they passed one another on the street, in stores, in a hotel lobby, while unintentionally looking for each other. The characters visit places that mean something to each other in the rare hopes of finding the other, and in the end, they do. The characters reunited like they were destined to be, but they were intentionally visiting locations of nostalgia. Is it really serendipity, or was it just a matter of probability?

As Awad described, there’s “the poetic urge to manifest something so vast it never ends.” People’s ability to believe in destiny, fate, kismet, karma, serendipity, and every other word that

that means this elusive concept that there's a greater power orchestrating us like puppets. We need to create a reason when events and people merely correlate with, not cause, each other.

## **Piece 6: The Diagnosis**

Maybe we find ourselves in everything because we're all a bit narcissistic. We love to see ourselves in the world. Mayo Clinic defines narcissism as "a disorder in which a person has an inflated sense of self-importance." We make up reasons for things happening to us so we feel more important. So we are more important. So the world revolves around us. So bad luck isn't just bad luck but rather a karma for something we did. So something good is happening because we wished for it at 11:11. So we meet people at the right place, at the right time, because the universe wants us to be together, like Ted and Tracy, Jonathan and Sara. Because maybe when it pertains to ourselves, we're too partial to see events in an objective light.

In another way, it's also how we relate to love songs and movies, making them "ours" in a way. We put our own meaning onto the works, so they're no longer something common or universal, but rather "our song" or "our movie." We become too familiar, too emotional that we can't help but insert ourselves and what we know. Coming back to Awad, "Maybe it is just an optical illusion, maybe everything is just an optical illusion where if I stare at it long enough, and squint, and turn my head the right way, I'll see your face." Even with an image of stars and galaxies, she can't help but see something else entirely. Maybe she's narcissistic. But aren't we all the center of our own universe?

## Piece 7: The Philosophy

In “[Meditations on the First Philosophy](#),” René Descartes argues that there should be a distinction between the mind and the body. “All that up to the present time I have accepted as most true and certain I have learned either from the senses or through the senses.” What you think is not always true. What you perceive is not always accurate. What’s real, what’s there, is what you can gather from your senses. Sometimes we are aware that we’re not right. That the reason we conjured up things happening in our lives is, in fact, just something we created. But it doesn’t deter us from believing in it. We believe in birthday wishes and superstitions, even though we’re fully aware of probability and hard work. We believe in serendipity and karma, in the universe and greater beings, in conspiracy theories and UFOs, even though we are able to see things clearly, exactly for what they are. Maybe we are hopeless, just as Awad said, seeing patterns where there aren’t any.

## Piece 8: The Data

In addition to the image, Webb’s telescope also collected [spectra](#), which are data about objects’ physical and chemical properties that can help researchers identify more details about distant galaxies. We are one step closer to discovering the full picture if we can piece it all together. Correlation does not equal causation, but sometimes we need to take a gamble, a hypothesis, as a scientist would call it, and tell a story. Because the data wouldn’t make sense without a narrative. Numbers are numbers. What good do they do without a reason, an explanation, for their occurrence?

There’s also the fact that the [universe is expanding](#) while we’re trying to make sense of it. [Wikipedia](#) explains that “the universe does not expand ‘into’ anything and does not require space to exist ‘outside’ it.” Webb’s image captures the universe a few 100 million

years after the Big Bang, but The Big Bang was 13.8 billion years ago. The universe is ever-changing, so who knows what it looks like now? We're constantly playing catch-up . Writing and rewriting the question. Like Awad said, "Maybe I'm doomed." Maybe humans are doomed and hopeless and too romantic for our own good. Maybe we should take the number 42 and run with it. Maybe we should watch "Cars" and root for Lightning McQueen. Maybe we should watch movies about correlation and causation and serendipity and fate and dream of finding the same. Maybe in the process of trying to find a pattern in our tendency to find patterns, I'll discover there are none.

Maybe we'll never find out the full extent of the universe, this "whole" that we want to piece together, because the universe is ever-expanding. But so are we.

# THE HOPES AND PAINS THAT MADE ME

RICHARD SANTAMARIA

As I play with my toy car on the living room floor, my mother comes in with a poster to show. This woman was the one who had decided to leave home only a few years earlier, arriving with no money to her name and barely any support system to claim. She had only my grandmother, my father, and herself to rely on while raising me, working from dawn to dusk scrubbing the floors of people much richer than her. She was fairly young too, barely 30 and had already committed to the life of a housekeeper to raise me, with no governmental social safety net to catch us if she failed. I was not old enough yet to understand or appreciate any of this, of course, I just wanted to see what she had. Once she catches my attention, she flips the poster around, and I see it, a poster with all 43 (at the time) Presidents of the United States from Washington to Bush. She tells me she picked it up on the way home and jokes that I should try to memorize them from first to last. She was joking, but I decided to do it anyway. Truth be told, I am not really sure why I chose to do it, or why those old-looking white guys had piqued my interest. I certainly was not old enough yet to contemplate their legacies, or how some of them had directly shaped how the direction of my young life was going to go. But I knew there was some sort of spark in each of them, and it drew me toward them.

As I got older and went through elementary school, then through middle school, and finally early high school, my interest in history and the individuals who had made it only grew. My older brother arrived from El Salvador in 2008, and while he was completing the ninth grade, he got this one textbook for his history class. He read it because it was required, and it certainly helped him gain a grasp of the English language. I read it because I found it interesting. Every time I flipped through those pages I learned more about the

triumphs and the losses, what created this country, and the problems it has endured. From Bleeding Kansas to the Gilded Age to the Civil Rights Movement, this country's history was as bruised as it was impressive. Despite my fascination with this, however, whenever my teachers asked me what I wanted to do as an adult, I had no earthly idea. I remember putting everything from fireman to lawyer whenever our yearbooks asked us what our dream job was. I did not really see a clear direction for what I wanted to do once I got older yet. I was still young, but already at this point I had peers who had found passions and intended to see them through. I loved what I had learned thus far, but the thought of focusing my entire lifetime on the past did not seem to click for me. I revered the past, but with so much possible in the future it seemed only natural to want a more active job than one just reciting what we already knew.

As I went through high school, I looked at several options for myself. My parents above all else wanted me to do well enough to qualify for a full-ride scholarship at a university, our only hope of being able to afford college. Just as much, however, they wanted me to focus on a lucrative career. Trespassing into the upper-middle class was our ticket to the financial stability that they wished for, and we knew I was our best hope of achieving it. I took several STEM classes, the ones that my parents said would produce a higher paying job later on, to see if there was a fit for myself. AP Biology was interesting for the most part, but after a year, the mitochondria had worn out its welcome with me. Chemistry was a good time, but in hindsight that could have just as well been the Breaking Bad fan in myself more than anything else. AP Physics C: Mechanics left my head jumbled and frazzled after one year and left me assured that of all the paths I could take, that was certainly not one. I respected it for the course that it was, and indeed I highly respect people that go into it, but the second we stopped talking about Newton's Laws of Motion was the second I was doom-ed.

Therefore, I was left in a strange space where I wanted to choose a STEM major for college but found myself without the passion for any of them. My first semester of senior year had arrived, and I was still wholly uncertain what major I was going to apply to schools with. I knew, by and large, that it was quite common for college students to switch their majors if they found themselves unhappy. Knowing myself, however, I wanted to get it right on the first try before I could get the chance to convince myself I was happy in a major I was uninterested in.

While I was deliberating, I was simultaneously taking AP United States Government and Politics with our school's enthusiastic teacher, Mr. Latham. Mr. Latham was the kind of teacher who saw us as who we were: young adults with rapidly maturing and changing attitudes regarding the world and the country we lived in, and he spoke to us like such. Never one to talk down to a student but never afraid to tease us either, he created an engaging atmosphere in the classroom and combined it with a deep knowledge on the subject. When he spoke about the deliberations of a Supreme Court decision from three lifetimes ago, or pointed out the inconsistency of a former President's rhetoric and their foreign policy, there was a reverence for history in what he said. He reminded me of what it was to appreciate civics and the political engagement that makes government and politics possible. These were the things that made the American experiment work, and he reminded me of that. Not to mention, I can safely say I have not encountered another teacher before or since who proudly hung a "Teachers with Attitude: Straight Outta Homework" poster.

My favorite moment in the class was during the week he guided us through a week-long mock session of Congress. For five days, our two classes were split into the House and Senate, and my class had wound up as the House. We were each assigned to come up with a bill that we would be putting through committee, debating

on the floor, sending to the Senate to vote on, and finally passing to Mr. Latham as our President. I was a Democrat, which meant I was in the running to serve as Speaker for a day, and without a bit of hesitation, I went up to Mr. Latham to formally ask and he happily obliged. Mere days later, I was officially Speaker of the House of my high school's AP Government and Politics class of 2018-2019 (the most prestigious of titles truly). I would be lying if I said I did not find the concept supremely enjoyable, and I was very happy the moment he gave me instructions on how to communicate with all the jargon that goes into Congressional routine. My bill was meant to eliminate the penny from circulation since its buying power is outright pitiful and each costs 1.7 cents to make, and I was looking forward to putting it on the floor and arguing in favor of it. Well, I did just that, only for the entire Republican delegation to come out against the bill and successfully sway enough Democrats in the class to vote against the bill in order to kill it, under the vague notion of patriotism and my branding as an anti-Lincoln radical. It was a truly strange feeling to preside over the failure of your own bill, but I can say that it was extremely funny in the moment, too. For that unique experience, I can safely thank Mr. Latham for encouraging us to go all in our roles.

Later on in the year, Mr. Latham had us researching for a group project we would be doing at the library, spending the entire school day in the library giving presentations on our topic to rotating groups of freshman students. My topic was the Electoral College and the times in which it conflicted with the popular vote. In researching for this topic, however, I fell down a Wikipedia rabbit hole and before long stumbled across one quote from Abraham Lincoln. At the time merely an Illinois state politician, he said this when asked about the role of government: "The legitimate object of government, is to do for a community of people, whatever they need to have done, but cannot do, at all, or cannot, so well do, for themselves — in their separate, and individual capacities" (Lincoln

1). Not as flashy or influential as his Gettysburg Address, to be sure. But this admittedly long-winded statement from future President Lincoln argued that the point of government is to accomplish what an individual would not be able to do effectively, or at all, without its existence. That it is the responsibility and obligation of government to undertake endeavors that a single individual cannot do alone. That a government of the people working together was objectively stronger and more capable of something than anything they could possibly hope to achieve alone. It captivated me, and it felt right, because to me it felt that this philosophy was right for the country then, and that we might need it more than ever now.

After this class reminded me of how much I loved the story of American government, and how important it had been throughout history for individuals to be active in the pursuit of progress, I committed to political science and I submitted my college applications. I still would not quite be able to tell anyone what I intended to do once I graduated, but I knew that what I wanted more than anything was to be in the position to make a difference. As I had grown up, I had begun to realize the world my parents had been inhabiting since arriving. To be frank, it was an America that had the odds stacked against their favor. They, like the vast majority of undocumented immigrants in this country, did not qualify for any governmental assistance for themselves. This was in spite of the fact that our household income was absolutely low enough to qualify for EBT or TANF or some form of federal assistance and had been since I was little. My father worked in hard labor jobs until I was seven years old, at which point he had to receive back surgery and was effectively left unable to work. He was a third-grade dropout. There was no chance of him getting a low-intensity office job. To not be able to work in manual labor essentially meant he could not work at all. By some stroke of luck, my parents were able to secure Social Security numbers for

themselves, and he has thus been collecting disability payments from what he had paid into the economy in payroll taxes. But other undocumented immigrants do not have such a luxury. They pay taxes into the American economy with no hope of ever collecting benefits in their old age or in need of an emergency. All in all, the life of an undocumented immigrant in this country can be one of exploitative labor conditions, an absolute lack of a social safety net, and a situation where they pay into an economy that has no intention of paying them back.

