AZAAD: liberated (Urdu)
est. 2016

“‘I’m always left of center and that’s right where I belong; I’m the random minor note you hear in major songs’”

Janelle Monae, “I Like That”

“You are growing into consciousness, and my wish for you is that you feel no need to constrict yourself to make other people comfortable.”

Ta-Nahesi Coates, Between the World and Me
Dear Reader,

With our first issue of the year, we, the Azaad board, hope to encourage conversation around culture and identity within the Milton community. We recognize already that our school is such a diverse environment, but there's always an opportunity to learn from the other students to whom you may not get a chance to speak everyday. Hopefully, after reading this issue, you will have gained some insight into somebody else's world and also taken a second to look into your own.

Everybody knows what it means to be an outsider, whether it's in your house, the classroom, the Stu, in a club, or in your dorm. Although not all of us experience isolation in the same spaces, we've most likely all experienced that alienating feeling. In reflecting on our experiences, we can come together to understand each other. By exposing our vulnerabilities, the theme of “Outsider” takes our loneliness and uses it to push us closer together.

Each contribution to this issue takes on a different interpretation. Hopefully, this issue can highlight the diversity of perspectives within our community. With pieces ranging from poetry, to interviews, to paintings and digital art, the wide range of talents in our student body makes it possible for us to use these mediums for further exploration. By transforming our isolation into art, we open ourselves up to seeing each other in a new light. We invite you to read the Azaad with appreciation for the contributors’ ability to open themselves up to the greater Milton community and show you their attempts at gaining a deeper understanding of their experiences.

As you read this issue, we ask you to consider the places in which you feel most comfortable or most alone. How do you react to feeling like an outsider? How do you behave in those isolating situations? Can you prevent them, or should you prevent them at all? Should you embrace them?

Yours,

Natasha, Akua, and Adrian
Literature

Outsider At Home
Nicaragua.
A Reflection on Being Chinese When the Heart is Too Weak
A Letter To An Outsider Like Me
Heart in a Box
Lone Star
Art
Mental Health
Stinky Food is the Best Food
An Outsider At Thanksgiving
Unsaid
An Open Letter To JSU
There is No Birthright.

Interviews

Understanding One’s Own “Otherness”
Voices of the “Other”
Cross Country While Black

Erinma Onyewuchi
Stefan Aleksic, Sneha Jaiswal, Lynn Yuan
Kenya Mathieu
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Artist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tension</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Andy Zhang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¿Te Molesta?</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Amaya Sangurima-Jimenez</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outsider Graphic</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Erin Brady</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Que Bonita Bandera</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Various Artists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Bedroom</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Adrian Hackney</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Too Am Milton: A Series</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Grace Li</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Untitled</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Asia Chung</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tension</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Adrian Hackney</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do You See What I See?</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Asia Chung</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Untitled</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Natasha Roy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Untitled</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Lynn Yuan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do You Speak Jamaican?</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Parker Hitt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuwait</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Parker Hitt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hiding</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Erin Brady</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Untitled</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Annie Corcoran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Untitled</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Grace Li</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baby Teeth</td>
<td>31</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Untitled</td>
<td>32</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tension</td>
<td>33</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>34</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Grace Li</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Understanding One’s Own “Otherness”

BY ADRIAN HACKNEY ’19

INTERVIEWEE: ERINMA ONYEWUCHI ’20

What does being an outsider mean to you?
Being an outsider is all about the environment that you’re in, so it’s very subjective. I think that it’s a huge difference between people who see themselves as outsiders versus when people points someone else is an outsider.

“I don’t code-switch for anybody.”

Have you ever felt like an outsider in class?
I have felt like an outsider. In middle school in class, because I was in a small program, which was an advanced humanities program, and it was like 70 kids, and it was mostly white and Asian, but I was at a bigger school where it was predominantly black and Hispanic, so like my friends were black and brown, but I also had friends in the humanities program, and there was a huge separation between the kids at the program and the rest of school, and I felt like an outsider in both areas. I considered myself an outsider in the humanities program, but I think that in the whole school, black and brown kids would point out a white kid and say, “that’s someone who’s not my race.”

Do you ever feel like an outsider at Milton?
Yeah. I do, I think that being an outsider at Milton is more subtle than anywhere else. Because students aren’t always so on to themselves, so I think that it’s always me looking at situations and saying, “I don’t fit there,” which is honestly better because as you grow you start to decide what you like, what you don’t like, who your friends are and aren’t, I find myself separating myself a lot and seeing if I am an outsider in a certain situation.

