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• WRITERS PROJECT

LABYRINTH



METAMORPHOSIS

MOON AND SUN

MEMORY AS PRAXIS

Cover Photo: *The World Through My Eyes* by Gamze Akildiz

The Writers Project and Labyrinth staff
would like to extend our sincere thanks to:

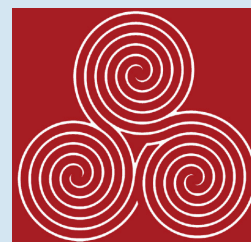
The CSM Honors Project faculty, staff, and students, with special thanks to
David Laderman, for their continued support of our club and our vision,
our inspiring club advisor, Sarah Mangin.

and the students who submitted their work to be considered for this publication.

We want to thank you for reading our new issue of Labyrinth and hope that this
publication continues to inspire you.

Keep writing. Keep learning. Keep creating.

Labyrinth Issue 17
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Photo: *The World Through My Eyes* by Gamze Akildiz

Letter from the Editor



For the past two issues, my role as the design director has helped me understand the works of *Labyrinth* and Writers Project. Now, taking on the editor-in-chief position for the first time, collaborating on such an amazing issue has been an honor and pleasure. I am excited to share with everyone the outstanding contributions of the students of San Mateo Community College District and to work under the Honors Program at College of San Mateo. The creativity and dedication poured into each submission, from the imaginative art pieces to the captivating research, are truly impressive.

I want to express my gratitude to the students who have dedicated their time and energy to Writers Project, as well as our advisors, Sarah Mangin and David Laderman, for their guidance and support throughout the process. Their commitment and thoughtful contributions have played a significant role in bringing this issue to life.

This current issue centers around three themes: Metamorphosis, Moon and Sun, and Memory as Praxis. All combined, they represent the full circle of life and its meanings. The artworks, images, and written works, all gradually explore these main ideas. Metamorphosis describes the transformation and growth of a person. Moon and Sun is about the balance of light and dark, life and death. Lastly, memory as praxis reminds us to reflect on our shared experiences and cultural identities, returning to our roots and communities.

I hope every reader can find inspiration in these pages and appreciate the power of creativity, reflection, and connection.

Warm regards,

Orika Kita

Metamorphosis



Art: *Face* by Coco Spencer



Art: *Lotus Sisters* by *pridimensional (Priya Desai)*



Photo: *Kismet* by *Natalie Dias*

Threads of Fate: A Hand Unseen

Marlon M.

Are we free or just puppets on strings
In this tapestry of fate, does
destiny sing
For in this equation of time
Do we navigate the path we take
Or follow its script, a path preordained
I do not know
I fear to ask
For we are bound by its laws,
Never to be free,
Never to be free,
Do we dare to hope
Do we dare to break free,
To dance in chaos
To live in dreams

To transcend
To be truly free
I do not know
I fear to ask

For the more I seek
The less I know
Questions echo
Answers forever untold
For in this enigma of existence
We ponder this question
While we dance to its tune
Are we free,
I dare not say
...

But I think you know



Eurytides marcellus

Art: *Scientific Illustration of a Zebra Swallowtail Butterfly (Eurytides Marcellus)* by Carlyn Kuchan

Poetry is exceptionally effective at conveying emotions that arise during difficult circumstances. The compressed language and additional visual cues allow room for interpretation, so that the words may express what full sentences fall short of wholly representing. For instance, Noor Ibn Najam uses a unique style of breaking down the stanzas in their poem titled “train,” which illustrates an argument between the speaker and their father over the speaker’s gender identity. In “not an elegy for Mike Brown,” Danez Smith expresses his exhaustion with police brutality against the black community using varied line breaks and casual language. W. H. Auden comments on humanity’s indifference to the suffering perpetually present around us in “Musée des Beaux Arts.” From various perspectives, these three poems reveal that it can be taxing to care so much about something out of one’s control, and that repeated disappointment can ultimately lead to apathy.

Najam’s “train” utilizes a unique dual-column arrangement, with the left column aligned to the right, the right column aligned to the left, and the final line placed in the space between the columns. Upon the first reading, we find ourselves wrestling with the format, unsure of the order in which to follow the lines. The parallel columns illustrate the back-and-forth quarrel between the two characters of the poem: the speaker and “baba.” As there are multiple ways in which to experience this poem, Najam pushes the reader to reread it multiple times. Each reread illuminates a slightly new way to look at the argument, albeit about the same misunderstanding. This suggests that the two characters have argued about the speaker’s gender before, and it doesn’t seem like they will reach a resolution anytime soon.

The parallel columns divided by two-line stanzas also pose a resemblance to train tracks, pointing back to the title of the poem. As the argument escalates, the train accelerates, until it ultimately reaches its end at the final line: “out of sight” (Najam, 19). Though the train has stopped, the conflict has not been resolved. It’s still there, the characters have just opted to ignore it until next time; out of sight, out of mind. The speaker has merely given up, defeated by yet another battle. Another format element to note in this poem is the lack of capitalization. It stands out against the clashing words since we may not expect an argument to be displayed in such quiet language. Baba has made the speaker feel small, which is reflected in the speaker’s defeated tone and quiet voice.

The author uses light and sound motifs to further the train metaphor. Although “baba’s pupils”(1) are described as “bright as headlights”(2), it’s implied that he doesn’t truly see the speaker as they wish to be seen. Instead, the light forces the speaker into a vulnerable, perhaps unwanted, position: “all of me is illuminated / no shadows”(5-6). The speaker is like a deer in the headlights, directly facing the danger yet not moving out of the way. Unlike the deer, however, the speaker is not paralyzed by lack of awareness about the situation, but rather due to the sheer absence of a way to overcome it. With no potential paths to move forward, the speaker is stuck. The noise motif throughout the poem additionally demonstrates the energy of the argument. Since the poem lacks capitalization, exclamation marks, or any punctuation elements that usually indicate

loudness, the poet uses specific words to give off that effect. The speaker’s voice is unstable, “in ricocheting / tones” and “in ricocheting / pitch”(7-8) as they are fighting to be heard by someone who doesn’t care to listen. The speaker is taking the most damage in this conflict, as they “break / my voicebox open”(9-10) just for Baba to shut down any attempts at understanding. To care so much and so profoundly about someone else’s opinion despite their apparent lack of compassion towards you is deeply exhausting and breaks down one’s spirit over time.

“not an elegy for Mike Brown” conveys a similar exhaustion, but on a collective scale rather than solely between two people. Smith shows how experiencing repeated emotional turmoil may ultimately manifest in detachment from the cause that one was initially very invested in. From the very first line, “I am sick of writing this poem”(Smith, 1), we immediately get the sense that Smith is fed up with the cycle of police brutality against the black community. The opening line reinforces the title of the poem; the subject is neither beautiful nor honorable. Smith continues, referring to the boy as an “ordinary, black / dead thing”(Smith, 3-4). The tragedies of young black men dying at the hands of police are not stories of martyrdom. They are such a nauseatingly common occurrence that the poet describes the experience with jarring casualness: “poof, no more child” (Smith, 10). “Poof” alludes to

magic disappearing acts, which are meant to inspire awe and wonder. The use of the word in this line, however, invokes horror and discomfort because the understatement highlights the devastation of losing a child to violence. We previously saw this seemingly out-of-place casualness in “train” as Najam also uses minimal capitalization to demonstrate a sense of resignation. With too many similar stories, it’s like the victims’ individuality doesn’t matter. As long as they are “ordinary, black” they are at risk of being a target. The circumstances demand black boys to constantly be on the defense, an attitude that inflicts indiscriminate damage upon the black community as a whole.

Names are essential to individual identity, so when a name is not given its rightful respect, the disrespect is personal. In “train,” the speaker’s resignation to the argument is marked by “i fold back into / my old name” (Najam, 16-17), which demonstrates how important names are to represent ourselves. On the individual level, to be denied acknowledgment of one’s name is already devastating. Having one’s name become publicly recognized, especially after violence that leads to their death, puts that person in an extremely vulnerable position especially as they are no longer around to represent themselves. Their name becomes attached to the horrific events that happened to them, rather than representing the person as a whole. Smith comments on this phenomenon with regard to the sickening cycle of stories of police killing black boys and men: “his new name / his same old body” (Smith, 2-3). Similar tragedies have already occurred, and they continue to happen. These stories of police brutality are so horrifically common that the details, including the victims’ names, become redundant as each incident is reduced to yet another statistic. Later in the poem, Smith demands justice for the boy, “no matter what his name is this time” (Smith, 21). As the victims suffer depersonalization by the sheer amount of incidents, the issue grows to be collective rather than individual, and the community bands together to

The Weight of Caring Illustrated Through Poetry

Sage Tulabing

create a movement. The title of this poem states that it is not an elegy for Mike Brown, since so many names, too many in fact, could fill that spot and the poem would still project the same message.

From an outside perspective, witnessing a struggle that doesn't directly affect oneself, the disinterestedness of bystanders appears absurd. Auden notes that suffering is all around us at all times, existing in congruence with ordinary life: "how it takes place / While someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking dully along" (Auden, 3-4). This quote is pulled from the first stanza, in which the ekphrastic poem comments on Bruegel's *The Massacre of the Innocents*. Armed men on horses enter the town, fulfilling orders to kill all infant children. Nevertheless, the townspeople seem to go on with their daily lives, for "even the dreadful martyrdom must run its course" (Auden, 10); tragedy is inevitable and arguably necessary to give life meaning. The second stanza provides Auden's thoughts on Bruegel's *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*, where he observes "how everything turns away / Quite leisurely from disaster" (Auden, 14-15). Despite the title of the painting, the fall of Icarus only takes up a small portion of the composition; in the bottom right-hand corner, all that is shown of Icarus are his legs kicking above the water. In the foreground, the ploughman continues his work, and the ship right beside where Icarus fell sails on, perhaps oblivious or simply ignorant to the tragedy that has just occurred.



Art: Seeding the City by Anonymous

It's easier to turn a blind eye than to address the problem. The final line of "train," "out of sight" (Najam, 19) reiterates this sentiment, as turning away from the conflict is a painless, albeit short-term, alternative to continuing the fight. In "not an elegy for Mike Brown," Smith provides a rationale for why creating emotional distance from an issue may be a coping technique that prioritizes one's well-being when collective issues become too overwhelming.

While Auden points out the odd nonchalance of the bystanders, he doesn't quite call upon them to take action. Many of the surrounding characters in the paintings innocently happen to be in the vicinity, such as the "Children who did not especially want it to happen" (Auden, 7). He even notes the non-human bystanders: "The dogs go on with their doggy life and the torturer's horse / Scratches its innocent behind on a tree" (Auden, 12-13). Perhaps it's unfair to demand compassion from those who can't possibly understand what's unraveling in front of them. But that calls into question: to what extent then are the adult witnesses obligated to care? The ploughman doesn't acknowledge Icarus's fall, for "It was not an important failure; the sun shone" (Auden, 17). If it doesn't directly affect him, how much should he care? As we saw in Najam's "train," to care so deeply about an issue so personal, individual identity, and still having to fight for acceptance from a loved one, can make one question if they ought to care as much as they do. Smith's Trojan War allusion also inquires if it's realistic to demand a city of ash, to launch 1000 ships for every instance of tragedy.

It's not difficult to see the consequences of caring beyond the limits of what one can do about a situation. Auden's description of "Reverently, passionately waiting / for the miraculous birth" (Auden, 5-6) uses exaggerated language to encapsulate the ridiculousness of placing so much importance on every single event. "Reverently" and "miraculous birth" have religious implications, which feel out of place to describe a massacre. Najam took this further, asserting that overextending one's care can hurt oneself more than helping the problem. The speaker says "I break / my voicebox open" (Najam, 9-10), creating additional hurt in the pursuit of a solution since the other party lacks a proportionate level of consideration. By the end of "not an elegy for Mike Brown," Smith resorts to reducing his call for justice: "I at least demand a song. a song will do just fine" (Smith, 22). Defeated and tired, he bargains with a world determined to lowball him.

Although cynicism is prevalent in these poems, the poets don't seem to advocate for complete apathy. The hardships illustrated through their words aren't cautionary tales. They exemplify sharing our sorrows with the world and finding healing in vulnerability. As we face these struggles, we hurt in our empathy, and yet we persist in caring. Poetry beautifully expresses the human nature to relate to feelings of suffering through its language and tone. It provides a medium to share emotions in ways that ordinary wording falls short. Through poetry, we can translate other's experiences into versions of a universal language: suffering. We create supportive connections through this empathy which consequently upholds relationships



Art: *Fox* by Coco Spencer

A Little Part of Her Life Story

Mercedeh Barazandehnik

It was a freezing snowy day when she was woken up by the noise of one of the children. The kid was so hungry, and that noise was a moaning of hunger. It was the third day that they had not had anything to eat because of heavy snow and freezing weather; she could not get out to find something to eat. For over two weeks, she and her seven children were at the barn in a remote village. It was a small and poor rural village with only a diner that serves as a bar too. So, she could not find much to eat. As if residents of the village preferred to eat their whole plate and did not want to throw anything for some poor family like hers.