And yet, they were supremely hopeful when they heard me tell them I had come back with an acceptance letter from Northeastern. At this point, I had made my learning aspirations clear to them, and after a mild sadness caused from the fact that I was not intending to become a lawyer, doctor, or physicist, they came to believe in what I wanted to do. Since coming to Northeastern, I did my first co-op working for the Massachusetts State Government. Even from just my short foray working within government, it was very apparent that there was a massive hole in the services that we were providing. Within my department, which oversaw licensing, we were months behind where we needed to be for sending people the paperwork they needed to work in the midst of a pandemic. Repeat callers were a common occurrence, with them often calling every couple hours for weeks on end. Despite this, it only reinforced my belief in a compassionate and proactive approach to governance. I believe that if the department I worked with hired more, many of its issues would be resolved right there. Even with the current inflammatory nature of our nation's politics, I still believe there is nothing more powerful than people united in a quest to help each other. For every person that becomes apathetic towards improving the lives of themselves and of other people, it becomes that much harder to improve the world.

It took a bit of time to settle on that as the philosophy that encourages my current discipline. It took exploring my options and looking at possibilities that did not sustain my interests, leaving me briefly but genuinely uncertain. It certainly took the right teacher at the right place and time. However, I have chosen my discipline, and I have yet to stray from it. I certainly have no intention of doing so, either. I get hopeful thinking of what I can do after graduation to help the lives of working people, fight for the rights of the undocumented, and encourage a more active government. I have found a niche for myself, and I intend to see it through.

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# ON MY DISCIPLINARY IDENTITY

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JESICA BAK

Even though I had a deep conviction that I was good at writing, and that in some way I already *was* a writer, this conviction was completely independent of my having ever written anything, or being able to imagine ever writing anything, that I thought anyone would like to read. Elif Batuman, *The Idiot*

Inevitably, all great writers get asked the age-old questions: When did they know they wanted to devote their lives to writing? Did they always know they were destined to write? Had they seen signs in their early life of being a great writer? Sometimes, when I'm cosplaying this identity of a 'great writer' being interviewed by an 'important magazine,' I pretend to think thoughtfully before answering with my most humble yet grandiose answer.

Yet, these questions confound me even now. Growing up, writing was not a practice or philosophy that I picked apart to try and find a hidden meaning in. Usually, it was nothing more than a piece of paper in my satin blue diary for me to ask myself things like *why did that boy at school not talk to me today, why are my parents fighting all the time, why do we have that hole in our door where the doorknob should be*. I wasn't exactly hoping to find answers to these questions, but they were an early way for me to materialize what had felt wholly abstract. Since then, it must have been that: using language to materialize the everyday; making sense of what, otherwise, does not; and hoping that it can take me a little closer to what feels unreachable. It must have been.

It turns out that educational institutions are not typically in the business of fostering this thing I call 'materializing language' — especially not when the so-called 'institution' is a victim of what we call the 'New York City Department of Education Budget

‘Allocation.’ Who cares about this thing we call ‘fostering students in the act of materializing language’ when the so-called victimized institution’ is being forced to choose between new metal detectors or new books for the English Department (ones that don’t have slurs or sexually-epithetic drawings in them)? There is no difficult decision to make, and there is no real choice to begin with.

I remember watching white private school girls in the American television shows I loved so much as a high school student, wondering why I was not also decked out in expensive plaid, analyzing in English class why Anna Karenina threw herself under a train, or why Jane Austen began her seminal novel with that famous, seminal first line, or why Beat poetry should be distinguished from other, traditional forms of poetry. In other words, there was a canon, and I had not familiarized myself with it before arriving at the hallowed steps of higher education. Who was to blame for my missed literary prowess; for the missed opportunity in forming my own literary identity – the one that the ‘great writer’ typically references in an ‘interview with important magazine’?

The answer may very well have been me, at the very moment I was denied admittance to one of the nine elite institutions in New York’s specialized high school system. My mother, who had truly believed that my education was over at the time, was not interested in the politics of how unequal the distribution of funding, resources, or opportunity was for public high schools in our state. She was not interested in how unfair it was that three of the specialized high schools – which already boasted massive multi-million dollar endowments, and just happened to be regular feeder schools to some of the most wealthy and prestigious universities in the world – were receiving more of our public school funding,[1] while the zoned school I would end up attending was still suffering from underfunded resources,

underpaid faculty, and underinvested youth. She was not interested in the normative statement of what should be, for the empirical fact was simply that it was. And if this is the way things empirically *were*, why had I let her sacrifice go to waste? Getting rejected after being enrolled and entrenched in an American hagwon was simply unheard of. These private enrichment schools, ubiquitous in Korean communities around the world[2], espoused meritocracy and reminded students constantly about the sacrifices their families made so they could study comfortably. Sacrifice was not to be wasted.

Before entering high school, our Korean mothers would flock to the various *hagwons* in Queens, New York, and enroll us in a preparatory course to ensure that we, the children, would not forget that they were spending their blood money, made from washing white women's feet at the nail salon or from standing twelve hours a day at the supermarket register. All this to send us to the best high schools in the city so that they could eventually send us to the best colleges in the country. Were we lucky to have someone making these sacrifices for us? How can we redeem ourselves? And to whom do we owe this debt? At the time, I thought this was an Asian thing, where we could quickly point fingers at our mothers for leading us into traps of disciplinary oppression. In doing so, we failed to realize that for our parents and our communities, sacrifice not only had to be worth the act, but was also our language of love. We failed to realize, as I do now, that when our parents — perpetual aliens, situated in the very state we nurture our own lives in — claim that sacrifice and love are inseparable, it is because what we call 'Western Capitalism' has deemed that what they call 'the non-Western Subject' must do so.

Questions of disciplinary identity did not end upon my matriculation into Northeastern, nor were they questions suddenly safe from the structures that had always permeated my young student life.

At eighteen years old, I was already contemplating the normative statement of what I should be doing in my twenties and thirties. In the months preceding my move to Boston, I decided to clock out early from my last semester of high school classes and spent countless hours sitting at what would become my childhood desk, scrolling through the university course catalog. In the hidden digital corners: Sociology; History; Political Science; Philosophy; Journalism; English. I was coming to the realization that maybe my college essays didn't have to be a lie. Maybe I really could use my role as a university student, as a budding writer and thinker, to tell meaningful stories and even impact this abstract thing we call 'truth.'

Then, I wondered how I was going to get a job, wondered if I would be wasting my degree, wondered if others might not be more impressed if I studied something else. I wondered about my mother's sacrifice. I ended up feeling that, either way, I was not the exception to the rule: I was a fantasist.

I spent my first semester biding my time in the university's business classes — a discipline I, today, don't even believe in, politically — trying to convince myself that if I was patient and studied hard, I might learn to appreciate the rigors and demands of this surely important field. Had Northeastern been more proud of its humanities departments, it might have given me the strength I needed to be honest with myself. To this day, I remain unsure of what this might have looked like, of what this might look like, but I know that whatever it was, it was not present.

The one exception of this rather impoverished semester had turned out to be First-Year Writing, a university-wide requirement that no one ever asked for but still had to take. The sentiment amongst all of the students held that the introductory course was useless, a waste of time, and a mere preliminary step to get to the real classes. But it turned out to be my saving grace, offering a glimpse of how much I enjoyed trying to understand the

difficult but wonderful theories and readings we took on; the capacity we had to be thinkers alongside, not beneath, our professor; the unstructured space we were given to analyze our various disciplines and our identities as students. To this day, I remember walking down Huntington Avenue in the rain to buy the cheapest watercolors and paint brushes I could find at Blick Art Supplies for an assignment in which our professor asked us to illustrate our disciplinary narratives. I sat for hours on the fourth floor of Snell Library, in front of the cold window, painting the old hole in the door of our family's first apartment, where our doorknob should have been; painting the two twin beds my mother had pushed together so that my sister and I could sleep close to each other; painting our old bookshelf, where my mother had tried to train me rigorously into becoming an avid reader.

I began to explore other writing-intensive courses, starting with the demystification of the major they called Political Science. I remember feeling self-conscious because my only reason for taking a course in this discipline was an unspoken belief that this knowledge was somehow important to obtain, while my peers had spent most of their high school careers rubbing shoulders at G20 conferences and writing essays about international conflicts. I remember feeling embarrassed that I had no idea what a G20 conference even was.

And so, I decided there was no better way to start than by understanding the very foundations of political life, city, and identity. I enrolled in the course they called Ancient Philosophy.

I no longer believe in the idea of becoming the 'great writer' asked to be interviewed by 'important magazine,' nor do I believe that a student such as myself has to be familiar with the thing we call 'canon' (who chooses the canon?) to meaningfully engage with language. This should have been clear to me from the

beginning, but the motivations provided to students for pursuing certain academic disciplines over others are often muddled by the material reality of social and economic class dynamics and aspirations; by the material reality of immigration and diaspora. We are told from a young age that if we pursue x, y, or z, we can have a better life than our parents did. Look at how much they suffered for us to have a better life here! Why would we not pursue x, y, and z?

But for all the forces that attempted to strip an alternative imagination from me, I still concluded that my discipline is largely about using language to confront the tensions that fill our days and ultimately our lives, to confront the violence of memory. Language is, and remains, a shared and cohesive act of dreaming, inventing, and reimagining.

I didn't come to this conclusion alone. When I made the final decision to switch my major to Political Science, I met with my new academic advisor, who was new to the university as well. She was youthful and kind and complimented the color of my lipstick, which helped a little, but not much given the wider context of my fear about what the change would entail (her expression seemed to ask: what will it entail?). But rather than suggesting alternative majors, or pointing me to the university's website to consider other career options, she shared a similar story of having to pay a price for studying what she loved (why must we pay a price at all?). And if my academic advisor was just one facet of external support I received in ultimately deciding on my discipline, my professors have been a powerful reminder in the classroom of what our sacrifices are worth.

Questions remain unanswered: What are the structures that dictate what we should think about and devote ourselves to? How do we make sense of the tensions that consume our identities as

students and thinkers? Who or what can we blame for repressing our most intimate feelings? Except now, I am not troubled by the fact that I have no answers yet. The very absence of such answers serves as a powerful reminder of what my tumultuous path to studying language, literature, and politics is worth. It is a labor of love.

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# WHY I AM WHO I AM

## CYNTHIA MARIA EL CHOUERI

Beirut, Lebanon — my first home. I was born in the Middle East, in a small country called Lebanon. There is this misconception that the Middle East is filled with war and underdeveloped nations, leading people to believe that those countries are miserable and worthless. To be honest, there are a lot of problems in the Middle East, but regardless, the most mesmerizing countries are found there, like Lebanon. My house is right in the city, a 2-minute walk to the sea and a 1–3-hour drive from the mountains. In every corner of the country lies history, beauty, and life: the cedar-filled forests, royal blue sea, and tall mountains render the country’s scenery unique where it cannot be replicated anywhere else in the world. The night life does not sleep until 6 AM and the fashion scene is always innovative. It is really my dream country.

Unfortunately, with all this glamor comes its downsides. Once known as the “Paris of the Middle East,” the country now suffers from crippling corruption that has led to a detrimental ongoing financial crisis (Karem, 2022). Currently, nearly 80% of Lebanon’s population lives under the poverty line, the value of the national currency has dropped by 99%, there is an alarming power outage and education crisis, and the Lebanese parliament failed to elect a President this year (Husain, 2022; Khurma, 2023; Prentis, 2023). Foreshadowing Lebanon’s downfall, my parents decided to move us to the United States.

It was not until I moved to Massachusetts that I realized how differently I had been living. From crosswalk rules to constitutional rights, the order surprised me. In Lebanon, rules were not enforced, women were not seen as equal to men, and the government was, and still is, corrupt. Half of the country did not have access to

running water, electricity, proper food– these ‘luxuries’ were very expensive. It was then that my 12-year-old self grew sad about the situation back home. The US felt stable, safe, and comfortable. I remember thinking to myself: “Why do we not have this system in Lebanon?” Right then and there, I decided to become a lawyer to fix all the problems that the Lebanese people faced and to defend their rights in court. Since then, I have not changed my mind one bit.