How does your identity affect your feeling as an outsider at Milton in general?
A lot of the lines that I draw to myself are things based on like race, socio-economic status, and gender, all that kind of stuff, and some of them are good and some of them are bad, but I think it ends up having pushing me in one direction or the other, if I’m around all white people, it would really make me feel like an outsider, and encourage me to jump in and feel comfortable, and like vice versa. When I’m with all black people, it’s going to force me to try to adapt or separate myself, so along with gender lines or race lines, it just has me emphasizing my identity in the room

So when you feel like an outsider, how did you cope with that? What did you do, and how did you respond?
I think the biggest time I felt like an outsider was when I was in middle school, and when I was in middle school, I think I just see the point of trying to figure who I was, I did a lot of self reflection and trying to be self aware. Because when someone else points out that I’m an outsider, I would try to do my own thing and I would feel nervous and insecure. I would try to develop a self-awareness, like you’re able to decide when you’re an outsider in the room.

What are your thoughts on conformity? Do you think it’s necessary, or does it feel like self-betrayal?
Honestly, I struggle with that. Especially coming here, because I don’t
code-switch for anybody, but I think that it’s such a personal choice. I personally feel a certain way when I’m told to code-switch, or to play the game, but I will feel guilty. I think conformity is trash, and feels like betraying myself, so much more often than just playing the game, to just make themselves more palatable. It would feel like a betrayal to me, but I would feel like that when I think a situation requires me to shapeshift. People tend to do more than they have to because it’s comfortable after a while.

**Do you think that you can gain anything from being an outsider?**

**Or is it just a negative experience?**

I think you can definitely gain something from being an outsider. It’s negative, because you don’t feel like you’re included, but I think that for me, I feel like it forces you to be by yourself, and learn about yourself, and learn what you like and don’t like, and it forces you to be really honest. You can’t lie to yourself because you spend so much time alone and you form a rhythm understanding yourself the way people who are always just don’t. And you learn about the people that are excluding you and feel separate from; it’s definitely a learning experience, even though it doesn’t feel good.

---

“If I’m around all white people, it would really make me feel like an outsider.”

If there are people who feel like an outsider, what can we do to make them feel better and belong more, if it is possible?

I definitely think that it’s possible, but I think that there are two different types of outsiders. Outsiders I’m talking about is around the race lines, sexuality and gender lines, and there are people who feel like they are outsiders because they like chemistry or english, and I feel like those two are different. So I think that with race and identity lines, it’s just important to have respect as a basis, let people say their piece, let people talk, and I think that it’s one thing to tell an outsider tell everyone should feel comfortable, and then with you interests, it’s about finding your people and understanding who you are. I think a huge key to navigate through outsiders is basic respect, self awareness. Like, there’s a difference between not liking someone because they’re gay or not liking someone because they didn’t watch a movie.

---

I thought it was interesting how you said you can still be an outsider even when you are part of a group, so do you think that being an outsider is invisible?

Hundred percent. I think that it’s not always people pointing at you and it’s not always super obvious, it’s not somebody yelling at you and saying “get outta here,” or subtle body language. It could be in your head, there could be something that could separate you from other people that people don’t know about excluding people based on different things.

**Is there anything else you want to add?**

I would say that if you feel like an outsider, make a differentiation between what exactly makes you feel that way. I think it’s important to point something and say, “this makes me feel excluded, and this makes me feel included, when I walk into a room, people look like this, and people look like that.” I think being able to decode the secret messages and like the space that you occupy to understand why and how you feel like an outsider can help you learn about yourself and the people around you. •
**Outsider At Home**

**BY TAPTI SEN ’21**

Sometimes, I think that for a South Asian living in the US, I’ve assimilated pretty well. It helps that I was already fluent in English when I moved, but I understand the cultures and norms here too. After living here for almost 3 years now, America feels like just as much a home to me as Bangladesh did. When people discussed their immigrant stories of first adjusting to American culture, I felt like I couldn’t relate because my adjustment was so very easy. However, there are times where I am reminded that yet again, I am an outsider.

“Why should I try to be one or the other?”

From pronouncing everyday words wrong (“It’s yoo-ro-PEE-an, not yoo-RO-pee-an”) and not understanding references to things apparently everyone grew up with (“what do you mean you’ve never watched baseball before?”), sometimes it becomes very clear to me just how much of an outsider I am here. How much I am not American.