On the first day of their arrival in this village, they were so lucky. A couple was fighting, and the husband got so angry that he threw the dish of food out of the window. She took as much wet bread with the chicken broth, which was left over from the husband's food, as she could. She ran to the barn to give the wet bread to her children to eat. They became so happy when they saw their mother with some bread. She returned fast to get some more bread for her children and could find some more and again ran to the barn. It was the time that one of the naughty children of the village saw her and threw a rock followed by a curse at her. Then he ran toward her while he was shouting and trying to hit her with more stones. One of the rocks hit her head badly and she started bleeding from her head. She felt a sharp pain in her head around her left eye. She wished she could turn back and fight with that boy, but her children were hungry, and she needed to feed them. She knew that the child might hurt her children if he found her hidden place. So, she ran as fast as she could while carrying the wet bread. She did not go directly to the barn because she did not want that child to find her safe place. Before getting into the barn, she looked around carefully to make sure that the child was not around to see her. She sneaked to the barn and saw the faces of her seven half-hungry children. Although she was starving, she gave the rest of the bread to her children again. The kids were not hungry anymore and started to play with each other and asked their mother to join them, but she was still so hungry and worried about that child who tried to follow her.

On the other days in that village, she managed to find some leftovers to help their hunger, but it was three days that it was snowing heavily, and she could not find anything to eat. Worse than suffering from hunger, she could hear some children around the barn, fortunately, they were not close enough to hear the voices of her kids. She stayed with her kids in the barn the whole of the first and second days, but they were all too hungry to be silent. She was starving, tired, and worried, but she needed to get out of the barn to find something to eat, or they would die of hunger in that cold barn. She listened carefully but could not hear any noise. Naughty children of the village returned to their houses to eat their hot soup. She sneaked out of the barn while she was dizzy out of hunger. She started running toward the only dinner in the hope of finding something to eat in the trash cans over there. Suddenly, she heard the scream of a child

behind her. She looked back while she was running, he was the same child who had thrown her a rock the other day. Unfortunately, the boy was not alone and some of his friends were with him, they all had wooden sticks in their hands. She ran as fast as she could to save herself, but she was too weak and still felt dizzy. Suddenly, she felt a sharp pain in her back because one of the boys threw a rock at her. Another stone hit her head, and another one hit her back leg. She felt too weak to run but she had no other choice but scaping. They were getting close so fast and the distance between them became less and less. She couldn't see anything to hide behind. She felt so disappointed and hopeless. She knew that the children would follow her to catch her and hit her to death, so why was running? Why was she looking for a place to hide? She felt so tired of hiding and escaping just because of her children. She used to fight with all her enemies let alone some naughty small children. Children would run away whenever she showed her sharp teeth and barked at them angrily. So suddenly she stopped, returned, and started running towards the children with wide open mouths, showing them her sharp teeth in the hope of scaring them and stopping them. The children saw her, but they did not stop and ran toward her while moving their wooden sticks as a threat to her. The distance between them was so short that the first one hit her head before she could bite him. Another one hit her back badly. She managed to bite the ankle of the little one and he screamed out of pain. Suddenly, all the sticks were hitting her body. She could not do anything except scaping again, but it was too late. They were surrounding her and hitting her with no mercy. One of the sticks hit her head again, it was a heavy one and suddenly she fell on her stomach. She was so tired and wished to be able to sleep. She could feel her blood running from her head and going into her eyes. She could see everything red because of the blood in her eyes. She heard that the boys were screaming out of happiness and victory. One of the boys shouted, "Let's finish this dirty dog. It bit my brother's ankle."

The boys started to hit her with the sticks again, but she could not feel any pain. She felt that it was not cold anymore, and she was not hungry anymore. It was an exceptionally good feeling that she had not felt for a long time. She did not hate the children anymore just because of this nice feeling. Her eyes were closing, and she did not move at all, but the children were still hitting her with their sticks. Suddenly, they stopped hitting, and her ears could not hear anything. She felt that she could sleep forever there, and she was not hungry anymore. Out of the blue, she could smell something familiar and lovely. She hardly opened her eyes and could see behind the blood in her eyes that her seven puppies were around the body of their mother and licking her. They still needed her, so she had to stay alive, just let her rest for a while with this relaxing feeling. Just for a while let her experience this comfortable and sweet feeling, just for a while.



Art: *National Geographic* by Coco Spencer



Block on Social Media

Leo Kong

Block is the unwilling action with Care —
wounded Chopstick was distracted by angry Tapas
Sometimes, worry causes stress
Sometimes, passion becomes isolation

Sense withdrawal is the only Exit — for mind Clarity —
A block could be negative, could be positive, , could be harmful,
could be productive
No more story, No more message, only Work can consume me
Surrender to the boundary of the block, then grow from there,
step up from there, Namaste —

A poem about the tree

Alexander Tjogas

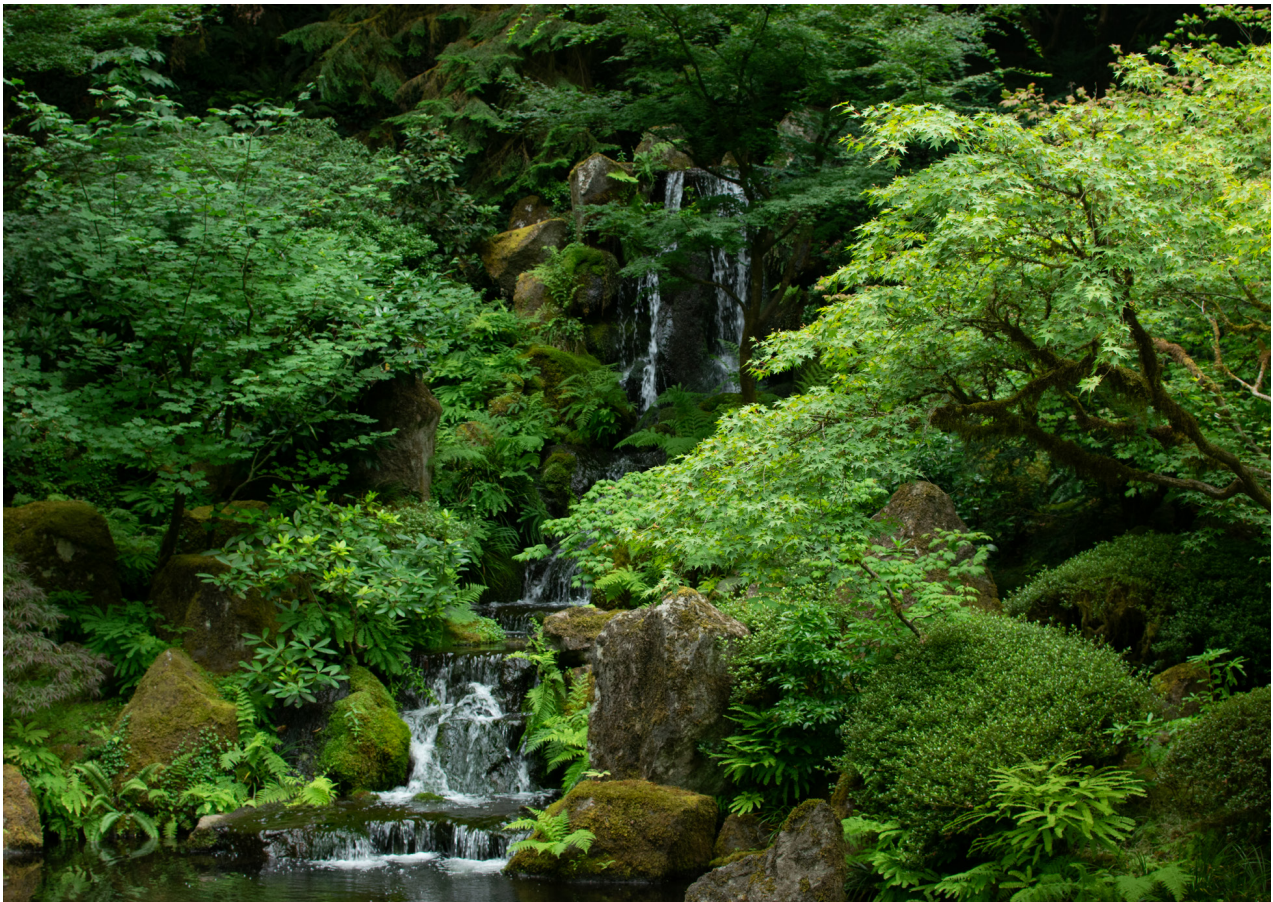
I've heard a tree is the symbol of life
The fertile little roots far below the dirt
Suddenly awake and start to reach
Reaching farther and farther with every new
moon
Soon to sprout in mother nature's Spring

Up past the dirt and on to the trunk
The thickest, densest, part of the art
Where the winding wedges of the wood
Wraps 'round n 'round the virgin naked soul
All light and power comes from the inside

Branches, sticks or dying unholy thoughts
Might all come from the bark

But from not the dead brings life
Little green adolescence populate
Where life is, life will grow

Small green heads turn into long luxurious
scarves
Hugging the brown branches that gave it exist-
ence
Soon to be the tree's shadow grew to twice,
3 times, then 5 times its initial size
This sensation is Growth: "the process of in-
creasing in physical size."



Photograph by Jason Paster

SAINT JOSEPH

Jasmin Aylsworth

The saint that walked in.

Saint Joseph. Stumbling on earth when I met you at 18. I searched the skies for an angel. I thought celestial guidance would solve my problems. A guiding hand to lead me through the maze full of horrors. I didn't know how to pray to a god I didn't think was listening; a being I wasn't even sure was real.

I felt so lost; fearing that no religion could offer my soul salvation. There was no escape from the chaotic monotony. Shaking like a lamb I took a step. Across the country I took a step. Into the cold New England air, I took a step. —

The night we met I was enchanted. I could have sworn you were sent by an angel. Blessing me with my first morsel of true religion. I was dumb founded; believing that the angel I had been looking for answered my prayers. I was alone and frightened but there you were. A white knight. I thought your species was extinct. Yet you have proven me egregiously wrong. Could you be my Saint, Joseph?

I was lost. I missed home. My salty sunrise, my half lit shores, my tree lined roads, my lanterns, my engines roar, my flavors, and sounds. You look nothing like home but somehow are everything I missed. Your presence washes over me like a wave. Shocking comfort and a soothing coolness. Sunset is a beautiful view but sunrise was my enemy.

For sunrise meant we had to go; returning to the haunting monotony; the office jobs we feared. So we stayed up late. No matter the time zone, it was all just a construct. One we devoted to one another. You made time for me, even when you had none to spare. You listened to every grievance and stood by my side. How could I not fall for you?

Heart so pure. Soul so bright. I stood as close as I could. But I couldn't dare contaminate you. I feared dulling your light even if yearning for the warmth. I hated myself for it but I found myself comparing my figure, my complexion, my worth to the girls back home - the ones you would like, the ones you had crushes on from across the classroom, the ones that trip over themselves vying for your attention. My most anti feminist. I am ashamed of my weakness. These cruel moments, such violent departure from my ideals. A failure to womankind. There is nothing more conniving than love, pitting women against one another.

Against my own wishes I began to day dream. What kind of childhood we would have had. What would it have been like if we met earlier? Would we be happier? What would it be like to have a mirror image at your side? Would you be mine? A story of childhood lovers. Or would I still be confined to this cage. The friend who is always by your side but never in your bed. I am in your heart but the walls are yellow and full of butterflies. Not the red rooms of lustful poetry and sinful dance.

I hoped for an angel. A sign that I was doing the right thing. Confirmation that I could be a righteous being, that I too could be pure and good. In my struggle I needed some manifestation to confirm. And in the stormy cold, there you stood. I am not sure why. But I think I was bestowed with a saint reborn.

There is so much familiarity in your embrace. Comfort in your presence. Relaxation in your tone. Laughter in your smile. I love you. It slid so naturally off our tongues, but what undertones lurk in the dark. What interpretations hide in the floorboards, the dusty corners, or boxes on the top shelf in the closet. Books are black and white, mistakenly we think the monotone is clear but there is so much to interpret between the lines.

And even harder to understand is the greytone. Too many shades, no way to find clarity. Elusive definitions ever changing as the sun walks across the sky. Filtering through the environment, the angle constantly changing. Scenes that are different by the minute, giving new meaning to each person that witnesses.

The falsely direct monochromatic fades into the unintelligible gray of my duvet. Comforting in its warmth. Just as quickly it is suffocating and you are fighting to get a breeze to calm the nerves. Talking from underneath this safety. The clouds in my head disappear at your voice. The weight in my stomach doesn't feel as heavy in your proximity. Gratefulness and love began to overlap, the lines between the two blurred. As unclear but beautiful as the seasons.

I am thankful for you- I mean I love you. Could I live without you? Neither of us seem to know, for we both fear a world the other has left. The glances that are held too longingly grow in concentration. Some nights fear shades the moon lit glow with clouds across your stare. But I see those same eyes blazing, when the sun sets.