My parents raised me to stand up for myself and believe in my capabilities. This led me to develop a strong mindset and an art for arguing in an articulated way. Whenever my parents have to call for a refund, I am always relied upon to successfully secure it. Even then, they had always tried to convince me to attend medical school and become a pediatrician. My choice to become a lawyer did not appeal to my parents at first. My mom expressed that she would be worried for my safety, sanity, and conscience as the field of law can be mentally and emotionally challenging. She did not want me to sacrifice my good heart for a career. My dad agreed with my mom but also wanted to support my ambitions. Once I began applying to college, many of those difficult conversations followed but it was obvious that I had made up my mind. My background fueled me to build the confidence and mentality that becomes a lawyer– us Lebanese people endure more than people see. Even after successfully moving countries, there is still the aspect of missing family, feeling like an outsider, and sacrificing happiness for stability. The fact that my parents let go of their life for my siblings and I to gain a better education and more opportunities still haunts me to this day. It pushed me to become a high achiever to make their sacrifice worth it.

Every day, I wake up making sure I am trying my best and doing the most I can to be successful and render my parents proud. While that might be a highly appreciated characteristic, it is also

exhausting. Knowing how much we Lebanese struggle is painful, which is why I vow to do something about it, not just for the Lebanese, but for every immigrant population.

So, I knew my end goal was law school, but what was I supposed to do in between for my undergraduate degree? I wanted to learn valuable skills that I could utilize in law school and make sure to have an added area of expertise. One day I researched “What do students going to law school major in?” and the basics popped up: Political Science, History, Psychology... I did not love my history classes and thought I could read about politics and psychology informally instead of studying them professionally. So, I was puzzled. But this is when I remembered the field of economics. I had taken AP economics my senior year and LOVED it. Understanding the trends of the economy due to people’s choices and pinpointing the reasons for its declines was fascinating to me. I thought this skill would help me understand why the state of Lebanon’s economy was the way it was. So, it was decided then: I would major in economics.

In addition, I liked the idea of potentially working in the White House, United Nations, or International Monetary Fund/World Bank after practicing law for a bit, so my economics degree would prove handy if I had to make that transition. This goal for my future profession was based on my idol, Amal Clooney. She is a Lebanese lawyer and works in the UN sector of women’s rights. After reading about her path and her accomplishments working for women in underrepresented countries, I was inspired to follow in her footsteps. My dream job then became working for the World Bank as the Lebanese representative all while trying to find a solution to the corruption using my legal background, after fighting for immigration rights in the US. So, since I figured I would end up working in an international organization, I decided studying international affairs would be beneficial and added that to my

degree. Diplomacy and world relations are interesting because partnerships and alliances between countries can sometimes indicate the status and wealth of a nation. So, after all that careful deliberation, had a plan for my college career.

As would be expected of a high school graduate, I was incredibly excited to start my first semester at Northeastern University. However, to my chagrin, less than a month before the beginning of the semester, I received horrible news. Per immigration requirements, I needed to submit documents to the US government to prove that I would be attending college and needed to wait for their approval before I was allowed to start. As this was the summer of 2020 under the presidency of Donald Trump, processing times for those applications had increased to around 15 months, when they would have usually taken a few weeks. As you can imagine, I did not receive my approved documents in time for the start of my first semester, nor even my second. Both semesters, I had to take part time classes from home when I had initially planned to graduate without having to take summer classes or follow a 5-year path due to co-op. That setback haunts me still today as I race to graduate in 4 years, forced to take classes during the summer and co-op with absolutely no break. At that point in my freshman year, I was worried I would not be able to take full time classes for the next year as well due to the 15 months turnaround time. However, I was not going to let my future be jeopardized after all my hard work. The Lebanese in me pushed through the frustration and decided to call the office that handles the legal paperwork (USCIS) every day and asked for help from congressional offices. And then what seemed like a miracle happened. On one of those days when I called USCIS, the person on the other end of the call explained to me that he was in the same position I was in. He passed me to a higher up, which was never done for me before. After a conversation I had with them, I grew optimistic. The officer I spoke to did not guarantee I would receive

my approval earlier but alluded to it. Finally, one summer day during July of 2021, I received an email informing me that my paperwork had been approved and that I was able to attend university. Never had I been happier. All of my depression, anxiety, uncertainty, worry, sadness, anger, and fear faded away– I was secure.

This event fueled me to over-perform even more. I needed to make up for that year I had lost for no real justification. I deserved to be a freshman like everyone else, but that was stripped from me. I could never forget that, for it was one of the worst years of my life. Regardless, I was finally allowed to move into university housing, to take a full load of classes, another luxury I had not foreseen as a privilege. This is when I realized I needed to understand the legal system more deeply, and so discovered the Law and Public Policy minor. I became an Economics major with minors in International Affairs and Law and Public Policy. Currently, I am a fourth year 4.0 student on co-op at BCG's legal team and will be on co-op at Wellington's legal team in the future. I hold leadership positions in 3 student organizations, including being President of the pre-law frat on campus. I volunteer on the side and always try to help people who face difficulties in their lives. I am proud of what I have done so far, yet still I feel I have not accomplished my goals. I won't feel that I have until I attend law school and fight for my people and country. So yes, 8 years after making my decision, I am still very much set on attending law school. Sometimes, I entertain the idea of leaning towards my economics degree and working at the Federal Reserve, but my passion for representing my country and aiding people who were in similar situations as me still prevails and overshadows any other possible career path. I know I would not feel like I have done the good in the world that I would do as a lawyer or diplomat. I still miss home, and one day, I hope Lebanon is stable enough for me to go back and raise a family there. I guess we will see where

life leads me to. Until then, these are my aspirations laid out. I know I have a lot on my bucket list, but this keeps me going amidst all the chaos. Once I am closer to my goals, I will look back and read this to assess what my past self wanted for me. Lawyer, Economist, and Diplomat – triple threat?

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# A DYING ECOSYSTEM

SAMUEL HAYES BARRETT

I rose before the sun. At about 4:30 AM, I paddled out to my boat to go fishing, a July tradition of mine that started 20 years ago in high school. At first, it was my dad and I, chasing Striped bass all over Boston Harbor, we would run the boat from Minute's light off the coast of Cohasset all the way up to Egg Rock up by Marblehead, searching for the biggest, strongest fish in the harbor. Honestly, we started it to have something to do during the pandemic and the lockdown. Soon though, we both had commercial fishing licenses and the fifty-dollar price-tag on an average fish made for a nice supplement to my odd summer jobs. As far as I can remember, we caught our biggest fish that first year, a rare sixty-pound Striped Bass.

We don't see those anymore, at least not in the summer, and rarely even in the peak of the migration in the spring, in fact, the whole fishery seems to be on the decline. The Striper migration out of the Chesapeake usually starts in early May, but we don't see any fish bigger than twenty inches until mid to late June. In the last few years, however, I stopped even seeing those in the summer. At first, I thought we had overfished, as we had with so many other species in New England in the past. I started keeping a log a few years back, out of curiosity, and maybe a bit of desperation disguised as hope of finding those elusive fish. we had with so many other species in New England in the past. I started keeping a log a few years back, out of curiosity, and maybe a bit of desperation disguised as hope of finding those elusive fish.

As the years droned by, the fish came fewer and further between. At first, I thought I was having an off year, maybe I was

just unlucky when I went out, but, as these ‘bad years’ added up, I began to see a trend. As fickle as fishing can be — you can be out on the same boat with someone else and one of you will get skunked while they catch fish after fish — as a scientist through and through, it was hard to ignore what I observed. Year after year, without fail, the fish were slowly disappearing. I feared it was something similar to the Northern-Atlantic Cod fiasco that plagued New England fisheries years ago. But it ended up being worse than that.

In the 80s and 90s cod was a super popular seafood dish, it tasted good and was easy to prepare, and importantly, carried a high price, at least that’s what my dad and grandfather told me. Naturally, every commercial fisherman desperately wanted to chase it, and eventually, the population dwindled. It got to the point where the government had to step in and put a hold on the fishery in hopes that the population might return, but it never recovered, and the commercial cod fishery in New England died out for good (Bergman). Stripers had never had the same commercial draw, however, so eventually I came to doubt my initial theory.

Last summer, early on an August morning, I must’ve been one of the only people awake at 4:30 AM on a Sunday in summer. Every fisherman knows that the best bite is always at dawn on an early outgoing tide. I reached my eighteen-foot skiff, praying that I would catch a fish, I hadn’t caught one all summer, and hadn’t even felt a bite on my line. I turned on a headlamp, and rigged all of my gear, and checked the weather one last time, a balmy 65° and rain forecasted to start in an hour. I started the engine, cast off the mooring, and turned on a northern heading, towards Boston Light, one of my favorite spots to catch fish. As I cast off, I noticed just how warm the water felt, warmer than I had ever felt around Boston before. It felt like Florida!

Before reaching Boston light, I dropped a sabiki rig, meant to catch baitfish. I left it in the water for close to an hour before giving up and deciding to use old plastic lures instead. It didn't even occur to me at the time, but I hadn't even seen many baitfish, no minnows, herring, or mackerel, all summer, and the ones I had seen were unusually small. They looked like babies that had only been born earlier that year. I moved on from Boston Light, with nothing to show for my effort, and as I returned towards the harbor, I still hadn't seen any signs of fish at all. I didn't see any sea birds circling the water, come to think of it, I hadn't seen any of that in the coastal waters at all.

After eight hours on the water, I finally gave up, I resigned myself to a fishless season, and headed back in to tie up the boat. I was confused, disappointed, and, honestly, a bit angry. I had sunk so many days into fishing, I never thought I'd have a season where I caught nothing. As I came back into the dock, I heard several grizzled, older lobstermen and commercial fishermen griping about the season, how little they'd caught, and wondering about where the fish had gone. Their worries were all too real, as the New England commercial fishing industry was, at one time, one of the most diverse and populated in the world.

I sank all of the remaining day into researching where all the fish went. Knowing Stripers are a cold-water species, and that they migrate from south to north following the cold water and their food sources gave me a start.

First off, the ocean is warmer than it used to be, especially in the Gulf of Maine. Our water temperatures are rising like nowhere else in the world (Bloch). The Striper migration has always been one of the most predictable things about New England's oceans, at least in my opinion. The weather can change, we can barely forecast it, heat waves appear and disappear and storms seem to

pop up without warning, but the migration has always happened around early to mid-May. At least it did when I was young. From decades of observation, it usually goes something like this: as the waters off the coast of Maryland and Virginia heat up, the fish head north for the summer, and some make it up to Canada, before returning to the brackish waters down south to breed, and then it repeats the next spring. However, as our oceans heat up, migration patterns are changing, and the migration moves earlier and earlier each year (Goertler Et. Al). The biggest problem with this, ignoring the obvious ecological issues and warning signs it provides us, is that the commercial fishing season remains aligned with the old migration patterns. Opening day still sits around mid-June every year, but by that point, most of the big fish have moved on, and the little ones are too small for commercial sale (Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries). So, with no fish to catch during the actual commercial season, all of the commercial fishermen are losing money, and wasting time. I've overheard countless older guys saying they are going to pack up their boats and head north or south, to start looking for other fish. Frankly, I don't blame them. As the fish go, all of these businesses and jobs in general, especially the small, family-owned ones, will disappear with them (Bloch).

Without the fishermen, and the small fishing communities dotting the northeastern seaboard, we will lose a crucial part of our heritage, and culture. Aside from that, though, we are staring down the barrel of one of the worst ecological disasters in decades. We are witnessing the collapse of one of the most diverse, and densely populated, marine environments. The rising ocean temperatures are causing a complete collapse of the food chain. The old plankton, known as Diatoms, an order of animals I studied way back in general biology, were accustomed to cold water. All species above them had evolved to make this specific food chain work. But the rising temperatures caused those

Diatoms to disappear, and instead, we got other types of warm water plankton (National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration). I think the ocean warmed so quickly that evolution and the natural changes necessary to adjust the food chain could not take place. It was just too fast for nature, which eventually caused the bait fish to disappear. As the food source for the bigger, predatory species like the Striper moved on to different waters, the bigger fish followed their food. Now, in 2042, the entire Massachusetts Bay ecosystem lies in ruins. We see crazy red tide blooms which used to only happen down south, and any animal caught in one of those, especially the fish, will most likely die. In a few years, I'd bet all of our old northern species, the Striper, bluefish, even the whales, will be gone, following their cold water and food sources, and for a while, we'll be left with nothing but plankton and algae. we'll be left with nothing but plankton and algae.