But then I get calls from my relatives, and they tease me on how American I’ve become. About how I say “Uh-mer-ica” instead of “Eme-rica”, and the “like” that peppers my sentences. It’s all in good fun, but I can hear the disappointment in their voices as my Bangla becomes more and more accented and more and more English words start slipping in. In a way, it seems like no matter what I do, I’ll always be an outsider. If I act “too Bangladesh”, I’m too ethnic and not trying to fit in. If I act “too American”, I’m trying to be someone I’m not. But why should I try to be one or the other? Why can’t I just accept that I am neither the typical Bangladeshi, nor really American either and just move on with my life?

**Nicaragua.**

**BY SOFIA COEN ’22**

April 18th, 2018. I remember being in class, and slowly saying goodbye to my friends as their parents rushed to pick them up from school, in order to bring them back home—to safety. I called my dad and asked him to pick us up too, it was mostly just to get out of school early, but a part of me was actually afraid of all the violence right outside the gates. When the car arrived, my sisters and I hopped in and began to drive home. I looked out my window and saw people on the roundabout waving blue and white Nicaraguan flags, as a sign that they opposed the dictator. In the days that followed, we would patiently sit staring at our computer screens to find out if classes had been cancelled.

We would go to class one day, and it would be cancelled the next, go to class again, and have to leave early because of marches that were taking place that same afternoon.

On the very first days of the protests, I began to realize that this was not like other protests that had taken place in the past, this time was different, and it was far from over. The first thing that I lost to the protests were sports. I slowly started having fewer and fewer practices, until it became unsafe to stay on campus past 2pm. I then lost all of my extracurriculars, and school became an occasional thing. When they suspended school for the year, and decided to have it online instead, I was no longer allowed to leave my house. We had daily family discussions about leaving the country, and what our next moves were.

I remember the first protest I attended. The waves of people with giant Nicaraguan flags. But the sea of blue and white is not what I remember most. The most prominent memories of the protest were the gunshots that followed.

The masses of people running somewhere safe. The gunshots are the reason why we left. We couldn’t live in the uncertainty of whether we would be the next to go. Then, I came to Milton. When I came to Milton I still didn’t have a home. People would ask me where I was from, and I would respond “Nicaragua.” I didn’t explain that I didn’t know where I was going to go ‘home’ during long weekends or the holidays.

I felt scared and alone; I thought no one understood me. Not having a home made me feel like an outsider. As my mom and sisters settled down in an apartment in the United States, I began to realize that although Nicaragua would always be my home, I could also find a home in people. I met more and more people I could talk to, people that helped me.

“I may feel like an outsider, but I enjoy that.”

Making Milton my home helped me realize that all my concerns about Nicaragua and everything else were valid. I no longer felt alone, hopeless. However, I was still confused and anxious, and from time to time, I still get panic attacks, and cry about not being able to go back to the place I grew up. I may feel like an outsider, but I enjoy that. Being an outsider has made me more aware of other people’s situations. It has made me more open minded, and while I still sometimes lay awake thinking of the nightmare I lived through, I realize that I am strong, and I will get through this.
Que Bonita Bandera

BY AMAYA SANGURIMA-JIMENEZ ’19

This is San Jose Street in the historic district of Puerto Rico. It’s a pretty famous landmark on the island that was painted over black and white to mourn all the suffering of the island and a call to action to distance ourselves from the United States by literally painting over the red, white, and blue.
**Voices of the “Other”**

**BY ANDY ZHANG ’20**

**INTERVIEWEES: STEFAN ALEKSIC ’20, SNEHA JAISWAL ’22, LYNN YUAN ’21**

**Introduce yourself!**

*LY:* My name is Lynn Yuan. I was born in Kunming, China, but moved to Beijing at a young age, and then moved to Vancouver, Canada when I was five. When I was eleven, I moved to Hong Kong, and last year, I came to Milton. During the holidays, I go back to a combination of Guiyang (my mother’s hometown) and Beijing, but I can’t say for certain where I am from. I like to draw, sing, write, and read.

*SA:* My name is Stefan Aleksic- I’m an international boarder living in Forbes House. I live with my parents in Saudi Arabia, but I’m Canadian and Serbian. At Milton, I’m in Varsity Swim and I dance on Milton’s Latinx and Caribbean dance team, Ritmo.