The breeze off the ocean brings in the cool mist. These moments we send each other. Photos of the same sun but the time is staggered. We feel staggered. My sunset is after yours, your day has already come to a close. We still take the same train. Making plans over the phone. We become dreamers as the moon rises rejecting the bright sun. "I wish you were here" It would be so much easier to ask. Ask if we are thinking the same thing? How could I not fall for you? Could you fall for me as I have for you? Could you be my Saint Joseph?

You make me want a halo. Without one I fear I cannot be worthy of you. Modesty was foreign, purity long gone stolen. Unable to recover it. It all felt like Atlantis, so far in the past you can't quite remember. And as years pass it becomes a myth, lost to time. Covered in dust and cobwebs the details become obscure. The candlelight burned them away inch by inch. I could not thank god for your existence but you are nothing less than a saint. If you told me below was your home I would think you insane. You are a cast out saint, holy, slowly fading in the monotony. When we are together you almost glow. The tense in your shoulders, the tone of your voice it all falls into place. Your tone shifts and your smile returns. We mesh so easily in humor and sorrow. If only we could turn this into a dance. To the music in our headphones, the synchronized peace is tangible. The red string tangles around our feet as our elaborate steps move across the floor.

"Goodnight" came secondary to "take care of yourself", because you are not allowed to die. Staying awake for as long as possible. Every last second of consciousness belonging to the other. I text and call and miss you from under that same duvet. "I'll be damned if I see you go down in flames" "I'll take the world down with me if that happens" come from your mouth



Art: *Monarch Butterfly* by Renata Caliman

like commandments. The sincerity is overwhelming. Could you be my saint, Joseph? I don't know how I could possibly deserve you. How could I not love you.

As life in university progressed so did our conversation. Drifting from statistics and game scores to deeper thoughts. Sharing our dreams of escapism; Scotland slowly dominated our conversation. Instagram feeds flooded with restaurants, landmarks, and must do's. But in all of this; how do I understand my place? Where do I stand in your dreams? We talk about escaping it all, but are we going together? Does this future include a place for me? Did meeting me change your plans? Was it a blessing? Could we be a blessing? Our history could be intertwined. From now on; our differing paths converging in the tall grass. "remember I got your back whenever you need me" what about when you need me? Will you allow me to stand by your side? I want to help you stand tall even when your knees are failing to hold the weight of the world.

Could I persuade you into the Holy House? The one that estranged us from our families and made us foreigners in our homes. Could we meet in white. Asking for your hand and sword, offering my own in return. Sparkling carbon fractals cradled in my hands, translucent beauty. Golden promises binding, so no adventure would be lonely. No dark night or warm sunrise would be faced alone. The stars no longer seem so far away. On this day; will we laugh, will you cry, will I cry? Will you be my saint?

Hometown

Jasmin Aylsworth

Hometown

more of an experience than a place
one that once you leave
returning is the strangest thing
choking on the consonants, "oh, I moved"
rough syllables of "yeah it is pretty nice there"
a guilty sandpaper feeling on the tongue, "no, I don't see myself moving back."

Home travels with you but your childhood does not
it exists within that concrete town
within graffiti street signs on you most trodden corners
living rooms accented by the worn in couches
in the fast food joints you spilled secrets in late at night
and the sand permanently embedded in the floorboards of your car.

Your hometown will change
might be unrecognizable in a few more years
but your childhood stays the same
like a outgrown sweater sitting on the top shelf
she was important once and knows so much
but she is only a stepping stone, one page of your scrapbook.

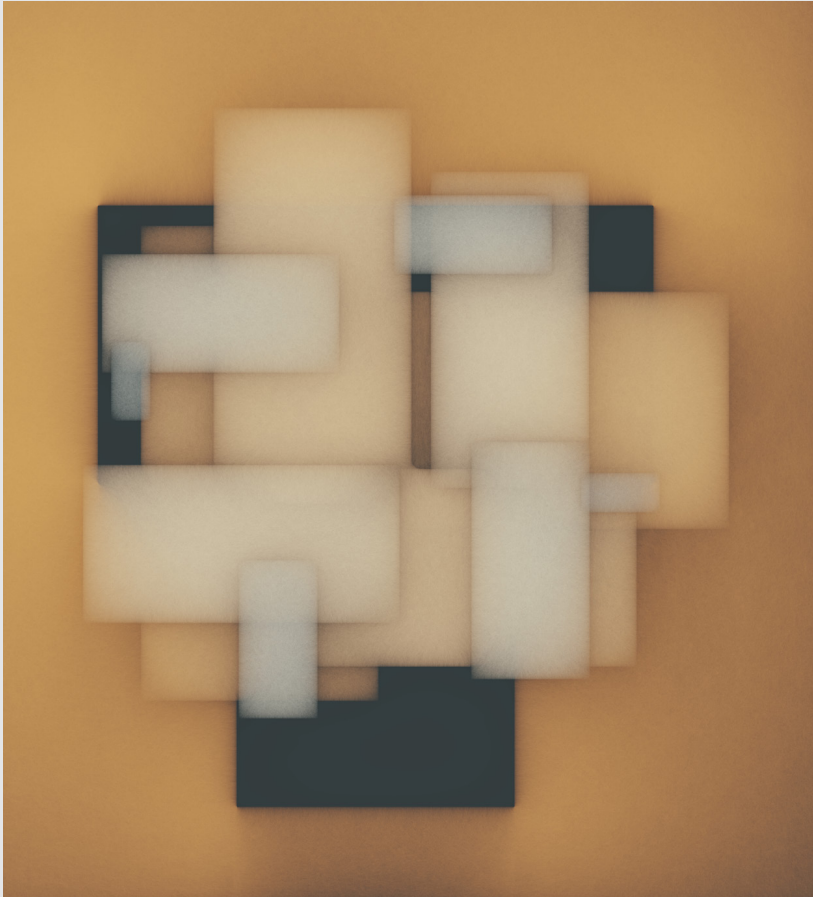
Your childhood bed too small to hold the body you've grown
still you sleep with limbs sprawled out, crazily hanging over the sides
the silence seems more lonely, making the room seem more vast than the ocean
even though it is so small.

the room now full of dust, clutter once covered every inch of surface
mess of childhood and teenage angst is cleared away,
long packed into cardboard without a splash of color left
chill air fills the room, devoid of emotion or liveliness
dim, as the dreams once dreamt here, are unfolding elsewhere

leaving an ocean for an ocean, a steadily made decision
is taken back nonetheless as the waters shifted

And she stands in the too small room
on unsteady ground new progress is made
in the concrete little town
the bright lighthouse that guided is dark now
all her movement feels aimless
but hope is not lost
for a box of matches sits on the table only inches away

Photo: *Good Natured* by Lyrica Tyree



Art: *Conflicted* by Jess Pslmer



Art: *A Day on the Water* by Barbara Gibb



Art: *In Your Orbit* by pridimensional (Priya Desai)

The Moon and The Sun

Nikki Popielak

Some say they favor only the sun.

Others the moon.

For those seeking an easy thrill— a day in the sun
is good fun,
for everyone.

Others have a darkness the sun cannot consume in one afternoon.

So they consume,

get high, they cry, they are up late, looking up at the night sky.

A grief and doom only known by the moon

They wait for their souls to fly freely across the night sky.

Let me be clear, they are not suicidal, they don't wanna die.

They realize only in darkness does one see the night sky.

This is why I relate to the bright moon in the dark night sky
and choose to fly.

Inspired by "Fire and Ice" by Robert Frost



Art: *Fruits of Santa Monica* by Barbara Cromarty

My Father's Will

Aidan McKenna

My father always made sure that I knew secret codes only take time and concentration. In fact, the last thing he told me was to always take my time and concentrate, not just with codes, but with life. Take time, and concentrate. I wish those weren't his last words to me. I wish he had said, I love you son, or I'm so proud of you. But no. I was left with, take time and concentrate.

We found out when I was 8 that he had Leukemia. After that, the fun games and secret codes slowed and eventually stopped altogether. Six months later and he was gone. All I had left were old codes and dumb skills like untying knots behind my back. That was all I had left of my dad, fuzzy memories, pictures, skills I would never use in school or life, and a small inheritance my mom used to pay for school.

So, when his lawyer called me on my 18th birthday out of the blue I was shocked. Apparently, there was a clause in my dad's will that only activated when I turned 18. My guess is that he didn't want my mom to know, since what I found in the small grey lockbox shook me to my core.

Inside the box was five grand in five different currencies, a thousand in dollars, another in yen, another in euros, another in pesos and the last in lira. Alongside the rolls of cash were two journals, one blue and one black, both with gold lettering on the cover. The black journal was seemingly untouched, its spine looking pristine and unbent. The blue journal, however, had divots and creases in its dark blue spine, and the lettering on the front looked worn out. As worn as the lettering was, I could still easily see my father's initials. And when I looked over at the black journal, I noticed that they were mine.

I reached in and pulled out the journal with my initials and opened it to blank pages. All were empty, except for the very last. It had a small mark, unrecognizable for anyone save for me. It was a small circle with a squiggly line coming out of the top.

It was my father's symbol for fire. Whenever he would leave a message in invisible ink, he would end the visible message with that mark. It looked so very like a period with a small mistake. But I knew very well it was no mistake. I decided to wait, thinking whatever secret message he left me wasn't to be read in front of his lawyer. Obviously, my dad didn't trust him completely. Placing the black journal down, I picked up the blue one.

Inside were pages filled with lines of English, Pigpen, and crypted English. What I mean is notes written in plain old English, notes written in Pigpen, the cipher from before, and letters jumbled up in gibberish. Like Pigpen, each letter is substituted for another, or several. For example Z can be B, but ZZ means H not BB. So instead of E having only one symbol, it can have two or three or four, so on and so on. Much harder to figure out with out a cipher key.

A cipher key I knew my dad probably hid in the

other journal. I didn't want to spend more time than necessary in the private room that the bank provided, so I quickly put the money and journals inside my backpack. That's when I noticed the false bottom. My eyebrows rose slightly, before I schooled my expression.

"Do you—" I started to say, "Do you think, that I could maybe have a moment? This is just... a lot." The lawyer, whose name I've long forgotten, stood with a small nod.

"You can have a few minutes, but the bank needs this room back soon," he said walking to the door. "For your sake, don't touch anything else in here."

My brows furrowed as he closed the door. I did not like that ominous warning. I quickly reached for the box again, and felt around its walls to find a latch or something to open the bottom. My finger brushed over a small lever in the corner and I slowly shifted it down.

The bottom flipped up, exposing its secrets, and I jumped not expecting it to be spring-loaded. After a second's pause, I looked inside. There were three items, a watch, a pen and a pair of glasses. The watch was broken, its hands still at 5:15, the pen's cap was stuck on, and the glasses were bifocals, with a thick black frame.

I put them into my backpack, and carefully closed the false bottom. I stood in the small room for another second, took a deep breath and walked out the door. As I stepped out into the main lobby of the bank, I took a moment to find my dad's lawyer. He was sitting on the bench nearest the revolving door, which meant I would have to walk past him to leave.

He stood up as I neared, and I could tell he wanted to talk. I had hoped I could get by with a nod of my head or wave of my hand, but apparently not.

"So, all settled then?" he asked, shifting his briefcase from one hand to the next. I paused a moment, was it just in my head or was he more nervous? I extended my hand in thanks and farewell, and he took it with a sweaty palm. Definitely nervous.

"Yeah, all finished up. Not sure if I had to put the box back myself or not, so I just left it on the table," I responded. I stepped to the side of him, pursing my lips as I nodded my head. "Well then, thanks for this I suppose. I hope you have a good day." "Wait!" I turned back to face him, confused and concerned. What more could he need to talk about? "So, the writing in the journal...could you make anything out of that? I've always been curious."

"No, it was all gibberish," I said narrowing my eyes. "I really have to get going though," I said turning to leave again.

"Would you let me know if you do figure it out? Some of the partners have a running bet on what it all means," he said.

Which was odd for him to say, as I thought lawyers weren't supposed to read their dead client's property. This time I didn't turn or pause my stride; I just left a short "sure" over my shoulder.

I spent the bus ride home confused and lost. My mom had never said anything about my father leaving behind some-

thing more for me, other than the social security money she used for my schooling. Deciding to ask her about it when I got home, I pushed all thoughts of the odd meeting from my head.

I popped my air pods in, and pressed play on my good vibes playlist. Halfway through the second verse of *Electric Love* by Børns, I noticed this guy in a suit staring at me. He turned his head when I looked up at him, but I could see his eyes flicker to me every few seconds.

I shook it off as nerves from the odd questions from the lawyer, and turned back to my phone. When we got near to my transfer stop, I stood up and walked to the doors. As the bus stopped and the doors opened, I stepped down onto the cracked pavement. I knew it was coming, so I didn't falter or trip like I had my first time riding this bus. I had walked a few steps when I heard someone fall.