From what I have overheard, and seen firsthand, this is not natural. No, this is all man-made. We pumped the atmosphere full of carbon and trapped all of the solar heat in, which, in turn, directly caused the ocean temperatures to rise, while also causing deep rippling effects across our climates and normal weather patterns. I could sit here and say what we can do now, but frankly, I think it is too late. If only I could tell my past self about this dismal future, maybe I could have stopped, or at least slowed, our impact on the Earth. We needed to cut our carbon outputs and find ways to reduce our pollution. If that electric car fad in the early 2020s had really caught on, maybe we could have avoided this. Any effort, no matter how small, would have made a difference. I guess there isn't much point in looking back now. It's far too late, and we, humanity, have destroyed the only known island of life in the universe. Nature, as we once knew it, is gone, and I'm not sure there is any way we can recover from our mistakes now.

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# SILENCE = DEATH: THEN & NOW

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SOPHIA NICOLE SACHS

A scene of anonymous, makeshift corpses marked with poster-board tombstones that are delineated with each person's cause of death lie in front of FDA headquarters. The use of the theme of death and the naming of the many perpetrators speaks to a sense that for this assemblage of people, an already shamed and marginalized community, death is just another form of discrimination. In the messages on these tombstones, we see that inaction and slowness cause death. This is also signified by the imagery of red handprints which allude to how organizations, such as the FDA, have blood on their hands. It is this kind of dramatic expression often used by LGBTQ+ activists to continually call out a government, a society, and the pharmaceutical corporations for their lack of humanity and the systematic killing off of their community.



ACT UP demonstrators gathered in front of the FDA headquarters in Rockville, Maryland (October 11, 1988)

Although the demonstrators are pretending to be dead, many of their community are lying six feet under as a result of AIDS and the government's inaction towards finding a cure. The protest is an expression of how powerless it is for them to be abandoned by their government and society. Their plight is actually a matter of life and death. At the same time, it emanates the actuality of them being attacked from many sides and illustrates the enormity of the problem. We see images that reference the sins of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the Burroughs Wellcome pharmaceutical company's profits from an epidemic, the sick and dying who were given a placebo, and Nancy Reagan, the former First Lady of the United States, being given the middle finger as a result of her inaction. According to the ACT UP advocate group and many other allies, the government, its agencies, and the pharmaceutical company's slow and stagnant response to the AIDS epidemic were akin to genocide. The small pink triangle in the background seems to be the only indication as to what group these activists are representing; this was the 1980s insignia for



Stonewall Inn 1960's

the LGBTQ+ community. Thousands of LGBTQ+ individuals were dying and millions were infected with an incurable disease. However, it took the FDA years to release a toxic drug that was unaffordable for the majority of the infected.

Wherever we go, we are not wanted. No matter where we are, there will always be someone who is praying for our downfall. This lifelong annihilation of our identity, something we cannot change, carries great weight on our shoulders. This systemic discrimination directed at the LGBTQ+ community leads members of the community to question whether we deserve life. “Why can’t I be “normal?” is a question that has continually haunted most of the minds of this community. This universal experience speaks to the plight of the community as we question if we even have a place to thrive in this world.

Men of different races stand peacefully and socialize with one another. Some are in button-down shirts, while others are in jeans and t-shirts. What is not apparent is that the club is a symbol of resistance to oppression. The LGBTQ+ bar was raided by police. Biased laws at the time set a minimum distance between those of the same sex, thus making it difficult for them to socialize. One must also point out the subtlety of the social grouping, needing to be approved and known by security to enter, which speaks to the hidden and underground nature of this community. NYC is commonly thought of as the most progressive city of our time, however, the raid that ensued thereafter and the uprising that followed marked the beginning of resistance to the intolerance and shaming of a peaceful minority group. The old 1950’s car present at the scene represents the old and narrow-minded way of thinking of the previous two decades and shows how pervasive this bigotry still remains looming over a more modern time.

What do all of these political figures have in common? They were all guilty, as is written on their foreheads. President Reagan is depicted here due to his purposeful inaction that caused the death of hundreds of thousands. He is next to Hitler who needs no



Members of the ACT UP activist group outside of the Food and Drug Administration headquarters (October 11, 1988, Rockville, Maryland).

introduction, giving Reagan and all the other figures an apropos association with the genocide of an innocent community. The overwhelming number of signs of politicians projects the political wall of solidarity that these lawmakers created to purposefully ignore and ostracize the LGBTQ+ community that was dying. The signs of politicians physically being above the protesters depicts the looming power over them. Jesse Helms in the foreground was at the helm of this by purposefully blocking funding for HIV research and constantly slandering the LGBTQ+ community. My gay father experienced these political events firsthand. The policies created forced him and many others to live in a world where the government that was supposed to protect them, chose instead to inflame society to seek further violence and discriminate against the LGBTQIA+ community. Our shared legacy and the way I, too, witness the same kinds of discrimination, deepens my understanding of the disenfranchised LGTQIA+ community. Even today, with so many rights granted, the same shameful identity is propagated. This is prevalent to such an extent that young LGBTQ+

suicide rates have grown astronomically. “The Trevor Project estimates that more than 1.8 million LGBTQ youth (13-24) seriously consider suicide each year in the U.S. — and at least one attempts suicide every 45 seconds” (“Facts About LGBTQ Youth Suicide”).



AIDS protest at the FDA building in Washington, DC, October 1988

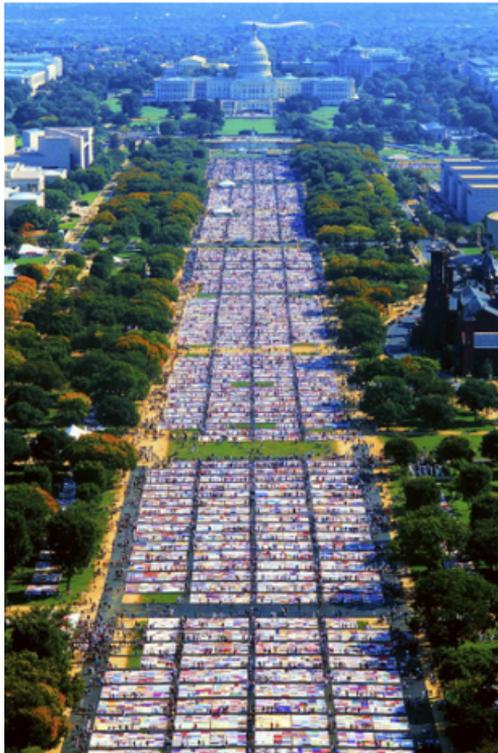
One of the biggest perpetrators of allowing people to die in the name of bigotry was the FDA. Orange and black target-like posters symbolize how an entire community was under constant fire. Hundreds of thousands were left to die due to the lack of urgency of the FDA to approve a potentially life-saving treatment. The FDA was in no rush to finally approve a treatment for those that many didn't want to be saved. Today, it only took less than a year to approve a vaccine for COVID-19. These are similar crises; however, COVID-19 affected everyone, not just the LGBTQ+ community. It is evident through the photo that this desperate community must continue to shockingly point out the gravity of the situation to those that were to blame.

This similar type of targeting of a community is still prevalent today, as medical organizations subtly brand the Monkeypox

outbreak as an LGBTQ+ disease. Although one might argue that being able to get a vaccine is better than not having one at all, the underlying discrimination that is still perpetuated demonstrates a more current attempt to villainize the LGBTQ+ community.

Our identity — something that makes us who we are — cannot be sustained with the constant barrage of hate from parts of the world. With homosexuality being criminalized in 69 countries (Reality Check Team), it is hard to seek refuge and find a place that accepts who we are. Although there are parts of the world that may accept our identity, there will always be someone challenging our right to thrive. Not giving people a face or a name invalidates their existence, making it easier to incite division and prejudice.

What seems to be a celebratory festival at the US Capital Mall in Washington, DC, is actually a memorial mourning for the more



AIDS quilt memorial in Washington D.C., 1996

than 100,000 individuals that perished during the first years of the AIDS epidemic. Although this memorial celebrates and names all those who perished, it shows the somber tragedy of thousands of loved ones lost because of purposeful inaction. The large colorful rectangular quilts project a feeling of comfort and warmth while also marking the enormity of death that caught a nation by storm. Even though this memorial was grand in nature, it was only a temporary exhibit and memorial. This lack of permanence allows people to forget, which speaks to the anonymity that is often given to marginalized populations even after the initial attention is given.

There is a long list of ways in which the LGBTQIA+ community's identity has been diminished and its right to exist has been challenged. From the first resistance at Stonewall in 1969, the Matthew Shepard & James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act of 2009, the Executive order of President Obama in 2014, to the most recent Supreme Court ruling of 2015, granting LGBTQ+ marriages as constitutional, the LGBTQ+ community has fought unstoppably for its identity. Though many rights have been granted, we are currently seeing an unprecedented backlash resurgence of discrimination laws toward the LGBTQ+ community, diminishing protections and adding new limitations. Whether it's banning books, preventing teachers from talking about LGBTQ+ issues in the classroom, or legally being able to refuse to make a wedding cake for a queer couple, we must be careful not to allow this already-diminished community to lose any of its rights. This resurgence only serves to demonstrate that community members will never be safe enough to stop looking over their shoulders.

The impermanence of LGBTQ+ rights fills my heart with sorrow and anger. A new path, represented by the viewpoint of the photograph, brings hope for a movement towards achieving a better life. As we walk down this path towards the capitol building and remember the significance of this quilt, we will demand equal rights.

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# WHY NOT JUST MAKE AN EASY MODE?

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EMILY XU

Why do people enjoy video games so much? Whether it's to feel that sweet rush of adrenaline and pride at performing a difficult maneuver, to find comfort in a fictional world far away from the boredom and stress of reality, or even to exercise that creative yet chaotic brain, video games have always catered to a variety of conflicting entertainment interests. But, according to a 2021 statistic, out of the more than 3 billion people in the world who play video games casually, a third of them can't enjoy their hobby without varying levels of physical and/or cognitive difficulty (Baltzar et al., 1).

Although game developers have become more aware of their disabled audience in recent years, including closed-captioning and subtitle options for in-game dialogue, high contrast UI options, and integration with accessible controllers such as the Xbox Adaptive Controller in their games, there's still a lot more that can be done. According to a 2021 survey, only 42% of the gaming population believe developers do enough to accommodate mentally and physically disabled gamers (Gardner). A major reason for this attitude, and which still stands as the biggest barrier to accessible gaming, is developers' refusal to implement, or even consider, accessibility options that would influence core gameplay features.

Think of how players may need to move and interact with a game environment: mashing buttons to perform rapid actions, holding triggers to move objects, and using gyro controls to aim long range weapons. All these maneuvers can be extremely difficult or time-consuming for people with certain motor control or mobility issues. Some games, specifically action games with

combat and/or platforming elements, require players to execute these actions quickly and accurately, which only exacerbates the existing issue. Any mechanics that require speed, accuracy, and precise timing can also be problematic. Quick-time events, which require players to press a specific input or combination of inputs within a certain time frame to avoid negative in-game consequences, are an egregious example of this, punishing players who may have a hard time handling a controller in the first place or just can't physically react fast enough to the game's prompts. Games that require visual and audio cues, such as a stealth game that needs players to listen for incoming footsteps to avoid a deadly enemy encounter or an action game that requires players to observe enemy attack animations to predict their next move, can prevent those who have auditory and/or visual processing disorders from fully enjoying them. They may have issues properly discerning these sensory cues or find them overwhelming and distressing.