*SJ:* My name is Sneha Jaiswal, and I’m in Class IV. My parents were born and raised in India, and they immigrated to the US a few years before I was born.

**With some examples from your lives, how do you think differences unite and/or divide people within your culture?**

*LY:* I think our differences are what makes us unique and amazing, and it is always cool to see people’s different perspectives on everything. However, often people find difficulty in relating when other people are discussing their own culture and identity, and this devalues that person’s identity.

“**I think in general we are just a community of outsiders.**”

*SA:* The definition of ‘my culture’ has always been a loaded question from me, because being Serbian comes with vastly different connotations than being Canadian does. Firstly, I want to clarify that I’m not Saudi, I happen to live there because of my dad’s work. From the way I carry myself and the way I talk, people assume I’m American, but are then relieved when I explain that I am Canadian. As a little kid, my mom always told me not to tell people that we were Serbian because of the negative connotation it carried, especially after the Bosnian War. Serbians were looked down upon by the powerful Western countries, so it was better to not let people judge me for that before knowing me for myself. Within my culture, both Canadians and Serbians have really strong patriotic values, so it’s always fun to meet people from either. Usually we’ll click instantly just because of how we kind of belong to the same ‘tribe’.

*SJ:* In Indian culture, there are many differences between the North and South, particularly when it comes to religion, language, and food. These differences make Indian culture more interesting as a whole, and in my experience with my peers, they don’t have any effect. However, in my parents’ generation, the differences in values create some prejudice.

**How do you see the theme of “outsider” playing out in your own home and family?**

*LY:* When I go back to China, I am an outsider, mostly because I have not really ever lived there. I am also an outsider to my extended family, because I have not been seeing them on a yearly basis. I am also an outsider in Vancouver, due to my further cultural experiences, and now, because I no longer have any ties to Hong Kong, I am also an outsider there.

*SA:* As many other ‘Aramcons’ can attest, living as an expatriate in Saudi Arabia is challenging and unique. If people haven’t experienced that kind of life, they’ll never understand everything you’ve been through, so I guess I’ll always be an outsider in that respect.

*SJ:* In my extended family, the theme of “outsider” played out when my brother and I visited India when I was younger, and we struggled with communication with family members because of the language barrier.
Where do you feel like you belong the most? The least?

LY: I personally don't feel much personal attachment to any city or place. I have some attachment to my childhood home in Canada, but because I haven't lived there in so many years, it doesn't feel like "home". I feel attachment to relatives in Guiyang, but I also do not feel at home there.

SA: I grew up immersed in diversity, so I am most comfortable around a diverse group of people, especially people who I grew up with as we do share that unique experience of living in Saudi. In my experience, I usually see people hang out with a group of people that are exact copies of themselves, and I find that boring. I think that the world is filled with a variety of people who have so much to bring and share that sticking around people who are most similar to you can be both comforting but also limited. I truly do believe that our interactions with each other as a global community shape our characters and help us grow as individuals. As a result, I think I’m most uncomfortable around individuals who don’t bring new experiences to my life or who can’t help me grow as a person.

SJ: I feel a sense of belonging in both the US and in India; I’ve always lived in the US, so here is where I am comfortable, but I’ve also maintained a close connection with India and its culture- from food, to movies, to language. It’s hard to not feel like an outsider when the ‘main’ Asians are East Asians.

Fitting in. What do those words mean to you, and what are your experiences with fitting in?

LY: Fitting in has always been a default for me, and I’ve gotten used to changing myself and my actions to fit with my new living climate. All the schools and communities I’ve been a part of have been vastly different, so I’ve developed and grown differently thanks to that.

SA: To me ‘fitting in’ means finding a place in your immediate community where you feel like you have a group a individuals who validate and support your evolution as a person. My experience with fitting in has been simple- take 100% of my flaws and all or don’t. If you’re not willing to be there for me for any reason big or small, there is no reason for me to pursue a deeper connection with you. I’ve never been one to try and mold myself to my surroundings and change myself just for the sake of fitting in. Milton p It’s hard to not feel like an outsider when the ‘main’ Asians are East Asians. artecularly has an issue with that, which is ironic considering everyone swears they’re being real. If I fit in or not, I don’t care. I know who my true friends are and that’s all that matters to me.