It was the man in the suit. He hadn't seen the difference the crack made in the pavement and snagged his foot. As he stood up and composed himself, we made eye contact.

"Alright?" I asked, pulling on my backpack strap. He nodded and kept my eye line. I turned then and walked to the crosswalk. I knew from experience the west bound bus get there in about five or six minutes, so I sat on the bench and pulled up TikTok.

I had an eerie feeling someone was watching me and when I looked up, I saw the man in the suit across the street looking at me. This time, he didn't look away. Thoroughly creeped out, I didn't look away.

Our staring contest was only broken when the next east bound bus stopped in front of his bench. Everything in my body was telling me to run, my father's voice in my head telling a six-year-old me how to lose someone chasing you. It was after a kidnapping scare at my elementary school, but looking back now, it was much more detailed than it needed

to be. I quickly stood and walked east, the same way the bus would drive off to. Once I made it to the crosswalk, I waited until I heard the bus brakes squeak as the driver stepped off the brake pedal.

Once the bus was in motion, I started to run across the street, making it to the other side of the road just as the bus passed me. I didn't spare a glance behind me, running as fast as I could to the alley behind *O' Sole Mio*, a little Italian place my mom loved to go. As soon as I was around the corner, I peaked around to find the man. He was at the bench I had just left, looking around for me.

He hadn't seen which way I went, or where I stepped into the alley. I took a few calming breaths, and choosing to be safer I walked to the back door of the restaurant. Safe. For now.



Art: *Hidden Garden* by Barbara Cromarty



Art: *Baptisia Australis* Scientific Illustration by Elizabeth Tu

Forget & Remember

Zoe Hsieh

It was the coldest winter of their lives. Ashen rain stabbed deep into the dirt roads that ran between the fields. At places the way had collapsed into the roadside muck and was impassible, and everywhere the earth was stained black.

They had found the farm years ago, the woman and the boy. They were camping in the woods. Last summer vacation before he would leave home. "Make sure you remember it," she had said. "I will."

The car, pulling off the empty interstate to find the burnt out houses, timbers snapped like bones.
The bodies. The blowing blanket of dust.
They called. Turned on the radio.
She called the father and when he didn't pick up they drove to his place across town.

The people at the farm had long since succumbed.
They found the grave, marked with a single stone that said here we are



Art: *Hands* by pridimensional (Priya Desai)

Guiding Light: A Mother's Journey Through the Shadows

Dunhoja LaVerne Robbins

In the dark of night, I cradle my child,
A precious soul, so innocent and mild.
But beneath the surface, a mother's fear,
For the world outside is not always clear.

In his eyes, I see the stars shine bright,
Yet in society's gaze, he's judged by his sight.
A black child born into a world of strife,
Where his skin color dictates the script of life.

I kiss his forehead, whispering a prayer,
Hoping to shield him from the world's despair.
But how can I protect him from the hate,
That seeks to devour, to discriminate?

In school, they label him, they make him small,
As if his dreams don't matter at all.
Racism's grip tightens its hold,
Leaving scars unseen, stories untold.

I watch him play, laughter in the air,
But my heart clenches with every stare.
For I know the dangers that lie ahead,
In a world where his skin is seen as a threat.

Police sirens wail, echoing the night,
A chilling reminder of a perpetual fight.
For justice and equality, we strive,
But the odds are stacked, we must survive.

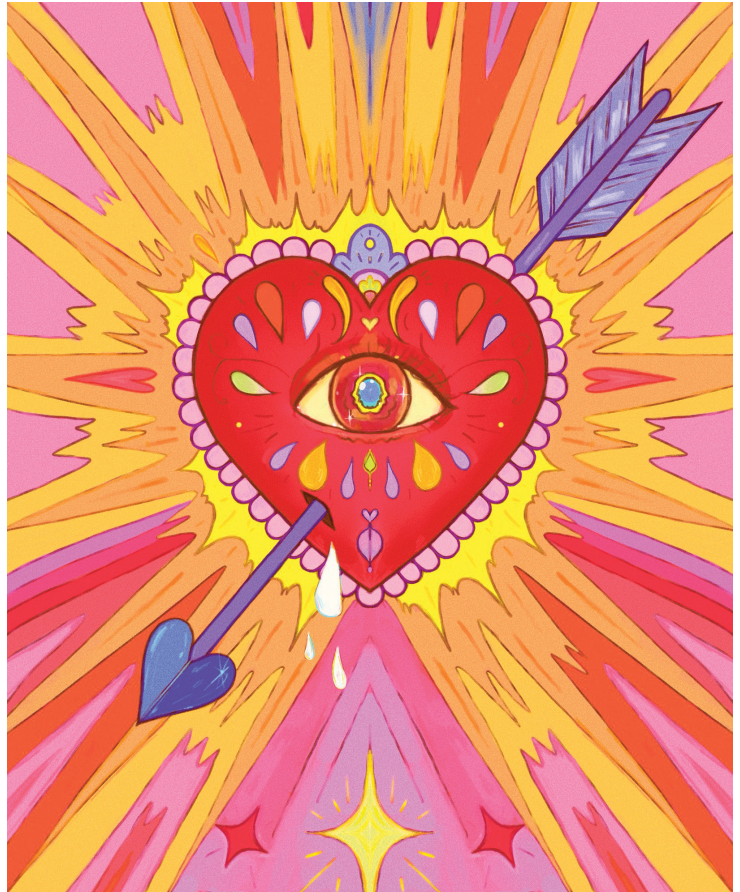
I tell him, my child, you're strong and wise,
But the tears in my eyes betray my lies.
For I know the truth of this harsh reality,
That his journey will demand more than just tenacity.

Yet still, I hold onto hope's gentle flame,
Believing in a world that's not the same.
Where opportunities abound for all,
But where black children must rise, must stand tall.

So I'll teach him resilience, I'll teach him grace,
To navigate a world that's not always safe.
And though the road may be rough and long,
I'll walk beside him, steadfast and strong.

For I am his mother, fierce and true,
And I'll fight for him, in all that I do.
Together, we'll rise, despite the odds,
In a world that seeks to silence, to discard.

So hear me now, world, loud and clear,
My love for my child knows no fear.
For in his eyes, I see a future bright,
A beacon of hope, a guiding light.



Art: *El Corazon* by Sara Aguilar

Cake of a Day

Paola Sutor

As the day begins
The possibility is
Sweet
Icing
Piled high
Coffee scented sunrise,
Let's not dig in too quickly-
Savor this perfect layer
Promising
Delicious productivity
From this beautiful cake of
a day

Linger too long
And the morning is gone
(did I even taste it?)
Bite into the afternoon's
Grey-sky flavor
Stale before I even take a
mouthful
Gritty, bland duty's
Tooth grinding texture

Bromidic and boring,
Mash it down
Push it aside
This lumpy humdrum pile
Of laundry
Junk mail
Busywork and filing
Squish it to the side of the
plate

Dig down to the dark
Sugary goodness
Of evening
Rich, decadent night
It never tastes as sweet
When I've mushed up the
afternoon
Just a hollow aftertaste

Left with only the crumbs
I go to bed a little hungry
For tomorrow.

Multigenerational Conflicts Through an Asian American Lens: The Fight for Balance

Anonymous

According to Amy Tan, “It is both rebellion and conformity that attack you with success.” Written with courageous rebellion and intimate conformity, “The Joy Luck Club” features a San Francisco mah-jong club striving to bring bits of Chinese culture, through shared stories between four mothers: Suyuan, An Mei, Lindo Jong, and Ying Ying St. Clair. Jing Mei (June), Suyuan’s daughter, fills her late mother’s spot in the club. From this transition, we begin to explore the deep ways in which cultural and generational differences shape each mother-daughter relationship. As a San Francisco native who identifies as a First Generation Chinese American, Tan’s book centers four mother-daughter relationships uniquely traversing through timelines, cultures, and locations. “The Joy Luck Club” highlights cultural and generational differences that both weaken and strengthen mother-daughter relationships, illustrated through contrasting struggles of understanding. Tan courageously reinforces the notion that Immigrant Family dynamics are not destined to be linear, making “The Joy Luck Club” a pillar of representation for Asian American experiences with assimilation and multigenerational balance.

As a parent immigrating and rebuilding a life in America, cultural clashes are bound to occur between them and their children. Raised on the foundations of Chinese morals, the mothers’ definition of success heavily contrasts that of their daughters. As can be seen in June’s painful flashback, her mother’s relentless push for her to become a prodigy, an embodiment of Suyuan’s definition of the American Dream, eventually forces June to rebel against the impossible standards— “[June] hated the tests, the raised hopes, and failed expectations” (Tan, 134). When June purposefully threw her piano recital, rooted from years of forcibly mastering avenues of talent, despite her growing exhaustion, she “learned [she] could be lazy and get away with mistakes, lots of mistakes” (137). This rebellious turning point creates a stubborn rift between Suyuan and June, highlighting the difference between June’s American desire to embrace individuality in the ability to make choices for herself versus Suyuan’s Chinese desire for her daughter to take advantage of the endless range of opportunities. Similarly, Waverly’s extraordinary chess talents “touted [her] as the Great American Hope” (97). Waverly’s mom, Lindo, becomes excessively prideful in her daughter’s victories. However, much like June, Waverly’s American desire to be independent perceives Lindo’s relentless commitment to oversharing her daughter’s victories as unnecessary and overbearing. While, to Lindo, a mother’s pride roots from genuine love and the traditional Chinese value that her child’s success is made possible by the sacrifices and support of those that came before her. Both June and Waverly are American born, inevitably causing their values to resemble that of American Ideals: embracing individuality, and separating themselves from strict familial commitments. Suyuan and Lindo remain in touch with their Chinese Ideals: success roots from strong familial commitments and desire to be the best. As a result of the cultural friction, the daughters are unable to understand the fact that the mothers’ need to push their daughters’ boundaries was the only way they knew how to show their love and pride. Furthermore, the cultural friction between the mothers and their daughters illustrate the larger idea that the younger generation naturally assimilates to a “me” mindset, clouding their ability to see past themselves. In like manner, this head-strong attitude can also be seen through the older generation’s stubborn attachment to their traditional ways, deteriorating any possibilities of truly understanding their daughters.

Beyond cultural clashes, the relationship between Immigrant Parents and their First Generation children are bound to fall victim to generational differences that challenge the strength of their relationship. Seen between Ying Ying and Lena, their individual perceptions of marriage, molded by their respective generations, complicate their relationship with each other. As Ying Ying reflects back on her first marriage, she recalls “becoming a stranger to [herself].

to her husband, she understands that this hierarchical dynamic is what sustains a marriage. In this, she represents the conservative notion that women are less than men, and even exist solely for them. On the contrary, her daughter, Lena, represents the modern idea that women and men are equals. So much so that within her marriage with Harold, she strongly believes they “are equals, in every respect”, splitting bills, food, and responsibilities (156). Even through the vanity lens like her mother, her modernistic approach to gender equality believes that even though Harold is “not exactly handsome... [she] may not be a raving beauty” herself (156). It is this equal balance mindset that Lena builds the foundation of her relationship on, demonstrating her firm belief in equality being essential in sustaining a healthy marriage. Notably, this generational gap in regard to perceptions of gender, emerges arguments about the stability of Lena’s marriage, driving a stubborn wedge between Ying Ying and Lena. In parallel to the generational contrast between Ying Ying and Lena, An Mei and Rose’s relationship underline the idea of fate versus faith. Within “Half and Half”, when Rose encountered Ted’s divorce papers, she “laid in bed for three days, getting up only to go to the bathroom...” (193). Her lack of action in the face of adversity illustrates how easily she quits, reaffirming her belief in predetermined destiny. In contrast, Rose’s faithful nature is emphasized in a gut-wrenching flashback where she desperately attempts to save her son, Bing Su. Even though “[An Mei] had never swum a stroke in her life, her faith in her own nengkan convinced her ... she could find Bing” (126). Nengkan, in Chinese, is defined as when an individual sets their mind on something, that it will be done. In this, Rose’s faith never faltered or shattered in her attempts to save her son, despite the treacherous ocean currents that swept him away. Even more so, when Rose finds her mom’s bible, she notices that under the “Deaths” page, Bing Su is written “lightly, in erasable pencil”, showing An Mei’s unwavering commitment to faith that her son is still alive (131). As can be seen, the idea of fate, embodied by Rose, and faith, embodied by An Mei, provided each with contrasting approaches on personal adversity. The differing approaches create relational distance, further illustrating the devastating effects of generational gaps. Evidently, between the older generation being traditional, and the younger generation gravitating towards modern approaches, there is an inevitable struggle to understand one another. Thus, it is because of this struggle that contributes to the diminishing relationship between the mothers and their daughters.