All these concerns force developers to consider how some of the gameplay mechanics they come up with may unintentionally create barriers that prevent disabled people from enjoying their game the intended way. Unfortunately, many of them believe it would take too much time and resources to integrate these kinds of accommodations into a game most players can play without them. From their perspective, accessibility options are inconvenient and unnecessary to implement and may even undermine their artistic intentions. It doesn't help that a sizable portion of the gaming community supports this perspective, fueled additionally by the misconception that accessibility means dumbing down a game for those who can't be bothered to play it properly.

A game that perfectly demonstrates this problem and most discussions surrounding it is *Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice*. Released

in spring of 2019, it quickly gained notoriety for its harsh technical skill curve, which demands unforgiving levels of precision and timing from its players to defeat even the most basic enemies. To land successful attacks, players must watch each frame carefully to find an opening in the enemy's often quick and unreliable movement patterns, all the while guarding their own character from a potential onslaught. Many players with disabilities complained about the game's inherent inaccessibility, with one critic explaining that because of his chronic pain, he's 10% clumsier with controllers, making the game 10% harder than intended. These complaints, combined with critiques from able-bodied players that the game's difficulty is unnecessary and unenjoyable, lead to a discussion on whether *Sekiro* should have an optional easy mode. Some people from the community quickly rose to oppose that idea, claiming that an easy mode, or any kind of accessibility option, would tarnish director Hidetaka Miyazaki's creative intent and the studio FromSoftware's core philosophy of creating games that challenge players to a high degree and encourage trial-by-error gameplay. They also argued that if people have such a hard time with the game, they should look elsewhere for less intensive games instead of dumbing down *Sekiro* to appeal to players who were clearly too lazy or incompetent to properly learn and master the mechanics. Beating the game with any kind of assistance feature was seen from their point of view as another form of cheating. A hollow victory that should be shamed.

Many of these points were brought up by able-bodied people who never had to worry about whether a game would be unenjoyable or unplayable due to factors outside their control. Video games are a great source of comfort and amusement for disabled gamers, with 68% saying in a 2021 survey that gaming improves their mental health and 47% saying gaming brings them happiness (Gardner). It's not fair for the community to

decide whether their disabilities should prevent people from engaging in a casual hobby. This gatekeeping mentality that's present in the Sekiro fanbase and others like it ignores the fact that difficulty is subjective. It's reductive to claim accessibility options make a game easier because different people have different physical and mental limitations. Merely increasing player defense and decreasing enemy attack power isn't enough. In fact, I believe implementing an easy mode isn't an effective way at all for games to address inaccessibility because it assumes a one size fits all solution to a nuanced problem. Accessibility is about providing options. Options that remove invisible barriers of access and allow disabled players to get the intended experience without having to sacrifice the experience of other players.

It may seem like an insurmountable task to integrate radical accessibility options in a way that still preserves the core fun behind the game mechanics, but many indie developers in recent years have gotten closer. *Celeste*, released by Maddy Thorson in 2018, became known in the industry for implementing revolutionary accessibility options in its acclaimed assist mode. Known across its fanbase for its challenging platforming maps and unforgiving movement mechanics, it seems surprising at first glance that there are options to slow the game speed and give players infinite stamina or invincibility, all presented in a non-judgmental way. Thorson said in an interview that the assist mode was intended to “accept that every player is different” because “people come into the game at many different skill levels” (Klepek). Although the mode was a relatively late addition to the game, Thorson claimed it didn't require many resources or time to implement. With the amount of positive reception assist mode has received, especially from disabled players who were overjoyed that it gave them the opportunity to experience a game they'd written off before as “not for them”, Thorson says she and

her team were happy they decided to go through with the idea.

*Celeste* has inspired various other indie games to include accessibility options that change the very fabric of gameplay and influenced the community's view toward accessible gaming. *Celeste* fans have even programmed mods, which are fan-made alterations to an existing game, that implement an assist mode feature in games such as *Cuphead*, another beloved indie game with notoriously challenging mechanics. Although we still have a long way to go in terms of making games playable to everyone, especially since the disabled community encompasses people with a wide variety of cognitive, mental, and physical disabilities that extend beyond motor control disorders, game developers and accessibility consultants have been working hard in the background to create a better experience for all.

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# THE DETRIMENTAL IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON YOUTHS WITH EATING DISORDERS

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KATHERINE M LE

A couple of years ago, I came upon the realization that I was a victim of body dysmorphia and as a result developed an eating disorder that took control of my life for an entire year. At that time, I hadn't yet realized the grounding effects body dysmorphia had on my perception of myself and my body. I just knew that the internet made me hate the way I looked. I wanted to make a change, any change, no matter what steps I had to take or what hurdles I had to go through.



This may not accurately represent a child's struggles, but it shows an example of what a child may be going through and doing because of the beauty standards set out by social media.<sup>1</sup>

No child should ever go through such a thing. The issue in our society today is that I am just one of the many people who are facing or have faced an eating disorder. And why is it that the issues concerning food still remain a topic that is so often overlooked in our society? The problem here is not just the notions

that revolve around food in and of itself but rather toxic beauty standards, which are spread by social media, that demand a person to look a certain way to be deemed attractive. As a result, there have been a growing number of advertisements encouraging anorexic<sup>2</sup> behaviors, such as purging<sup>3</sup> or excessive exercising, and fatphobic ideology. These advertisements promote an unhealthy way of thinking and lifestyle that could potentially cause great harm to the people who view them, especially teenagers. Social media poses as a platform that brings about great harm to a child's mental health concerning body image, which in turn affects their physical health.

Believe it or not, eating disorders affect at least nine percent of the population worldwide To lay the numbers right out, that is at least seven hundred million people worldwide.<sup>4</sup> In fact, eating disorders affect so many of us that it is the second deadliest mental illness, second to opioid overdose.<sup>5</sup> This is not a matter that should be handled recklessly. Many people suffer irreversible damage from eating disorders, which in turn creates a domino effect that causes other parts of a person's way of living to become even more difficult. This is why it is crucial that our society realizes the detrimental effects of eating disorders, starting with the one platform that influences people the most: social media.

Social media comes into play as being the platform that first introduces a child, teen, or person to the idea of "diets hacks". One story, in particular, belongs to Sara,<sup>6</sup> a member of the National Eating Disorder Information Centre (NEDIC). Sara's concern for her curvy body shape started from a young age due to the people around her and the shows she watched. This concern grew into action when she viewed a talk show on the topic of eating disorders, with several young girls discussing their struggles with anorexia and bulimia. Sara listened to them as they described in detail how they "made themselves sick." As a curious teenage girl,

Sara was bound to try out the things she saw, so she tried purging and stuck with it for many years. “I pulled my hair back into a ponytail, knelt over the toilet, and made myself sick. I wish, with all my heart, that I could tell every young girl or boy who is contemplating that very action for the first time not to succumb.”

It’s a disappointing thing to admit but Sara’s story is something common, even in the youths of our time. As shown in Sara’s childhood, a child can become self-aware of body image at a very young age. In a survey conducted on elementary and middle school children, forty-two percent of first to third grade girls want to be thinner and eighty-one percent of ten-year-old children are afraid of becoming fat.<sup>7</sup> It is the inappropriate body image ideas that children are exposed to at an early age from their peers and the media which causes them to think a certain way about themselves. It is sad to see a child as young as seven years old hate or dislike the way they look just because it is different from others. A child should be raised on the fundamentals of love and compassion. They should learn how to love themselves from an early age. I believe that the most important way to take care of yourself is to first accept and love yourself for who you are. Media should be a platform that spreads positivity and awareness towards eating disorders in order to prevent them as much as possible.

In Sara’s story, one of the main reasons why she eventually developed her eating disorder was the media and the depiction of eating disorders in the media. Media is such an important factor because it carries a lot of influence and persuasion. People rely on social media as a form of education and entertainment. However, as much as social media is so crucial, there is never any filter that prevents a person from viewing the negative contents of the internet. As a result, people are exposed without warning. Social media brings about new negative thinking that can easily influence others to take action.



One of Dr. Christian Jessen's cover photo for *Supersize vs. Superskinny* used on Prime Video.<sup>8</sup>

Social media depicts eating disorders as a sort of entertainment, instead of considering the severity that comes with it. An example of this can be seen in the television show, *Supersize Vs. Superskinny*, featuring Dr. Christian Jessen. The premise of the show is to create an eating clinic that swaps the diet of people suffering from an eating disorder on a different spectrum and hopes that the drastic change in diet would become the shock factor that leads the people to make a permanent lifestyle change. Dr. Christian Jessen does not realize that his own show creates more negative thinking than positive. In the article, "How "triggering" Noughties show *Supersize vs Superskinny* is troubling a new audience," by Amelia Tate, she writes: "The show's idealization of thinness, alongside its fat-shaming, can be problematic."<sup>9</sup> Just as Sara developed her unhealthy cycle of purging from watching a TV show on eating disorders, the same can be said about *Supersize vs. Superskinny*. The content on this show can be triggering and sensitive to a vulnerable audience. The show humiliates people

who are bigger by putting them out on full display and giving suggestions for “skinnier” eating alternatives to encourage anorexic behaviors. The show’s depiction of what a “healthy” diet should look like is never clearly made, and this carries misinformation to viewers, especially those who are easily influenced.

In our current society, the topic of eating disorders will never be a comfortable topic to discuss, but social media and television shows have proven ways to NOT talk about it. Instead of just suggesting “healthier” eating alternatives such as intermittent fasting, low-calorie diets, and starving, the most simple solution is to spread awareness of the topic in an educational and comfortable way. Eating disorders are not a decision people just make and can stop themselves from doing. Eating disorders stem from the mental wellness of a person and the state they are in. Everyone goes through eating disorders differently, so they must also be treated differently. For most people, their eating disorder began because they were unaware and uneducated about its harmful effects. Social media is a platform that can create harm, but it can become a platform that brings about positive changes. Though it makes a person hate themselves, we can reverse the process and spread love. Together, we all can learn and teach others about the harmful effects of eating disorders and spread positivity everywhere we go. If we do this together, then slowly, progress will be made toward a healthier self and world.

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# A COMMUNIST ALBANIA: CONTROL, CULTURE, & CONSEQUENCES

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ALEKSANDRA BANI

The first search result when one googles *what is Albania known for* is the war bunkers built by the communist dictator Enver Hoxha. Only after that does one see the idyllic mountain ranges, the hidden beaches, and the mix of Ottoman and Byzantine culture. Google provides a handy metaphor: while Albania as a country is defined by many things, its communist past overshadows everything else. It provides a warning on the dangers of idolizing politicians and shows how a group's culture can be corrupted by Nationalism and used to justify great atrocities. This is especially applicable in the current American political landscape, with many politicians growing personality cults, trying to establish their own definition of American culture and values, and using that to justify lawmaking. Finally, it explains why so many Albanians today are vacating the country and leaving Albania struggling to feed an aging population. From 1944 to 1992, communism gripped Albania, with its primary leader, Enver Hoxha, establishing and maintaining control through a clever combination of propaganda, censorship, and economic power. This paper will explore Hoxha's initial rise to power, how he maintained it, and the fall of communism following his death. Further, its effects on a modern-day Albanian diaspora will be investigated.

In 1939, during World War II, the independent monarchy of Albania found itself invaded by Mussolini's Italy. Mussolini quickly created a puppet government and fascism ruled Albania. Resistance to this occupation was brewing, and the Communist Party of Albania was founded on November 8th, 1941. The party was both heavily influenced and supported by the Soviet Union and the communist party of nearby Yugoslavia. One crucial participant in the founding of the Communist Party of Albania was Enver Hoxha,

who at the time was merely a secretary on the party's central committee. Hoxha did not belong to any specific faction within the communist party, a fact that became key in his appeal for power. In 1942, the communists launched the National Liberation Movement, quickly gaining the following of the poor and working classes in Albania as the party was led by the working class. Once the Axis powers fell and retreated from Albania in 1944, Hoxha marched upon Tirana, the capital. A new government was created, and the Communist Party was renamed the "Democratic Front." During the 1945 elections, most of the ballot candidates were of the Democratic Front. Notably, the party secured votes not through coercion, but through heavy campaigning that utilized the youth and women in their party. Their messages claimed an end to fascism and a return to Albanian nationalism. The Democratic Front won in a landslide, and their power was secured (Mëhilli 17-21).