In spite of the polarizing nature that comes with cultural and generational differences, June’s melodic realization in “Two Kinds” introduced a turning point in the way these differences affected the mother-daughter pairs. Recalled from earlier, June’s experience with mastering piano skills was associated with immense resentment for her mother’s relentlessness. However, as an adult, June revives her piano skills by combining a short and slow piece called “Pleading Child”, with “Perfectly Contented”, a “longer but faster” melody. After playing both pieces a few times, she realizes “they were two halves of the same song” (144). Significantly in this case, the two piano pieces serve as a metaphor for the opposing natures of June and her mother. While the two pieces were of opposite lengths and paces, in realizing they were nevertheless from the same song, showed June that her and her mother might be two different people, they both have shared experiences unique to Asian American Women. June’s critical realization is a prime example of differences creating depth in mother-daughter relationships, deepening the connection that was once thought to be non-existent.

June’s monumental realization that despite the problems that cultural and generational differences create, these differences are also

what deepens the undeniable connection between the mothers and their daughters. Before dying, Suyuan had hoped that her two older daughters and June would meet. Now, June decides to honor her mom's wishes by flying to China and breaking the news of Suyuan's death to her half sisters. Notably, when June sees her half sisters for the first time, they all realize that "together, [they] all look like [their] mother" (288). The importance of June seeing her mother's facial features in her half sisters, knowing she sees "no trace of [her] mother in them" (287) shows June's critical realization that her Chinese roots lie below the surface. Recalling that in Suyuan and June's earlier relationship, June is embarrassed of her Chinese roots, imagining the Joy Luck Club that her mother created, as a symbol of Suyuan's contrasting appreciation for her Chinese roots, "was a shameful Chinese Custom..." (88). June's contrasting feelings about her cultural roots as a child versus an adult showcase how June's cultural clash with her mother only deepened their undeniable connection in the long run, when she realizes just how deep her Chinese blood runs. In fulfilling her mother's lifelong wish, June builds on her improving relationship with her late mother as she begins to comprehend how her internalized American desire to assimilate has clouded her judgment on what being Chinese truly means. Likewise, Lindo and Waverly's immigrant versus first generation differences come to a turning point in a hairdresser shop in San Francisco. When the stylist assumes Lindo does not understand English, Lindo explains how she puts on her "Chinese face"; a face that Lindo has learned to plaster on as a result of hiding her shame from being based in a different culture than most Americans. Suddenly, Lindo recognizes her and Waverly's shared facial features, "these two faces, [she] thinks, so much the same" (256). Lindo references how she resembles her own mother, recognizing the undeniable bond that exists between a mother and her daughter. At this point, Lindo sees past their opposing natures, as she realizes how her and her daughter both struggle with cultural identity balances. Lindo's "Chinese Face" is one way she shows assimilation to American culture as a Chinese Immigrant, and Waverly's desire to maintain her American beliefs while also preserving her Chinese roots displays similar patterns of cultural belonging. Lindo's realization that despite her and her daughter's differences, they share the same desire to balance two cultures simultaneously, ultimately allowing her to see how their similarities run deeper than just facial features. Universally, both June and Lindo's turning realizations represent the multifaceted role that cultural and generational differences play in immigrant families. Beyond the ways immigrant families can easily fall victim to the polarizing nature of their differences in thinking, acting, and feeling, their experiences are connected through their shared struggles of understanding, and overcoming adversity.

The four relationships centered in "The Joy Luck Club" notably emphasizes collective experiences specifically through an intersectional lens including first generation, immigrant, and Women of Color identities. The stories and experiences of the four unique pairs show how intimate complexities within cultural and generational differences shape the ways a mother-daughter relationship improves and deteriorates. Tan exceptionally highlights cultural ideas around work ethic, personality traits, fate versus faith while also displaying the ten-

der generational ideas surrounding assimilation, gender, and marriage. It is through this that allows us to understand the struggle for understanding between the mothers and their daughters, further reaffirming the fact that these relationships were never destined to be easy. Instead, these relationships were meant to be nonlinear, filled with endless disputes that open portals of miscommunication with equal parts in tender harmony made possible only through vulnerability. Overall, the significance of the multigenerational theme in "The Joy Luck Club" is further illustrated through its authenticity. From the based location of San Francisco, to the heartfelt cultural nods of zodiac foretelling, fantastical superstitions, and inclusion of traditional Chinese names, Tan courageously speaks to the universal yet intimate experience of Asian American Daughters and their struggles, with equal representation for the powerful nature of immigrant mothers navigating the world alongside their daughters.



Art: *Seoul Poster* by Anonymous

Memory as



Photo: *The World Through My Eyes* by Gamze Akildiz

Praxis.

Tahine Va

Angelina V. Pome'e

I was Va, without the knowledge of faka
apa'apa
So my wealth is knowledge when you only
come from fonua
Tulou , free my Tokos
Juveniles and Prison systems.
Their tears fill up the Pacific Ocean.
I was a keiki, henny-drownin
'Cause im ocean chosen.
I cant speak Tongan but my taoulunga told it.
Speaking in heliaki in California, thats street
code.
Dont mess with my FOBs, devolution of love
gets real cold.
This the shit
that comes with being ocean chose
Im the latina hafekasi fahu in my family
Ofa ki Ma'ufanga and Makave.
Metaphorical Miss Heilala
from San Mateo, California.
Where water is the blood of our mothers land
You and I hold that love of the inner mountain

Generational trauma through DNA is unex-
plained
Ima respect my ancestors my way
The more I could celebrate
Myself I had felt
The unchaining from
Around my crown of feathers.
You think you know me but you hella don't
Ocean chosen and Nicoya grown
Filled the lakes with tears
As my grandmother left her home
All those padre nuestro that she told
Gotta tight grip on me even from the after life
You and I hold the love of the inner mountain
I know your tender like the toughness of my
grandfather's hands
But I will hold yours
As I walked you to Pulotu
I know your road has been long coming and
dark
But I could brush the stress from this
To braid yours.
Malo

Shot on 35 mm film | Photograph by Sophia Fajardo

Immigration Diary

Mohammad Arif Ahmady

I was sitting in the entrance hall, thinking to myself how to survive? So, I grabbed my passport and went to the European embassy. I said, "I just want to stay alive." The ambassador considered my situation, he felt sorry for me, he issued me an immigration visa. Very happy, I took a pair of boots and a suit with me and went to the airport with so many hopes. The custom officer checked my passport and looked at me in surprise for a few seconds. I said goodbye but he did not answer. I got on the plane, the plane flew fast; when I tried to look at the tower and the square and its surroundings, the plane climbed and I could not see well. However, I had a picture of buildings, cluttered houses around the square. "Wake up, we've arrived," I watched as the flight attendant who shook me. I was disappointed, because I wished to see the soaring mountains of my homeland from those horizons and heights, but I could not. But I also had a picture of its lifeless scenery in my mind.

As soon as I got off the plane, I found myself in a very dreamy place, glasswork everywhere, walls and roads full of flowers and pottery. Accustomed to the dust, my tears flowed uncontrollably, as if the thunder of my grief and enthusiasm suddenly became cloudy and flowed. I wiped my tears with my old sleeves and caressed my face. I went to the visa and passport verification officer. He asked me, "Where did you come from?" "Where did you come from?" I said, "I came from my homeland of Afghanistan; I do not know where I am! Maybe Hamburg! or maybe Paris or Vienna, I do not know!" The officer gave me my passport and said, "Welcome!" I remembered that the custom officer of my country's airport had not answered my goodbye. I said, thank you! I blushed!

I came out of the airport; I saw someone who looked like an embassy representative, he came to me, greeted me, and said, "I am 'Adam Smit' Welcome!" I realized that someone had come to welcome me. I also introduced myself and thanked him. We got in the car; we drove to Adam's house. What I saw was amazing! Subways, skyscrapers, nesting overpasses, amusement parks, tranquility, love ... wherever you go look, love seems to blow me away. But my face was pale. I felt lost. Sometimes I turned to Adam, I saw that he was surprised. It seems that my condition did not look good in his eyes. While we were going farther, I could see more flowers everywhere as if they were laughing.

We arrived at Adam's house too late. "Do you want to sleep first to relieve fatigue or do you want me to make a coffee?" Adam said. I wanted to sleep for an hour because was a little tired. He guided me to the bedroom, I threw myself on the bed; And I fell asleep; I dreamed that it was near sunset, my mother was calling from far away. My Son! My son! My skirt is on fire, bring out my skirt immediately. Hurry up.... There was dust and smoke and dirt everywhere, darkness; But my mother's voice kept getting louder. she shouted; hurry up, put out the fire in my skirt. I was confused; My eyes were dusty; I took a deep breath and ran everywhere; My voice did not come out of my throat; I raised my voice once, I shouted, mother!!! Mother !!!, I woke up.

My whole body was sweating and Adam was standing on top of me, saying: "What happened? You are scared, did you have

a nightmare! Please relax! "Oh, take this cup of water and relax a little." I was sweating.

Adam left me alone to sleep again. I fell asleep. My eyes had not just warmed up. It was near sunset; I was going home. I heard a noise. I stopped; I looked around. I saw thick smoke billowing into the sky, right from our alley. Turn off the fire ... turn it off ... it was being heard as well. I said to myself, God forbid, there is a fire. I hurried to my feet, started running. While I was approaching the ally, I could hear somebody shouted, "My child, my child...". Wow my child. Wow my child is on fire! Woe is me, my child! It was the voice of Kishwar, the mother of the Dowlat, from my ally. Everyone is trying to put out the fire. I shouted when I arrived, "to get back! Let me bring out the child of the fire!!". My head was so heavy that I wanted to hit it against the wall. My crying and shouting didn't let Adam sleep, it woke him up. Adam came to my room and sat next to me and tried to make me calm, so he said: "You have to be calm. Did you dream of something?" "I could not tell him; I said it was a nightmare." I was terrified, my body was shaking like a willow, I felt like I had lost a few kilos.

Adam was worried about me, I put my head on the pillow, I took a deep, deep breath. If there was no oxygen in the air, I would be dizzy. My eyes rolled in the valley of dreams. I was walking in Kabul when suddenly the terrible sound of an explosion came from the Zanbaq crossroads, which is one kilometer away from me; I fell down to the ground; I got up, sheltered myself against the cement wall; The sky was covered with smoke and dust, and rags of stone and iron, flesh and skin and wood and bone rained down from the sky. I pulled myself together with difficulty on the road, I saw some fingers which had been separated from an elbow, were asking for my help. I ran towards them, I saw a golden watch with a leather strap, was still on the wrist, its handles were still dancing in the blood. The watch looked familiar to me, because a few days ago my younger brother 'Sohrab' had passed the entrance exam, I had bought him an incentive like this. Sohrab woke up early in the morning and asked my parents for permission to go out to watch the national team football match. I was not sure yet. I was stunned by the crowd as people passed by shouting. I had a bloody hand in my hand, I was wiping the blood from the hand and watch with my shirt, suddenly, I saw noticed the shadow of black color ink that had fallen on Sohrab's hand last night while practicing calligraphy and its spots could still be seen. Suddenly, I shouted. No!!! No!!! This is not Sohrab! This is not Sohrab's hand !! is not!!! I woke up suddenly and fell on the floor.

Adam ran to my bed when he heard my screams and grunt. Not in good condition, He said, "I do not think you are good; You are sick, you have a problem! Problems! I must call the doctor, let him see you or go to the clinic". I was breathing, trying to calm down; My head was spinning, it hurt as if I had not slept for several days. Adam was sitting on a chair by my bed, looking at me in amazement, waiting for me to answer. I closed my eyes for a moment, I could see that scene again. My heart was pounding rapidly, I burst into tears. Adam was comforting me; He told me, "You have no problem, it is safe here. This is Paris, "Let's go, let's go out, you can see the Eiffel Tower from the

window of, let's go and have fun there for an hour, maybe it will be fine." But I could not convince myself of anything. I said, "No! No! My head is confused, I must sleep". Finally, I told him, "Every time I fell asleep, I saw the horrible incident of fire and explosion. "It was just a dream." I said to myself, why did I come to Europe? "It is better to be inside the disaster instead of in fear of disaster." "Better to be in the storm with your dears than to be alone in the calm." When Adam realized that I was worried about my mother, father, brother, and family, he comforted me for a moment and said, "Don't worry, I understand that the situation in Afghanistan is not good." He asked me to wash my face. Adam led me to eat in the dining room, which was to the right of the hall. There was a variety of good food on the table, I ate some of it. I could not eat more while my eyes were pounding from the weight of Asmayee Mountain. I could keep my eyes hardly. Adam said to me, "You look sleepless, you must go to

she said, "I know where Shaqhayeqh is." She said: "You go to Kaka Fereydoun's bakery, I will inform Shaghayegh". I was waiting there when Shaqhayeqh, Morsel, Susan and Nastaran arrived laughing. The taller Shaqhayeqh, with its rhythmic limbs, the blue skirt, the green veil on the head. She was walking ahead of the others, approaching me. A little closer, I saw her wavy hunting eyes fencing towards me with his sharp eyelashes. Closer to come, everyone greeted. Everyone said in unison, "How alienated are you?" You don't look like the same Rostam that we knew a few years ago. Why are you so pale? Why do you look sick? Anyway, welcome! I greeted everyone. To not embarrass me more, smart Susan suggested, "Friends, we will leave Shaqhayeqh and Sohrab alone.

They said, "goodbye!" Shaqhayeqh said goodbye to them and thanked Nastaran for letting her know about me. I felt that Shaqhayeqh was so happy and proud of seeing me again.



sleep to relieve your fatigue.

I asked Adam for permission, I went to the bedroom again, I threw myself on the bed. I closed my eyes. It gave me some peace of mind. But the dream did not leave me alone. I was sitting high on the horizon of Kabul, and from there I was watching the city of Kabul and its surroundings, the sun was shining; I had overshadowed Kabul with the sun. Groups of people were working on all sides; crowds of people could be seen on all sides. People were moving like colorful flocks. Like a wave of grass blowing and dancing in the morning breeze. Enthusiasm was slowly captivating me. Suddenly my eyes were caught by a group of young people who, like the beautiful spring flowers sprouting through the thorns, clasped their hands together in a ring on the dark black ground, celebrating the light.

I rolled my dream horse into the neighborhood above, where my fiancé, Shaqhayeqh, and all her classmates, Susan, Mursal, Nastaran, and Gol Begum, were living. I was looking for Shaqhayeqh when I heard a whistling sound. I had reached Kaka Jamshid's house when Nastaran surprised me. I felt alienated from him. I felt that I was a stranger to her, I wanted to say hello. She said in advance, "Hello, Rustam!" I answered. "Who are you looking for?" she said sarcastically. I said no body,

If she weren't shy of the presence of her friends, she might have even been hugging me. We both walked to Baba Ferooz's Garden. Shaqhayeqh was looking at me all the time with her confused and attractive eyes. Her kindness, her charm, her beauty, her fragrance, and her modesty and shyness of that admirable girl were captivating. Her shame, and her modesty were adorable. I took her hand to squeeze, from the warmth of her love I cried out: "My love! my love! I love you". I woke up with the sound of my heart.

I saw my classmate, Bizhan standing near me, saying, "wake up. The professor of Western philosophy came in."

End

Kabul: June 15, 2017

Photograph by Jason Paster

Garden of Resilience

Herbert B.M.

Look those gardens green, where sunlight streams,
Living things flows, as it seems,
Away from wild, they make their strand,
Seeking new homes on this garden land.

Come from distant forests, they make their way,
To gardens land, through sunny and rainy day,
Where rich soil, and harmonic waters flow,
They carve a niche, a home to grow.

I admit, those like humans, they face the test,
Of thriving in a land not their best,
Adapting to new ways, they make their lives,
In a world where they have to survive.

Beings migrates, seeking new shores,
Humans on the way, seeking more,
Leaving behind their precious ones,
A new life on rich soil land has begun.

For in the crucible of a new land,
They build their body and mind from grains of sand.
Striving to thrive, to make a life,
Amidst the joys and the strife.

Amidst the sun's warmth and the storm's fierce boom,
A paradise emerges, scented bloom,
In the resilience of both old and new,
Where gardens grew and distant lands ensue.

In green gardens and realms afar,
Beings persist, beneath sun and star,
Their essence unyielding, their spirits true,
For in resilience lies the essence of who they rule.

Adapting, surviving, against the rocks,
In gardens and countries, they find their gods,
A testament to the spirit within their mind,
Of life's enduring, resilient aligned.

Photo: *The World Through My Eyes* by Gamze Akildiz



Anti-Asian Hate: Cultural Critique of History, Stereotypes, and the Covid - 19 Pandemic

Anonymous

It should be noted that an extensive history of anti-asian sentiment coursing through America's veins heavily influences and contributes to the ongoing anti-asian sentiment we are experiencing in our present time. The Chinese Massacre of 1871 occurred in Los Angeles Chinatown, where nineteen Asian residents were murdered. During this massacre, Chinese immigrants and residents were targeted with violence and hatred. Following this horrific massacre, the Page Exclusion Act of 1875, which was a restrictive immigration policy that prohibited Chinese women from entering the United States of America (Mineo, 2021). Notably, this policy was the first in the nation's history to end its open border policy. Significantly, this demonstrates the historical strength of anti-asian sentiment in America. Furthermore, such exclusive and targeting policies dehumanized Asian women, by objectifying them and stripping them of autonomy and individual consciousness in regards to immigration and rights to American opportunities. One of the most famous Anti-Asian historical policies was the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. This act was one of the first in history to deny immigration rights to a singular ethnicity (Chen et al., 2020). For a policy to target a singular ethnicity by denying them immigration rights is an act of hate and deep-rooted racism, an attitude that lives on in many American citizens, even after the existence of such an exclusive policy. The hateful spirit and sentiment seen in both the massacre and the historical policies lives on in modern times, as can be seen by the Atlanta shooting. During this event, eerily repeating similar horrors in 1871, left six Asian women dead, as the gunman, a white male, admitted that he was motivated by his sexual fetishization of Asian women and hatred towards the Asian American community as a whole. As can be seen, anti-Asian violence in the present day can eerily reflect similar dehumanizing historical events and patterns. Given America's anti-asian history, through its policies and acts of violence, present day sentiments are able to flourish unchecked. In another example, the term "Yellow Peril" was coined in the 19th century, as a result of the influx of Chinese immigrants. These immigrants presented a threat to White Americans, in terms of economic opportunities, often pouring the xenophobic blame of stealing jobs from those who were already working in America. While this term was coined over a century ago, these xenophobic attitudes often serve as motivation for violence against Asian Americans (Hiro, 2021). Significantly, the historical roots of these terms emerged as a result of painting Asian Immigrants as a threat to white dominance in America. It is through these terms that perpetuate and reinforce stereotypes and attitudes against Asian Americans, and in the long run, add fuel to the ongoing hate and violence directed towards the Asian community. Not only is it crucial to recognize the fundamental role historical anti-asian hate and violence has played in present day anti-asian attitudes and beliefs, but equally crucial to acknowledge the role of stereotypes in othering and antagonizing the Asian American community in the United States.

Anti - Asian Stereotypes

Stereotypes play a fundamental role in cementing and perpetuating the anti-asian hate and violence in America, as they are linguistic weapons that create a strong sense of othering and

antagonization against the Asian American community within the United States of America. In the mid 1960s, the rise of the "Model Minority Myth" rose due to the influx of Asian immigrants who were primarily highly educated professionals such as doctors and lawyers. (Chen et al., 2020). The "Model Minority Myth" refers to the idea that Asian Americans are the one minority group that is the closest to the dominant group in Society, Caucasian Americans, in terms of, but not limited to, class, privilege, and education. Grouping all Asian Americans as studious and successors of the "American Dream" presents a myriad of issues within and outside of the Asian American community. For one thing, this stereotype creates unrealistic expectations for Asian students, pressuring them to live up to the stereotype penetrated onto them (Jahnke, 2021). By type-casting all Asian Americans as inherently successful and obedient to the law and capitalistic standards of success, it not only creates pressure for the community to conform to these standards, but also has the power to isolate them from other ethnic groups by creating a wall of resentment. Thus, another issue with this harmful stereotype is that it creates a foundation for wrongful envy against Asian Americans, allowing others to justify and inflict violence on Asian Americans as they believe Asian Americans serve as a threat to their economic opportunity and stability. In various interviews with Asian American University of Southern California students, they've shared a myriad of systemic barriers the "Model Minority Myth" has created for them. For one thing, this myth has deteriorated the Mental well-being of certain students, as some have expressed how they have been conditioned to gaslight their experiences, and "code-switch" into the token Asian student to be socially accepted. Even more so, students have expressed how negative this stereotype truly is, emphasizing the fact that because they are labeled as "smart," their racist encounters are being normalized and downplayed, and that their hard work should not be rewarded, but expected. As can be seen in these interviews, there is a strong sense of erasure of minority-based experiences that Asian American students face. Perpetrating and normalizing the coercion of all Asian Americans into the "Model Minority" stereotype, suggests that the marginalizing and discrimination experiences Asian Americans endure are not a significant barrier to consider. In relation to anti-asian hate and violence, this push for erasure of experiences will not only complicate the process of dismantling systemic racism against Asian Americans, but also censor the true depth of violence and hatred endured by Asian Americans. Lastly, this myth has worked to divide Asian American students against other minority groups, further isolating their experiences and creating a divisiveness between different ethnic groups and the Asian American community ("Debunking the Model Minority Myth," n.d.). By painting Asian Americans as the one minority group who is destined for success, this stereotype also suggests that other minority groups are more disadvantaged. With anti-Asian hate and violence, solidarity with other ethnic groups would allow for the Asian American community to find strength and allyship in combating institutional and systemic racism against them. Notably, this divisive stereotype can tarnish the potential for solidarity among different minority groups, and even create resentment. In a study aiming to examine the use of anti-asian stereotypes

in elevating the status of dominant groups in society, such as Whites, the following results were concluded: White Non-Hispanics tend to perceive Asian Americans in a more favorable light as they are seen as more competent than other minority groups, White Non-Hispanics also perceive Asian Americans as more “difficult to get along with,” in comparison to other minority groups. From these results, they concluded that both the Model Minority Myth and “cold but competent” stereotypes are weaponized against the Asian American community. The use of these stereotypes, by Whites, are used to isolate Asian Americans from other minority groups and themselves by elevating them onto a pedestal through generalizations. In relation to the ongoing anti-asian hate, the weaponization of these stereotypes allows for folks to justify their hatred for Asian Americans by masking their envy and ignorance against the Asian American community with harmful generalizations. Additionally, these results emphasize the ostracization of Asian Americans against other minority groups such as African Americans, and Latinx Americans. Considering the fact that the Model Minority Myth itself serves as a comparison model between Asian Americans and other minority groups, the employment of this stereotype serves to isolate Asian Americans from other minorities, supporting the argument made earlier. Taking this a step further, this is harmful in the sense that it prevents solidarity amongst minority groups, experiencing similar discriminatory acts, from occurring. Especially in relation to anti-asian hate and violence, the lack of foundation for minority solidarity forces the Asian American community to combat their assaults and experiences alone. Significantly, this would allow for the violence to be normalized due to the lack of confrontation and solidarity from supporters outside of the Asian American community (Park et al., 2015).

Anti-Asian and the Covid - 19 Pandemic

Notably, the pandemic exacerbated the ongoing exclusion and non acceptance of the Asian American community in the United States. While some are led to believe that the pandemic created the anti-asian sentiment, it must be noted that such sentiments had existed before the pandemic, but were now being heavily saturated and normalized with the pandemic. Asian nurses and healthcare workers were being verbally assaulted with slurs, such as “Chink” and “Chinese Virus” (Chen et al., 2020). Given the birthplace of the disease originating in Wuhan, China, many saw this as an opportunity to normalize the discrimination and violence against Asian Americans. As of 2022, Asian Americans, more than any other ethnic or racial group, were most likely to report changing their daily routines to avoid falling victim to potential hate crimes or attacks. Such impacts is a result of various changes prompted by the pandemic, including, but not limited to: rapid rise in anti - asian online discourse encompassing comments such as “Chinese Virus” and “Asian Virus,” and public figures such as, Donald Trump publicly displaying anti-asian bias. To show the effect of this, researchers have worked to interview various victims of Anti-Asian hate to share their stories and perspectives. In one interview, an Asian American college student reflected on an experience in his dorm room, where his fellow peers painted “Chinese Virus Quarantine” on his walls. In another interview, with an Asian woman, she opens up about her violent encounter with a white woman who physically assaulted her while calling her “disgusting.” She shared that because her and her boyfriend, at the time, were undocumented, that they felt forced to remain silent and swallow their injustices (Ruiz et al., 2023). The pandemic has undoubtedly forced Asian Americans to

face an additional plague outside of Covid - 19 to stay aware off. Through these interviews, it is clear that the pandemic has brought anti-Asian sentiment to unprecedented heights, affecting the Asian American community on various levels such as, but not limited to: physical, emotional, personal, and professional levels. Uniquely, the pandemic has prompted the normalization of racialized scapegoating and blame towards the Asian American community for the pandemic. Adding on the raging misinformation spread in the media, anti-Asian hate and violence reached unprecedented heights due to these various and interconnected factors. Notably, it is important to dive into deeper reasons why this hate has become so normalized during the pandemic. Especially during outbreaks such as Covid - 19, research has shown that people tend to experience a rise in the need to blame others for such sickness. Due to the fact that sickness cultivates fear, this fear is what cultivates bias. Notably, Covid - 19 was not the first wave of anti-asian hate prompted by a disease, as the outbreak of the Bubonic Plague in San Francisco prompted Public Health Officials to quarantine Chinese residents, while allowing White residents to leave. Noting this pattern, it becomes clear that such sentiments have existed, but that this recent pandemic has presented its own unique forms of hatred. Hate crimes, which are a result of unchecked and raging bias, are executed to perform an act known as “othering.” “Othering” is a process where the group at the top of the racial hierarchy convinces a minority group that they do not belong in the United States, and by doing so, attempts to maintain the status quo. Furthermore, the “Othering Theory” refers to the “historical and ongoing process of marginalization, disempowerment, and social exclusion” performed by dominant groups in society to reaffirm their status quo of who belongs and who doesn’t (Gover et al., 2020). Through this, it becomes clear that the anti-asian sentiment rising with the Covid - 19 pandemic is the result of existing anti-asian hate that was only fueled and heightened from the fear produced from the pandemic. Taking all points into consideration, it is crucial to recognize the fueling role the pandemic played in anti-asian sentiment, and learn from the repeating patterns to prevent from this hate to fulfill its prophecy in the future.