Ultimately, communist rule in Albania can be split into three eras: when Albania was allied with the Soviet Union, when Albania was allied with China, and when Albania was completely isolated. From the beginning of Communist rule, Albania was geographically cut off from the rest of the world. The countries surrounding it in the Balkans, Greece and Yugoslavia, were now hostile. Albania came to rely on the Soviet Union for aid and trade (Mëhilli 94-5). The Albanian Communist party was now known as the Party of Labor. During the early years of the government, farmland and private property were seized and redistributed among the population. The government determined the required amount of living space for each household and subsequently shuffled them to new housing (Mëhilli 31-1). With the help of Soviet funding, new factories and textile mills were constructed. Notably, many of these were outside the capital, allowing Albanians in more rural settings to view the industrialization process. This is a period in Albanian communist history

where the country was flourishing. Albania's general population had a much higher quality of life compared to before communist takeover, and the country was in economic prosperity (Mëhilli 97-9).

However, this all came to an end after the death of Stalin. Albanian communist ideology idolized only a few things: their leader Hoxha, Marxist-Leninist philosophy, and Joseph Stalin. Upon Stalin's death, Hoxha viewed the Soviet Union as becoming decreasingly communist and openly denounced the policies of Khrushchev, the new leader. The Albanian-Soviet Split occurred in 1961, marking the end of the Soviet aid on which Albania had become dependent. As the Soviet Union was Albania's primary trade partner and ally, the country was forced to look elsewhere. Albania then became trade partners with communist China in the late 1960s, which boosted their suffering economy. Only in 1978, when China completely cut all relations with Albania, was the country truly alone. This ushered in an era of Self-Reliance, where the country was now cut off from the rest of the world geographically, politically, and economically. Hoxha declared that Albania would now only rely on itself for both agriculture and industry. He also tailored their communist philosophy to this, claiming that a true communist state could only rely on itself. Due to Albania's small size (approximately half the size of Maine) and mountainous terrain, the existing agriculture was insufficient to sustain its population. It was also not yet industrially developed enough to sustain itself (Backer). As a result, the population became increasingly disgruntled, and following Hoxha's death in 1985, the disillusionment of many led to the commencement of protests. In the early 1990s, many fled Albania seeking asylum in nearby European countries. Uprisings grew at this time, with the Albanian Student Movement, composed of university students, responsible for much of the organizing (Shahini). The

new Democratic Party took control in March of 1992, ending communism in Albania.

## **Methods of Control**

Once communism took hold of Albania, it did not have a difficult time maintaining control. Frankly, a majority of the Albanian population enjoyed a better quality of life for decades under the leadership of Hoxha. People saw an amount of food and job prospects that did not exist even before Mussolini's takeover. Due to Hoxha's modernization goals for Albania, agricultural production saw a 500% increase, and industrial production increased by more than 150%. He also oversaw the electrification of Albania, with the entire country being electrified by 1970. Mining projects and housing was also a focus (Artisien). Albanians as a whole had increased access to education, with the country reaching an almost 100% literacy rate. The people were also healthier. The communist government implemented free healthcare, drained marshes, and vaccinated the population against malaria, which had been a public health issue for years.

Many citizens, particularly women, enjoyed new rights under the communist regime. Previously, women did not have political power or access to education and jobs. Under Hoxha's leadership, women were now allowed into schools and encouraged to attend university. By 1988, one half of Albania's students were women and girls. The workforce, which was controlled by the government, also sought to include women, with 47% of the workforce being women. Additionally, Hoxha implemented quotas for the political representation of women, allowing them to vote and run for leadership. By 1988, around 33% of the party's government officials were women, and 40% of politicians voted to people's councils were women. Women also had

expanded maternity leave and access to care. However, Hoxha's demand for population increase erased women's reproductive choices and outlawed abortions. Divorce was also outlawed under this mindset, except for under very extreme cases. Additionally, despite Hoxha's efforts to enforce an equal division of labor with educational campaigns and in a law entitled *The Code of the Family*, social attitudes remained the same. Women were often forced to take care of the majority of household and childrearing work, on top of often having to work full time outside of the home (Kushi).

One clever way that the communist party assured the loyalty of the Albanian people is by repurposing folklore and traditional music into propaganda. The governmental study of *kultura popullore*, or popular culture, examined existing traditions and built up a national culture that was specifically framed under Marxism. Tradition therefore ultimately became a performance one did to honor communism and Enver Hoxha (Doja). Folk songs, dances, and costumes were now used only in rituals and celebrations regarding the communist party, such as visits of party leaders and historical anniversaries. One example is the repurposing of traditional singing styles into propaganda songs, notably that of Albanian iso-polyphony (Abazi). While specific styles vary depending on the area of the country, the singing overall is defined by having polyphonic singing combined with droning. Polyphonic singing is when there are two or more lines or melodies being sung at the same time and layered on top of each other. This is combined with droning, which in Albanian styles is a continuous "e" syllable sung by a chorus in the background of the lyrics. It is often used in religious celebrations, weddings, funerals, and other social events (Tole). The communists used this specific style when composing many of their propaganda songs. This can be seen in the song "Ligjero Shoku Enver," or "Speak, Comrade Enver." The song praises

Hoxha as a savior of Marxism for breaking ties with the Soviet Union and Krushchev. In the song, a woman speaker first sings a line, and then the chorus comes in with droning and layering lyrics as the line that was just sung repeats ("Ligjëro"). A similar example can be found in "Dilni se erdhi Enver," which can be translated to "Leave because Enver's Here," or "Get Out, Enver's Coming." This song is similar to the previous, except there are two primary singers that trade off lines instead of one. Here it can also be observed that the performers are wearing traditional Albanian dress while singing the propaganda ("Dilni").

With the outlawing of all types of religion, people's celebrations and folklore were all framed around the communist state and Enver Hoxha. Hoxha's framing as a pseudo deity of Marxism forced the nation into a Hoxha centered cult. The country's National Folklore Festival was held on Hoxha's birthday and at his birthplace (Abazi). This cult is intrinsically tied to Albanian national-ism. One of the communist party's main talking points was that Marxism was reestablishing Albanian identity that was lost under the years of fascist and feudal control. In order to do so, the government linked Albanian beliefs and culture to that of the ancient Illyrian origins of the people. It then established all rewritten communist folklore and tradition as a progression of the Illyrians, connecting communism to a romanticized past of the Albanian people. This identification was then used to justify any and all laws and activities of the party as upholding a lost society (Doja).

The idea of upholding a mythical past of the Albanian people was used as a justification for many of the atrocities committed by Hoxha and his government. Hoxha framed any western influence or ideas as anti-Albanian and as an enemy to communism. This definition is vague and convenient and was often

used to justify the surveillance and arrest of political opponents, religious figures, and ordinary citizens found breaking the law. The government instilled a fear of internal and external enemies to the Albanian people, keeping many of them complacent to a government they thought to be protecting them and their traditions (Artisien). This was while the government funded a secret police, forced people into labor camps, and stripped away the rights of groups not deemed perfectly Albanian.

The Directorate of State Security, or *Sigurimi*, was the intelligence and secret police force of communist Albania. They oversaw the surveillance of countless citizens, including hidden microphones and the monitoring of phone calls. They were on the lookout for anything deemed anti-communist or anti-Albanian. This could have been something as simple as listening to materials that were supposed to be censored or having a religious celebration. Although exact numbers are unknown, many party members were executed and even more citizens were sent to prison labor camps (Brunwasser). These camps claimed to focus on the re-education of inmates, but instead forced the prisoners into grueling labor and terrible conditions. Families of prisoners were also punished, with some being relocated to the prisons themselves or to similar facilities specifically for families (Gjoka). The *Sigurimi* also policed against homosexual acts, as those were deemed as an unnatural threat to traditional Albanian values. These atrocities were all justified under the framework of nationalism and ridding the country of any anti-Albanian threats, the definition of which was of course controlled by the government.

The government also heavily employed the use of censorship amongst the people. Histories were rewritten to frame them within the communist ideologies. Academics who wrote papers

on anything based in history, philosophy, and in the humanities were forced to somehow link their topic to the praise of Marxism. Literature was also not allowed to depict the Albanian state or the conditions under which Albanians lived as anything less than perfect. Writers and authors were in fact a decent size of the population of those who were sent to political prisons (Hoxha Beqiri). Media from outside sources were also banned, including music, art, and literature from any non-approved country. When religion was fully banned in the 1970s, any religious expression was also banned and censored, although the clergy and certain religions had been prosecuted since the beginning of communist rule. This was under the framework that any other religious activity was a poisonous enemy and took away from one's devotion to the party. Hoxha framed religion as an "opium" of the people, and that those who were poisoned had to be "cured" (Bezati).

### **Downfall and Impact: The Consequences on Modern Day Albanians**

The death of Enver Hoxha in 1985 inevitably led to the downfall of the communist party in Albania. Although food, job, and housing shortages plagued the country during the total isolation period, the cult of Hoxha remained strong. It was upon his death that the disillusionment broke for many, and protests gained speed throughout the country. These were often spearheaded by the youth, with protests of university students playing a prominent role (Shahini). A watershed election in 1992 finally forced the communists out of power, prompting a new era for Albania. Of course, it would be inaccurate to frame all Albanian people as having fully embraced the government's ideology and rules up until Hoxha's death. Where there was oppression, there was resistance. For example, despite all religions being banned, many people kept worshiping in secret, with cases of catholic

clergy hosting baptisms and Muslims celebrating Ramadan in secret. In fact, many Albanians retained their faith, with 57% identifying as Muslim, 10% Catholic, 7% Christian, and 2% Bektashi Muslim on the 2011 census. The rest declined to state any religion or identified as atheist (Bezati).

The new democratic government faced many challenges, primarily since it inherited a poor country lacking in agriculture and industry. The new government and leader were growing increasingly authoritarian, pressing the media, and manipulating election results in 1996. Despite attempts at economic growth, the implementation of a market economy, and western aid, the economy and government collapsed in 1997 due to a large number of Ponzi schemes ("ALBANIA"). An election in 1997 brought the socialist party into power, which was the new name for the revamped communist party. They remained in power into 2005, but now with a democratic system of government, a constitution that guarantees free speech and other liberties, and a market economy. Although the democratic party won power in 2005, the socialist party won again in 2013, and still retains the majority of seats in the Albanian parliament today. Elections from the early 2000s to the late 2010s have been marred with violence, although reforms added in the recent years seem to have quelled politically motivated violence. Albania joined NATO in 2009 and is currently seeking to join the EU, having been granted candidate status in 2014 ("Collapse").

The reasons Albania has not been able to join the EU provide a direct comparison to how communism and the nationalist ideology pushed for decades still affects the country to this day. The reasons the EU gives for not yet accepting Albania as a full member are political corruption, economic struggles, and human rights violations. Indeed, while Albania has had significant progress in these areas, it is severely lacking. Notably, key

government positions and institutions in the present are still run by people who served or were proteges in the oppressive communist regime (Gjeta). Bribery of government officials and workers is a huge issue in the present, with 20% of Albanian citizens having reported a direct experience with having to bribe a government official, often to speed up a procedure or to receive better treatment ("Corruption"). Political corruption is a cause of the human rights violations that plague Albania. Since a good amount of the government is controlled by those who played a part in the past oppressive government, human rights violations from the previous regime have been glossed over and denied. Many families who lost people to the Sigurmi have not had their pain acknowledged, nor have any bodies or possessions been returned to families (Gjeta). On top of this, women and LGBTQ people are not granted equal rights. Despite both parties having legal protections in the Albanian constitution, government corruption often leads to these protections not actually being granted, particularly in the case of LGBTQ people, who are seen as anti-Albanian western forces. Social opinions around women and queer people remain pretty conservative, and women still face an unequal division of labor in the home (Foufa; Calloni). During communism, the nationalist ideology promoted definitions of what it means to be Albanian, which further reinforced these beliefs.