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The Rhythm of Becoming

Ali

Across the threshold of the unfamiliar,
under the skies too wide, too foreign,
every whisper of wind is a new language
waiting to be learned;

Nights stretch into the canvas* of endless
study,
books piling up—a formidable fortress,
days blend into weeks,
and weeks into lifetimes;

Thoughts race between yesterday and to-
morrow,
bridging the worlds a thousand miles apart,
the heart is restless,
burning with the hope of belonging,
of carving out a space in this new reality.

*Canvas: Refers both to a blank surface for
creating art, specifically a cloth stretched
over a frame, and the online learning plat-
form.

Art: *Sunsets' Dance* by Mayra Garcia Adame





Shot on 35 mm film | Photograph by: Sophia Fajardo

Blind Faith

Alana K

She was born exactly 22 and a half seconds ago, though she had been conceived a few hours earlier. She had been held hostage in a cloud high above everything that anyone could ever imagine. She was afraid of heights, yet here she was, trapped in dark grey, scared to let go and freefall. She could feel her purpose building deep inside of her, and at any minute the cloud would let go and she would go forth and conquer.

A deep rumbling started vibrating her very being, and she instinctively knew it was time, it was ingrained in her. She knew what she had to do the second she was born; it was a natural born instinct. Each droplet knew, there was no school for it, there was no training for it. It just was.

With a great flash and thunderous roar, she suddenly found herself freefalling through the air, and straight for a world that was filled with so many colors. She knew that her role in all of this was to stay clean, quench the thirst for the land below, and join billions of other tiny raindrops to help sustain life.

SHE was going to be amazing. SHE was going to change the world. SHE knew her purpose. She took a deep breath as she prepared for landing, one never knew where they would end up, and they were never to question it.

She closed her eyes as her body slid onto the giant rock in the stream. "OH MY GOSH" she thought "I AM HERE" she felt an overwhelming urge to both burst into tears and to scream for joy. She felt as if every negative thought she had before this moment was silly and unwarranted.

She let her body slide over the rock and into the stream, basking in the warm heat that had baked the rock. She coveted that moment that she was an individual, knowing it would last only a short while.

She was born with the knowledge that she would join ranks with millions just like her, with her sole purpose being to nourish and bring life. She thought it was pretty amaz-

ing and knew that she would live a long life as long as she landed somewhere that took good care of their portion of the planet.

Stretching as far out as her body would allow, she catapulted into the rushing water, ready to fulfill her life's mission. Never in her wildest dreams did she think that she would feel so at home amongst so many strangers.

When they came together as a whole, she was overwhelmed with a feeling of HOME. The chatter in the body of water was that of excitement. She found herself amongst a group of droplets that had been recycled a few times and spent the next few days filling her moments with tales of what they had seen. None of it frightened her, she was bold and brave, and knew she could take on whatever was thrown at her.

After a few months she settled into the flow of things, the group she was in was winding through beautiful scenery. Sometimes they would go slow, sometimes they would rush fast and separate as they hit grand rocks and tumbled over edges into new bodies of water.

She lost a lot of friends when they all tumbled, but in her heart, she knew that she was not to get attached to anyone. The greater plan insisted she keep moving, keep nourishing.

She watched as thousands were gulped up as a herd of buffalo were hydrating, slightly jealous that THAT wasn't her life's purpose.

Where was she going? What was she doing? When would it be her turn to continue the circle of life? She knew she wasn't supposed to question the process, just be at peace knowing she was fulfilling her duties.

So, she surrendered, and boy did it feel good. She became overjoyed by the sensation of observing her surroundings, taking in everything she could, and going with her fated flow.

Cronyism Unveiled: Tracing Burma's Socioeconomic Landscape from Colonial Roots to Military Dominance and Privatization

Anonymous

In 2021, the Tatmadaw led a military coup to overthrow the democratically elected government. The coup came as a shock, bringing an abrupt end to a period of democracy. The impact of this coup was pronounced for most people, as they had become accustomed to the democratic rule of The National League For Democracy (NLD). The sudden shift allowed people to directly witness the repercussions of military rule combined with widespread corruption and substantial cronyism. While cronyism has persistently existed, it wasn't as apparent before as it is now. Historical analysis is crucial to understanding its origins. Contemporary cronyism in Burma is an indirect outcome of British colonialism and a direct result of the past five decades of military rule.

My aim in this paper is to conduct a historical analysis that delves into the evolution of contemporary cronyism in Burma, tracing its roots back to the era of British rule and capitalism. I will explore how these historical forces have shaped a societal longing for socialism among the Burmese. The narrative will extend to the consequential military coup and the subsequent mismanagement of the country, leading to a phase of privatization. This privatization, in turn, laid the groundwork for the emergence of a cronyistic society, with the military, specifically the Tatmadaw, exerting either full or partial control over the nation. The objective is to comprehend the contemporary state of Burma, where the military that seized power almost a century ago continues to hold sway, either wholly or in part. Simultaneously, the economy operates within the confines of a deeply entrenched cronyism. To accomplish this, the paper will utilize specific case studies and events considered most pertinent to the formation of contemporary cronyism. While acknowledging the multitude of factors at play, the selected cases will serve as focal points for a comprehensive understanding of the historical trajectory that has led to modern-day cronyism in Burma.

“On January 1, 1886, Lord Dufferin, Viceroy of India, delivered a succinct proclamation: By command of the Queen-Empress, the territories once governed by King Thibaw no longer bowed to his rule. Instead, they seamlessly became part of Her Majesty's dominions, subject to administration by officers appointed at the discretion of the Viceroy and Governor-General of India” (N.Trager & Maung,1956). Following the third Anglo-Burmese war, the British assumed control over all areas in present-day Burma, assimilating it into British-India. The British turned their attention to rice cultivation and export in Burma, witnessing a remarkable surge. The rice cultivation area expanded from 1.73 million acres in 1870 to 6.58 million acres in 1900, eventually reaching 9.93 million acres in 1940. Concurrently, export volumes soared, increasing by 1.36 million tonnes from 0.81 million in 1870 to 2.17 million in the 1900s (Brown, 2011).

Under British rule, Burma's economy changed dramatically. Many major foreign-owned industries were established. The Burmese populace faced considerable challenges in securing employment within the industrial sectors dominated by British-owned enterprises. British employers preferred Indian laborers, viewing them as better trained by the British, more willing to accept lower wages, and possessing a higher level of discipline and submission toward the British authorities. This bias against the Burmese population led to their exclusion from employment opportunities in British-owned industries, as they were deemed inferior compared to both the Indian and European workers. “Speaking of the Burmese population, J. S. Furnivall said that '[t]here were few or no technicians qualified even for appointment to the lowest posts . . . few people who had even received an elementary training in science. . . [and]

[t]here was no one with managerial experience in modern business” (Fenichel & Huff,1975). Consequently, a significant portion of the Burmese labored in the agricultural sector. The table below from the article "Colonialism and the Economic System of an Independent Burma" shows that in 1931, 67.8 percent of Burma's labor force was engaged in the agricultural sector, with the majority being Burmese workers (Fenichel & Huff,1975).

Occupational Distribution of 1000 Male Earners by Ethnic Origin, 1931

Occupation	Burmese	Chinese	Indians*
Cultivating landowners	260	159	27
Cultivating tenants	181	8	40
Agricultural labourers	307	20	101
Herdsmen, fishers and hunters	19	17	31
Clerical workers	9	24	39
Industrial management	1	3	1
Craftsmen	54	144	97
Unskilled and semi-skilled labourers	83	189	432
Professional, etc.	6	7	8
Traders and shop assistants	49	412	167
Rentiers	13	8	5
Army, police, etc.	5	1	29
Other public service	3	4	0
Medicine	6	4	4
Miscellaneous	4	0	19
Total	1,000	1,000	1,000

* Only includes Indians born outside of Burma. Indians born in Burma were much more frequently engaged in agriculture. There were 73,471 born in Burma, 457,403 born outside Burma.

Foreign firms in Burma have had a disruptive impact, affecting not just new local industries and firms, but also causing disturbances in existing local economies. This is particularly evident in the case of British rice milling and the British Railways Company. While the majority of Burmese owned small up-country rice mills in proximity to the source, British firms owned large mills situated at the port. Initially, the advantage of the Burmese-owned mills lay in their proximity to the supply source, leading to lower transportation costs. However, this advantage was nullified when the British Railway Company raised the fee for transporting milled rice compared to unmilled rice to the port. While the number of Burmese rice mills grew significantly between 1900 and 1930, the British mills had a larger share of the market. In addition, major British firms, a year prior to the price hike, collaborated to control the price of paddy in what was termed "The Bullinger Pool," functioning as a cartel arrangement. This move, designed to serve their interests, significantly impacted the pricing dynamics. “The number of small Burmese rice mills grew from 27 in 1900 to 528 by 1930. The European mills numbered only 45, but each employed a workforce many times that of their Burmese rivals. The four biggest firms operated a cartel, the "Bullinger Pool" which to a large extent fixed the price of paddy and was much resented by the Burmese public” (Tinker,1990). These factors collectively led to the inability of Burmese mills to compete with major British firms, resulting in the collapse of numerous Burmese-owned mills. "In addition, the year before the British Railways Company had initiated the rate increase, an effective cartel arrangement, the Bullinger Pool, was begun by the major British firms to control the price of paddy in their interests. When this was combined with the existence of too

many small mills, and the collapse of paddy prices in 1929, the result was that many Burmese-owned mills, operating on borrowed capital, fell into the hands of speculators and Indian moneylenders or were taken over by the large European mills" (Fenichel & Huff, 1975). As such, the people came to resent the pervasive influence of foreign corporations and British economic dominance. The locals were left with limited benefits and became keenly aware of their growing marginalization. Resulting in growing frustration, as the people perceived themselves as being subjected to a form of economic bullying under British rule. As a result, a strong sense of dissent and discontent with British rule and its capitalism was fostered within the Burmese population in the country; becoming a pivotal factor in the emergence of Socialist Burma after its independence.

After Burma's independence in 1948, both the civilian population and the military governments strongly embraced and pursued the idea of socialism, deeming it to be the quickest and the most effective way to economic prosperity, while liberating the country from the dominance of foreign businesses. The concept of socialism in Burma drew significant inspiration from Buddhist ideals of egalitarianism, as the majority of the population identified with Buddhism and perceived a close connection between Buddhism and socialism. As noted, "Many have noted the natural affinity of Buddhist notions of egalitarianism, redemption through social action and a healthy ambivalence to capital accumulation with such socialist ideals as equitable distribution of wealth in a classless society. Socialism and Burmese Buddhism further enjoyed the illusion of being closely linked, for only Buddhist terminology was available to explain Marxist philosophy to the general populace. Years before socialism was officially sanctioned, however, Burmese society had already evolved in a significantly 'socialist' manner" (Aung-Thwin & Myint-U, 1992). The inclination for socialism also stems from the economic traumas that the people experienced during the British colonial rule and its associated capitalist system. Following the 1962 military coup led by General Ne Win, which ousted the Democratic Union Parliament of U Nu, Burma witnessed the establishment of a one-party socialist rule, under the Burmese Way to Socialism Ideology; embracing strategies aimed at fostering self-sufficiency and economic growth through import substitution, state ownership, and rigorous control of economic activities. This shift triggered a massive transition of skills, resource control, and ownership from the private to the public sector, marking the start of prolonged economic challenges for Burma's future. Mya Maung in his journal said, "that a simple transfer of ownership and control of resources from the private to the public sector in the name of equity and justice does not automatically create efficiency or elevate technology, and that inefficiency may emerge due to the inflexibility of large-scale public programs, bureaucratic delays, institutional disruption of the market mechanism, inaction and conflict among the governmental agencies, loopholes, and evasion associated with a system of direct controls, and the disincentive effects of socialization" (Maung, 1989).

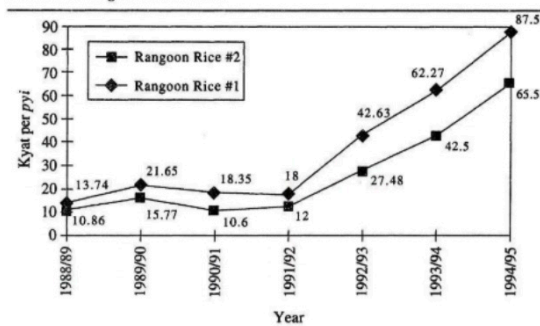
Immediately after the coup of March 1962, the Revolutionary Council of General Ne Win imposed a tight grip and control over the Burmese economy and politics. This resulted in the massive arrests of civilian politicians, nationalization, and suppression of the free press; while also jailing, and arresting, journalists and owners of private newspaper companies. He effectively isolated Burma from the rest of the world. Military commanders were given totalitarian control over the economy and its industries. By 1965, almost 90 percent of all trade, industry, and banking were nationalized. The Burma Socialist Programme Party's management (BSPP), overseen by unskilled military and civilian leaders, led to a system of large-scale control with inherent, uncontrollable loopholes. One glaring example is observed in the Peoples' Stores, where resources and goods distributed face misallocation and mysterious disappearances. Ne Win himself acknowledges this issue within the BSPP, stating, "Like rain on the river, they send oil to Magwe [which was the wrong town]. This may be due to dishonest intentions or lack of skill... We are unskilled people assembled. The skilled people we ask are not really that skilled. They do not know how to deal in foreign trade. We

have tried two or three persons. I selected one myself... I shall tell you what he did later." Continuing, he adds, "I had to have him removed. That is why I should like to ask whether what they are skilled in is theft" (Maung, 1989). Consequently, the norm became stealing goods from government shops for the burgeoning black market. The corruption in managerial positions played an important role in the formation of the massive black market, famously known as "Trade Corporation 23." This illicit trade further exacerbated issues, particularly in the production and the price of paddy. Prior to the military takeover in 1962, Burma stood as the world's largest exporter of rice, a status it held right before the outbreak of World War II. However, after the military coup in 1962, Burma's rice exports drastically declined. According to Mya Maung: "exports before 1962 averaged between one and two million tons annually and dwindled to a few thousand tons during the 26 years of military rule between 1962 and 1988" (Maung, 1997).

The mismanagement and corruption among government officials prompted a surge in Black Market activities. Regular citizens faced quotas when buying goods at government stores, unlike government officials and military elites who were exempt from such restrictions. Additionally, periodic shortages of paddy occurred, causing difficulties for people even when trying to obtain paddy below the quota rate. At the same time, the price of paddy in the black market exceeded the official rate per pyi (2.70214 qt), leading to an expanding illicit trade. High-profile individuals with power, such as military personnel and civilian managers, exploited this gap by purchasing at low official prices from government stores and selling at inflated rates in the black market. "Low-quality rice such as Nga Sein, which average-income families had never consumed prior to 1962, averaged around 2 kyat (K) per pyi in the late 1970s and during the 1980s at government cooperative shops, while the average black-market price was K4.5 per pyi" (Maung, 1989). This trend exacerbated government shortages. A clear instance occurred in 1973-1974, where government procurement of paddy was negatively affected due to farmers retaining goods for sale at the black market, "Production, claimed the government, was the highest in its history in 1973-74. Despite the bumper year, the government could procure only 60 percent of the production due to farmers' withholding for black marketeering purposes" (Maung, 1989).

Additionally, rice supply shortages contributed to a drastic surge in rice prices. The government, in an effort to meet export commitments, reduced the domestic supply, intensifying the rise in rice prices, as illustrated in a graph from the journal, "BURMA'S ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE UNDER MILITARY RULE: An Assessment By Mya Maung."

FIGURE 1 Rangoon Rice Prices

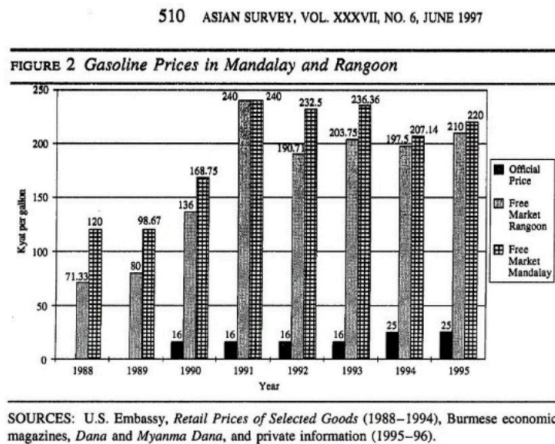


SOURCES: U.S. Embassy, Retail Prices of Selected Goods (1988-1994), Burmese economic magazines, *Dana* and *Myanma Dana*, and private information (1995-96).

The scarcity of goods forced more people to resort to the black market,

where prices skyrocketed, making basic commodities unaffordable for ordinary individuals. According to the analysis by Mya Maung, "As in the past socialist state, ordinary people could not afford to buy the best grade of rice or good quality meat and fish, cooking oil, and vegetables. Those who could afford to buy these foods from government welfare shops or private shops in the unofficial market found them to be of poor quality, for instance, pawsun mhway mixed with the lowest quality nga sein and broken rice and meat injected with water to add weight. It has been reported that poor families can no longer afford to consume rice and have been forced to drink boiled rice water (htamin yay), which is packaged and sold in bottles and reportedly increased in cost from Kt 5 to Kt 10 per bottle during 1996" (Maung,1997).

The situation with gasoline underscores a parallel circumstance, given the state's monopoly on this commodity since 1988. To regulate distribution, the government enforced a weekly quota of 2 to 4 gallons at a discounted rate for automobile owners. Exclusive, unrestricted access to state-distributed gasoline is reserved for military elites and high-ranking government officials. This restricted availability of gasoline to the general public, coupled with the privileged access granted to certain elites, fueled the emergence of a thriving black market for gasoline. The gasoline prices in the black market (free market) compared to the official price are shown in the graph below. (BURMA'S ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE UNDER MILITARY RULE An Assessment By Mya Maung GRAPH). This is a very good The flourishing black market, stemming from mismanagement, corruption, and loopholes within large-scale state systems, is the primary driving force behind the staggering rise in the cost of living for the Burmese people.



Burma's economic woes, marked by mismanagement and corruption, persisted, leading to a further deterioration in living standards. The decline in quality of life and an unrelenting surge in the cost of living fueled profound discontent and resistance among ordinary citizens against the government. Following significant political upheavals, such as the 1988 uprising marked by severe military repression, emerged a series of economic reforms initiated by the military junta to rejuvenate the ailing economy. Although events like the 1988 uprising hold historical significance, they are not extensively discussed in this study due to their minimal relevance to the topic of this paper. Between 1995 and 2011, Burma experienced a sequence of privatization initiatives, during which numerous state assets were divested to private sectors. The primary objective of this policy was to shift the country from a command economy to a market-oriented one, addressing the inefficiencies of debt-laden state enterprises. The privatization process unfolded in two distinct phases. The initial phase, spanning from 1995 to 2007, involved general policy goals and procedures aimed at encouraging private ownership.

The subsequent phase, from 2008 to 2011, witnessed a broader scope of state enterprises being privatized, both in terms of variety and quantity, resulting in more than a twofold increase in the transfer of public enterprise assets to private entities. Table 1 shows aggregate figures presented in the article "From Cronyism to Oligarchy? Privatisation and Business Elites in Myanmar" by the Privatization Commission.

Table 1: Privatized State Economic Enterprises, 1995-2011 (June)

Ministry	1995-2007	2008-2011	Total	Asset Type
Energy	-	251	251	Fuel Stations
Information	124	16	140	Cinema Halls
Commerce	25	95	120	Rice Mills, Bran Oil Mills, Warehouses
Industry	27	79	106	Appliances, Textiles
Others	46	119	165	-
Total	222	560	782	-

Source: Office of Privatisation Commission (2011).

The privatization process came with a lack of transparency in the overall procedure. Key assets such as state-owned airlines, shipping companies, port terminals, and mines were discreetly handpicked and transferred, often without public disclosure. These transactions frequently benefited individuals with close ties to military elites or the families of former military officials and military-owned companies. This gave rise to what is now known as cronies in Myanmar—a symbol of corruption in the eyes of many citizens. The privatization of assets was characterized by secrecy, with major entities changing hands in undisclosed deals. A prime example occurred in 2010 when the state-controlled Myanmar Port Authority privatized its port terminals in Yangon, "For instance, in 2010, the state-controlled Myanmar Port Authority privatized its port terminals in Yangon, with the Bo Aung Kyaw terminal being transferred to the military-controlled UMEH (The Irrawaddy, July 7, 2010). Another report from The Irrawaddy on February 3, 2010, highlights the case of the military transferring ownership of its state-owned shipping company to a private conglomerate with close ties to the military, "Similarly, the Transport Ministry in 2010 initiated the transfer of the state-owned shipping company Myanmar Five Star to UMEH and sold a majority share of Myanmar Airways International (MAI) to the Kanbawza group, a private conglomerate with well-known connections to the military regime"(The Irrawaddy, February 3, 2010.) In an interview featured in the article "From Cronyism to Oligarchy? Privatisation and Business Elites in Myanmar," a businessperson sheds light on the government's approach to privatization, "For small [SOEs], the government went through a proper tendering process ... But when it comes to big properties and big projects, only handpicked big businesses were awarded the privatisation deals ... Around eight big companies have bought roughly 80% of privatised businesses so far. There is enough to go round among the eight conglomerates; they cooperate, they get on well with each other. They are in different industry sectors (Interview, August 2011)." (From Cronyism to Oligarchy? Privatisation and Business Elites in Myanmar). Moreover, the article points out that in sectors such as the rice market, the government actively pushed for the establishment of large companies dedicated to the specialized handling of rice and rice mills; where many of these enterprises were found to be owned by individuals with close personal and business connections to the ruling elite. "In sectors like the rice market, the government encouraged the formation of large companies for the specialized handling of rice and rice mills. Many of these businesses were owned by individuals with close personal and business ties to the ruling elite, as evidenced by their sanctioning by the US Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC), targeting well-connected elite families and their conglomerates since 2007 (United States Treasury 2008)" (From Cronyism to Oligarchy? Privatisation and Business Elites in Myanmar). As a result, numerous cronies, defined as business figures who became

wealthy due to their close ties to the military, surfaced. These individuals maintained strong connections and trust with the military, often providing substantial funds to those in power through corrupt practices in exchange for favors such as land, licenses, and pardons. Transparency International also addresses this, “The privatisation process which took place in 2009- 2010 also shows the close relationship between the government, the military and its close friends. There is evidence that numerous state assets were sold to the military, family members, and associates of senior government officials at fire sale prices (Bertelsmann Foundation, 2012). Several experts have also denounced that privatisation could actually enhance conflict of interest and corruption by creating a new generation of businesses whose control of industries is dependent on government connections and other forms of collusion (Currie, 2012).” One prominent example is U Tay Za, one of the richest tycoons in Southeast Asia and chairman of the Htoo Group of Companies. His company consists of banks, investment firms, the first fully privatized airline in the nation, mines, construction businesses, and the Yangon Zoo. Tay Za's father, a retired lieutenant colonel at the Ministry of Industries, was close to General Ne Win, and Tay Za himself had close ties with the former head of State, General Than Shwe.

The privatization initiative, while ostensibly transferring ownership to the private sector, did not alter the concentration of wealth. In essence, the wealth distribution dynamics remained unchanged. In the socialist era of Burma, the military elites and those in positions of power enjoyed opulent lifestyles with luxurious villas. Post-privatization, the same individuals obtained ownership, leveraging their substantial resources to acquire major sectors of the country at fire sale prices. Contrary to the notion of equal opportunities, the privatization process did not level the playing field for all citizens. Instead, it perpetuated a system where those associated with former military officials or their families, as well as those in proximity to them, became the primary beneficiaries. Consequently, wealth remained concentrated among the already affluent, exacerbating the issue of unequal wealth distribution in Burma. This disparity, in turn, contributed to the persistent poverty experienced by the majority of the population. According to the World Bank, "About 40 percent of the population is living below the national poverty line in 2022, unwinding nearly a decade of progress on poverty reduction, according to The World Bank's Myanmar Economic Monitor released today." The privatization initiative in Burma failed to dismantle existing wealth concentrations, perpetuating disparities in ownership and opportunities. Former military elites and their associates continued to dominate, exacerbating unequal wealth distribution and sustaining high levels of poverty among the majority of the population.

The pervasive issue of poverty can be traced back over a century to the era of British colonialism, a period that laid the groundwork for the subsequent adoption of "The Burmese Way To Socialism." This ideological shift initially intended to address socio-economic inequalities, ironically paved the way for a series of mismanagement and corruption, exacerbating the very disparities it sought to alleviate. As the nation grappled with these internal challenges, the privatization process emerged as a crucial turning point. Unfortunately, it unfolded in a manner that lacked transparency and fairness, perpetuating the socio-economic divide rather than bridging it. The consequences of this process continue to reverberate through Burma's contemporary landscape, contributing significantly to the persistence of poverty. Recognizing this historical context becomes paramount in fostering a comprehensive understanding of Burma's present socio-economic state and gaining valuable insights into the systemic issues that underpin poverty. Without such awareness, attempts to address and overcome the persistent challenges of poverty in the nation may fall short. With this knowledge, targeted interventions and policies can be devised to foster inclusive development, striving toward a more equitable and prosperous future for the people of Burma.

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