Despite progress, Albania still struggles to achieve its footing economically. When the new government in the 1990s fell victim to Ponzi schemes and subsequently collapsed, anarchy ruled the country for the first few years. This marked the beginning of the new Albanian Diaspora, where Albanians fled to neighboring countries for better economic prospects. This diaspora is ongoing, due to continued economic strain on Albania. Despite Western aid and economic investments, the country still has a high unemployment rate with low wages, with agriculture com-

posing the majority of labor. One-third of the population lives in poverty, and the population skews older as many young people leave the country for better opportunities. As the diaspora continues, the workforce continues to decrease, leaving Albania unable to stabilize its economy ("Economy"). Many Albanians have fled to Greece, Italy, Germany, Belgium, Switzerland, France, and Austria. Notable populations have also landed in the United Kingdom and the United States (Barjada). The Albanian communities residing in these countries have played a significant role in ensuring their host countries' ongoing support towards Albania in terms of aid. The Albanian community in the United States represents a powerful lobbying group, particularly when it comes to securing guaranteed aid (Barjada).

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# THE FIGHT FOR WATER IN PANAMA

ALEC CONDRY

Dear Northeastern Student,

There's truly nothing better than a warm shower after a long day of work. When you have the time to just relax by yourself and let the hot water rush over you, it can be utterly euphoric. When you're in this state of relaxation the last thing on your mind is the 2.1 gallons of water used every minute to keep the shower running. The straightforward and nearly unlimited access to plumbing and drinking water is enjoyed by over 99% of American households. However, this is not a reality shared by the entire world. In fact, one in three people worldwide do not have access to safe drinking water and almost half of the world does not have access to basic sanitation facilities like hand washing. How can something so essential for human life be so unequally distributed?

The largest factor determining whether a person has access to drinking water is income. According to a joint report by WHO and UNICEF, 98% of high-income individuals have access to safe drinking water compared to only 29% of low-income people. The situation is saddening but not hopeless. Numerous charity groups and humanitarian organizations have been working for decades to close the gap and provide everyone, regardless of socioeconomic status, access to drinking water. In 1990, unsafe drinking sources were the 8th leading cause of death on Earth. Since then, deaths due to unsafe water sources have dropped by 50% from 2.44 million per year to 1.22 million per year. One success story is the country of Panama.

Over the past few decades, Panama's access to clean drinking water for the urban population has exploded from under 50% to

over 90% of the population having 24-hour access to clean drinking water. However, there is still a huge wealth disparity between urban and rural areas and consequently, a gap in access to water. Of the 1.2 million people living in rural communities, only around 50% have access to sanitation and 83% have access to improved water sources. This means that roughly 200,000 people still do not have access to a 24-hour water supply. In addition, due to the geography, the weather, and the socioeconomic factors of rural Panama, it can be very costly to implement these systems.

Panama is in South America located between Costa Rica and Columbia. The geography contains a mixture of rainforests, mountains, archipelagos, and coastal lowlands. This makes it difficult to traverse without local help. Additionally, the tropical nature of the weather lends itself to hurricanes, floods, and increasingly common droughts. Due to the effects of climate change, extreme weather conditions are much more common, and the consequences will only worsen over the coming decades. This means that not only is it difficult to acquire the supplies for a water system, but the system must be resilient to a host of natural disasters in the present and on into the future.

While the Panama Canal has made the country a necessity for international shipping, much of the profits are not seen by the average Panamanian. Most of the rural population of Panama are agrarian communities that rely on subsistence farming to survive. These communities do not have access to the money nor the knowledge to implement the complicated water distribution needed for such a harsh environment. Fortunately, humanitarian organizations and government institutions like the Inter-American Development bank are investing large amounts of resources to provide further access to these rural communities. However, the fight is not over until all Panamanians have access to clean drinking water and sanitation services.

The fight for equitable access to clean drinking water is a long hard war that will take millions of people and many years, and you can help. As a Northeastern student, you may not have access to endless coffers (or with the tuition we're paying, any at all), but if you're attending this school, it means you have an unyielding drive and impressive knowledge. At Engineers Without Borders, an American non-profit for international aid, you can put your skills to use helping communities around the world get access to the basic facilities they have a right to. Whether you're an engineer, graphic designer, writer, accountant, or more there is work to be done to improve the lives of your fellow humans.

Just last year, through a multi-faceted interdisciplinary effort, Engineers Without Borders at Northeastern completed a project in the rural town of Las Delicias in the forests of Panama. Through the club's hard work, a new water system was installed to replace the community's old system that could not provide sufficient water and was susceptible to environmental factors. The club members talked with the village to evaluate their needs, wrote grants to get funding, surveyed the land to determine the implementation, designed the water system, and contacted Panamanian companies to set up construction. Then, when the designs were finalized, a group of students and a mentor flew to Panama to personally oversee the implementation. The project was a complete success. The town was so happy with its new water system that they encouraged neighboring towns to contact Northeastern's Engineers Without Borders chapter and get help themselves. And thus, with one battle down, the club turned to face the next.

At the beginning of 2022, the town of La Pedregosa, about an hour's drive from Las Delicias, contacted Northeastern and asked if they could be provided with a new water system that could keep up with their water needs. Hence, the process started anew. While

the base problem was the same, the requirements and location presented a new host of challenges that will need to be solved. These problems require the time of good people like you who volunteer their own time to create a more equal and prosperous world.

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# LAHORE: THE CITY OF GARDENS

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HAROON QAZI

Lahore, Pakistan, my hometown, has never seen temperatures fall below  $-1^{\circ}\text{C}$  in winter. Last December, I experienced extreme cold, snowfall and icy sidewalks for the first time here in Boston. Lack of daylight and lots of snow deprived me of color in my life. Going out was treacherous and I had locked myself up in my dorm room all winter to escape the freezing cold. From my window, all I'd see was stark white snow against the dark, gloomy sky. As someone who loves to spend time outdoors, all I wanted was to go out for a walk. I felt caged, lonely and depressed. It was during this time that I longed for Lahore –its warmth, color, energy, people and stories.

Home. This is the first word that comes to mind when I think of Lahore. In contrast to the giant structures of Badshahi Masjid, Minar-e-Pakistan, and Lahore Fort, that a quick Google search would show you, the Lahore that I grew up in, was quite small with a lot more energy, activity and chaos than the former could produce. I grew up in a small house located in Shah Kamal. The street was narrow, just wide enough to fit a small car. The locals knew better than to take their cars down the street. The amount of people that frequented it wouldn't allow it to pass smoothly at any time of the day. *Phal waalay* (fruit sellers), *sabzi waalay* (vegetable peddlers), *doodh waalay* (milkmen) and other vendors had set up small shops and stalls along the road. After school, children would play *gully* (street) cricket there, using chairs as wickets. The signature pale blue balconies of Shah Kamal's houses served as place for the residents to lean on, take a view of the street, and interact with neighbors and shopkeepers, adding to the street's bustle.

Jinne Lahore nai vekhya,  
O jammeya nai. This saying  
repeatedly crossed my  
mind when I was cooped up  
in my room because of how  
strongly I agree with it. It  
roughly translates into; you  
haven't been anywhere if  
you haven't been to Lahore.  
It demonstrates how  
significant and well-known  
Lahore is — a person's life



is not complete without traveling to Lahore. Lahore is a lot more than its marketplaces (*Bazaars*), historical buildings, gardens and urban infrastructure. Its atmosphere, ambiance, feelings of happiness and melancholy, craziness and pleasure, fun and excitement, and, most of all, its inhabitants, make up its soul. Lahore was a key city throughout the Mughal era and this influence has permeated the city's history and culture. The city was founded long ago by wanderers, pilgrims, and travelers who came with the intention of establishing permanent homes. The brand-new beliefs, culture, and practices that these people had brought with them



had made Lahore the diamond of the Sub-Continent. Over the years, several civilizations have impacted the cultural heritage of Lahore. The city served as the regional capital of the Shahi dominion in the eleventh century, the Gaznavids in the twelfth century, the Mughal Empire in the sixteenth century, and other empires in

different eras. This also influenced the city's architecture. Most houses have intricate architecture featuring high roofs, screens for ventilation, overhangs as window shades and arches. The streets are narrow, especially when they curve, and are mostly well lit.

In Lahore, every street has a story to tell. Right outside my old home, in the midst of the *Shah Kamal* street, sits a busy breakfast shop, *Atari Mutton Channay*. Every morning, the owner, Atari hurriedly assists his customers as more line up outside the shop with their mouths watering in anticipation of Atari's flavorful mutton channay. The aroma of sizzling mutton and spices wafts from his small shop and envelopes the street, tempting passers-by. The shop is infamous for its flavor and attracts people from neighboring towns. Despite having to cater to several customers at once, Atari maintains a calm and friendly demeanor. He inquires about their well-being, families and work and enforces a sense of community. I find his story inspiring. After trying his luck at various professions, he became greatly disheartened but still had some fight left in him. As a final resort, he opened the shop.

At an age where most people start believing that they have only a few years ahead of them and give in to their circumstances, his shop is now flooded by customers as soon as the clock strikes seven in the morning.



Shops like *Atari Mutton Channay* have a long history. Since there were only a few jobs available for recently immigrated families from the subcontinent, people began opening up tiny stores in front of their homes. While some set up mere food stalls along the streets, the skilled artisans invested all that they had brought with them into small shops to make a living out of them. The clanking sounds that the big spoon makes against the steel pot while Atari puts food in his customers' plates alludes to the hardships these families have faced trying to fit into a culturally rich city like Lahore. These streets have seen a lot of struggle, restlessness and hard work that people like Atari have put into their work. A famous Punjabi poet, Mian Muhammad Baksh encapsulates the entire situation in a beautiful manner: *Maali da kam paanee laana, bhar bhar mashkan paway/ Malik da kaam phal phool lana laaway yaa naa laaway*. This roughly translates into; the gardener's responsibility is to water the plants using water-filled bags; it is up to God to permit the growth of fruits and flowers. I believe this resonates with the entirety of Lahore and its inhabitants. As human beings, the only thing that is in our control is the amount of effort we put into our endeavors. The outcome of those efforts is out of our control — just like a kite flying high up in the sky.



Kites were a representation of our existence in Lahore. In my younger years, I don't think there was anything that excited me more than flying a kite. The left half of the picture shows men gazing up at kites in the sky, totally focused, with their hearts set on the prize: nothing but a mere moment of victory. The person flying the kite here is standing on the edge of a rooftop. The building is 3 floors high, representing the lengths people of Lahore would go to in order to make their kite fly the highest in the sky. Unfortunately, blinded by joy and excitement, a few would even fall off these buildings and succumb to their injuries. Until 2007, Lahore, and the entire province of Punjab used to welcome springtime in mid-February – early March with a three-day festival, '*Basant Panchami*', the flying of colourful kites in the sky. The gatherings took place in late January or early February.

*Basant* as I know it, featured people dressed in new, crisp yellow clothes. The streets of Shah Kamal were well lit with string lights and decorated with yellow marigolds. I remember *mithai*, sweets, being exchanged among neighbours. Family members or friends with the biggest and highest rooftops would invite us over for a scrumptious meal featuring some of my favourite dishes and desserts such as *biryani*, *jalebis* and *gulab jamuns* and hours and hours of good music and kite flying. I felt strong and in control of my life as I saw my kite soaring towards the sky. It's possible that, in a manner, I came to identify with the kite itself as it soared freely and far above me, away from the bustling city, immersing me in a mood of adventure and freedom. To me, kites represent hope, a yearning for escape, and extravagant fantasies that are dependent on wind, a string, and the person holding the string.

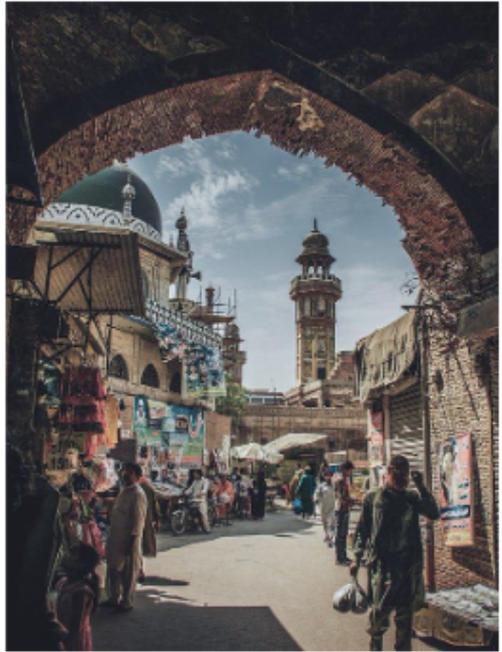
Historically, kite-flying took on a more competitive role after the partition of the Subcontinent into India and Pakistan. With loud yells of *Bokata*, the winner and his comrade would declare

the defeat of the opponent and issue a challenge for a follow-up pecha (Match). The beaten opponent would send up a brand-new kite in order to accept the challenge. The kite could not be captured until it was very high in the sky according to the game's regulations. To entangle or untangle one's kite from the opponent's grasp took significant maneuver — and this is what this city has seen throughout its existence. What remains now is only an ode to the bygone days, a skeleton of what Lahore's culture used to be.



The Walled City of Lahore is very distinct from the modern city that most are acquainted with. It has a culture and life of its own and is always bustling with activity. Only 13 gates or portals to the Walled City remain today. When I visited these gates, I wanted to recapture the spirit of a bygone Lahore and investigate the inner workings of the Walled City. I remember feeling nostalgic as I entered Bhaati Gate. At first glance, it looked like any other classic Mughal structure. I expected life inside it to be an ode to simpler times that I could immerse myself in, experiencing the rich history of the city.

Upon entering, I realized that the grand architecture housed worn-out insides. The residents were mainly of the working class. Their drab, disheveled dresses stood out against the rich history of the area. Most of them walked around in torn, ragged and dirty pieces of clothing that concealed their stocky physiques beneath. Others sported the traditional turbans, or had a dhoti wrapped around their waists, complementing



their thick moustaches. All in all, though there was no visible sign of affluence among them. This is true for all 13 gates. Although they are a testament to the undeniable proficiency in craftsmanship of the Mughals with their uniquely designed arches, they are home to poverty. Their dark by-lanes stretch on for miles, with a majority being cramped with an extension of shops. I came across a lot of young, malnourished, unclothed children forced into a life of hard labour. Instead of feeling the grandeur of the Mughal era, I was enveloped with guilt, regret and sadness.

The coexistence of the past and present and the vices and the virtues of the city is what makes Lahore special to me. It is a realm within itself. Walking around the streets makes me feel nostalgic because its graveyards, gardens and architecture all contain evidence of its melancholic past. It has lived through eras of conflict and destruction as well as intervals of intellectual, musical, and cultural advancement. It has been home to both festivals and famines. This duality and complexity make it a city

of hope for me. While pain persists within the 13 gates, there are people like Atari, who use that pain to fuel the fire within and make themselves the center of so much energy and activity. The time I spent indoors in Boston made me crave the complexity and chaos of home. Lahore for me is a place where every person, object, and piece of architecture has a rich history and story behind it, one that I am familiar with and have experienced to some extent. I longed to be in a place where each object made me relive my childhood and recall stories that filled me with warmth, brightened up my day and made it colorful — everything that Boston's cold had deprived me of.

# CALIFORNIA DREAMING

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RACHANA MADHAV

I moved to Massachusetts determined to hate it. Moving to old Massachusetts, with its brownstones and cottages- just a few straw roofs shy of proving that the Industrial Revolution never happened. I moved to cold, snowy Massachusetts from sunny California, with its broad roads and million-dollar houses, which begs the question: *why on earth would you leave?*

The reason is not entirely important. I could have listed a fair few, but what did matter is that I left behind the warm weather, the farmer's market that popped up every Sunday, and the not-so-subtle drive that everyone had to make it big someday. I was a city mouse, enamored by the spell every Californian is under at some point in their lives.

California holds you in her hands, whispering words of assurance and guarantees that *you* will be the one to break the mold, find Atlantis, and become the shiniest pebble in a sea of rocks. She keeps you with her and invites you to her home, filled with all the glamor of new money and Hollywood-style stardom. She teaches you about beauty as well as danger, and convinces you that you have every right to be here-even if you feel the most out of place in her home.

I loved being in love with California. I loved sinking into the beige seats of my car, delicately peeling off my sticky skin from the burning leather. The air conditioner was on year-round in our house, as well as in our prayers when we stepped foot outside. Summer in California was filled with us shaking our fists at the scorching sun, vowing to never leave the safety of our home again. Still, we traversed, driving to the local library or walking around the

dog park by Wintergreen Drive.

My family and I often frequented the Cupertino public library and walked out with more books than we could carry. I remember the first time we realized that we could borrow up to a hundred items on our SCCLD library card. We were like kids on Christmas morning, entirely at the library's mercy, our hearts hammering against our chests as we raced past the shelves, grabbing at any book that looked inviting. We went overboard on our first time there and ended up reading only a quarter of the books we finally did check out. Even so, I doubt I would ever forget the pure, unbridled joy I felt upon running my hands over the spines of my favorite books, knowing that I could take them home with me.

Winters in California were a whole other story. I remember sitting on the open school grounds one day, with my jacket tightly wrapped around my body as I worked through my lunch.

My friend, a true Californian, complained about the weather. "It's so cold. I can't believe it's fifty degrees, I'm freezing."

I look back on that interaction with a mix of amusement as well as envy. I now huddle underneath my two blankets and shiver against the merciless cold that Massachusetts brings forth. Winters here are a feat of strength; the northeast throws everything it has at you. From learning how to shovel snow, to my eyelashes freezing shut, I constantly feel like I'm on the latest season of *Survivor*, and every bone in my body is telling me to turn tail and run back to California.

I've met people who often ask me if California is full of influencers who shove cameras into your face and pretend to prank you for hundreds of viewers. I always respond by telling them that I am yet to meet anyone with a vlog camera, and in my eyes, they

lurk in the more stereotypical waters of the state, prowling behind the Hollywood sign while filling themselves up on LaCroix. The realistic scene that one would witness on a regular day out in California would simply be regular people on their daily routines, slowly pushing through their day while they made the most out of the weather.

Somehow, one of my biggest gripes about life in California as compared to Massachusetts is their public transport system. Where I live now, we have buses that would ferry us to and from our school. The high school, middle school, and elementary school would have their own separate bus system and even granted us a late bus if we missed the first one. In California, your arrival at school was entirely based on what you could do about it. I lived slightly far from my high school and had days where I would walk a couple miles to school simply because my working parents did not have the time to drive me.

As a freshman, I could not drive myself either, so more often than not I found myself taking the long route home, humming to myself as the other cars raced past me. I think about the lack of public transport a lot now I wonder why they did not have such a thing in Cupertino, which was full of working families and their children. Did they just expect the mothers of the family to make themselves available on school days? Were they expected to carve out time to drop and pick up their kids from school, while their husbands worked their strenuous I.T. jobs? Or were the fathers expected to drive us home, and get words of praise from other parents for doing a *mother's* job? For a place that prides itself on being 'liberal', why did my mother need to feel as though she was doing something wrong for not being able to excuse herself from her job at the hospital to pick up her two kids?

In retrospect, I feel as though we never fully felt like a part of California. The feeling stems from the certain presence that engulfs the state, dividing everyone who lives there into different groups. We are forced to interact with each other, as well as put on an air of nicety. We have a gifted set of people who have honed their craft at every imaginable hobby, as well as those who strive to be the next Steve Jobs. On the opposite side of the spectrum, we have people who drift through their lives, content with what they have. Although neither of these sides are wrong in any way, they clash with each other while living in the same place, unable to leave, and are always at a loss when they compare themselves to each other.

I remember my mother once telling me that she went to a clothing store and was casually browsing through some of the summer pieces when another woman approached her. This woman was younger than her, and she had decked herself out in the latest fashion and was sporting beautiful jewelry that she wore proudly. She gave my mother a brilliant smile and asked her where she could find the new spring dresses from the latest Aria couture line. When my mother politely informed her that she did not work there, the woman looked her up and down, her eyebrows raised in poorly disguised confusion.

“Oh, could have sworn you did!” she said, leaving quickly.

Although this interaction was a long time ago, it still stuck with my mother for a while. She brushes it off now, saying that she did not entirely care too much, but it still stays in the back of both of our minds. That was the first instance where my mother felt as though life in the shiny West Coast was not for her. Although she had danced with California and been the most enchanting date, she could not help but notice the subtle disdain she felt from the state.

My mother with her modest clothes and tame hairstyle did not fit in the sea of shinier pebbles. She was allowed to stay, of course, but this was not the right place for her. She knew it, the shopper knew it, and now I know it.

She said her goodbyes to California then.

My falling out with California continued for a few months, where our relationship slowly faded—it was nothing dramatic, nor did it leave either of us with a bad taste in our mouths. I will always regard my home state with a special kind of love. I find it hard to forget its broad roads, beautiful grassy fields which always smelled of lavender, and the tall trees that swayed in the sun. I can still remember the drive to my aunt's house which followed a route near a stable: the smell of dirt and manure would always follow our car as we drove, and we'd have to hold our breath for a couple of blocks, or until my brother's face would turn a peculiar shade of purple.

Life in Massachusetts has grown on my family, and we take pleasure in the little things. My dad often takes the train to Boston for his work, and he tells me about the journey there. He told me that once he found a seat and had settled down for the forty-minute ride from where we live to the heart of Boston, he would always look around and find that at least one other person aside from him was reading a book. My dad found this very charming and he admitted that he rarely saw this occur in California. His observation was definitely biased, but I still find it very interesting. Everyone in my family is an avid reader, and we often take books with us wherever we go. Now when I travel to Boston, like my dad, I started to look around for other readers while I use the commuter rail, and smile warmly at them when we do see each other.

So, goodbye to California, I suppose, and hello to a whole new side of the country. Would I miss the West Coast? Would I yearn for its freedom, the memories, and the weather? Or would I form a newfound love for the East Coast, with its roots firm in American history? There are quite a number of differences between living in California and living in Massachusetts. I find it hard to form an opinion when someone asks me which state I prefer. I always change the subject or place my foot staunchly in the middle of both sides. Although, I will mention that until In-N-Out manages to launch a couple of its restaurants in Massachusetts, California might have a slight advantage in earning my love.

When people come to visit us in Massachusetts, we usually take them around Boston and show them the different sites around there. We would walk the freedom trail, stopping by the oldest bar in Boston, or take them on the Duck Boat tour if they so desired. Visiting Massachusetts meant taking them around different sorts of architecture, where they could explore the extremely old buildings around the city, or even wander Westborough, the small town that I live in, which is full of colonial-style houses and churches that have stood tall for countless years.

While living in California, I was so irrevocably in love with it, that I was convinced that I would never leave. Therefore, when we finally did leave the state behind and move to Massachusetts, I was at a loss for a couple of months. I kept waiting for my parents to change their minds overnight and decide that Massachusetts wasn't for us after all. When my mom would complain about the work she had to do in her new hospital, I would laugh and say, "Well, should we head back to California then?"

Now, having lived in Massachusetts for around five years, I would not go back. It is my home now and I cannot see it as anything else. I would miss it too much. Leaving it would mean I

would have to say goodbye to the local USPS driver who always tips his hat in hello, or the sweet old ladies who own the sushi restaurant right on the outskirts of the town rotary. I would miss the town playground, which hosts a drive-in movie night every so often, leaving everyone who came to it with bug bites peppered all over their body. I would miss the people of Westborough, with their avid enthusiasm for town events, and their love for the high school football team. I would miss my friends, with their cleverly disguised Boston accents, and their acceptance of the terrified-to-be-here Californian girl.

There were years when I called California my home, but they seem quite a long time ago.