SJ: When I was younger, my mom said I was lucky that I was fairer than other Indians. She told me to be careful in summer in case I got too tanned and praised me for becoming fairer in the winter. I had never paid any attention to the ways I didn't fit in until the people around me put the thought into my mind that those differences were worthy of shame.

It’s hard to not feel like an outsider when the ‘main’ Asians are East Asians.”

In what ways would you consider yourself an “outsider” at Milton, if at all?

LY: I consider myself an outsider in the way that I am an international student, so I am an outsider to American holidays and traditions, but otherwise, I do not consider myself much of an outsider.

SA: Honestly, though it may come as a cliché, anyone attending Milton Academy is an outsider. We all come from different places and backgrounds which can both alienate and bring our community together. We’re a giant mix of nerds, jocks, and artists whose shared experience creates this community. Of course, Milton isn’t perfect and shared experiences can cause friction, but I think in general we are just a community of outsiders.

SJ: Milton is more diverse than any school I’ve attended before, but even within the large Asian community, there are very few South Asians. Even ‘Asian Society’, which claims to be inclusive of all Asians, still has an all East Asian board and a dabbing panda as its logo. It's hard to not feel like an outsider when the 'main' Asians are East Asians.
The Bedroom

BY ERIN BRADY ’19
A Reflection on Being Chinese When the Heart is Too Weak

BY SARAH HSU ’19

Every time you take the train to school, you decide that the platform looks like the kind of place where the world would end. You look at the rust stains dripping down concrete and the trash can half-sunken in the ground. Your heart twists when you imagine how everything used to be when it was new, when people wouldn’t pretend to not exist.

You know that Phillip wants to fly, and you’re ninety-seven percent sure it’s in a metaphorical sense. He doesn’t tell anyone what he wants, ever, but you’ve spent enough time with him (only two years, ever since you moved into this town, but still enough) to get a glimpse of his ambition, a trick of the light. You watch his restlessness manifest itself when he raises his hand in Chinese school to read the lyrics to a song about a sparrow. That lesson puts his participation tally at one, and you know it’ll show in his final grade. You’ve told him so, and he hasn’t given you a reaction of distress, so you’ve left him alone about it since then.

You learn to exist for people only when it’s convenient. When it’s not, you find yourself pushed to the side, squeezed out of the center of the room into corners that you learn to claim as your own. The corners are nice, you think, memorizing the cracks in the tile, where space has forced itself into places it isn’t supposed to be. When you do get dragged from your corner into the scrutiny of your classmates, people think you and Phillip are so special because of your dark, not-really-black-in-the-light hair and your monolid eyes. They ask you, “What’s my Chinese name?” and you tell them that they don’t have one since they aren’t Chinese, but they ask you to make one up for them anyway. Phillip gives them names, stinky fart kid and idiot, and they run off, happily butchering the pronunciation. You don’t even try correcting them or telling them what the words actually mean. They won’t listen to you. Besides, Phillip seems to think it’s justice at its finest.

“You learn to exist for people only when it’s convenient.”

You look into the classroom across the hall to see three other Chinese students, you look out your window to see your Chinese neighbors, and you realize how expendable everyone thinks you are when you’re confused with somebody else for the fifth time that week. You snort at the hypocrisy of the people who clamor for everyone’s voices to be heard but refuse to acknowledge stories of injustice when they come from you or Phillip or Amber or anyone else who’s ever been told to be a good member of society and to let every piece of shit that’s thrown at them pass over their heads— The shame you feel upon processing your own bitterness makes you want to throw yourself off a bridge.

A classmate of yours asks Phillip why the two of you go home so early after school, why you care about your grades so much. God, why are Asians such hardos? Phillip shoots back without hesitation, “You’re not even that bad, but if we got the grades you get, we’d be called stupid.” The people around him drop into silence, and from your corner, with your earbuds in but devoid of sound, you see Phillip’s right leg trembling, and you can tell that he knows there’s no escape from the social mine he just tossed himself into.

One day, you catch the sunset on your way home from school as your train sweeps over a bridge. Your eyes chase the last licks of light spilling over buildings turned golden, and to make up for the pockets of shadow where the sunlight can’t reach, the light intensifies on places it can. You decide you like this kind of desperate sunset, and you look over at Phillip next to you to get his opinion, and for a second, you’re mesmerized by the sun, washing his hair chestnut, turning half of him into light, but then you blink, and his eyes are closed, cheek pillowed on his armrest. •
"You’re not a real Asian"

By Asia Chung ’19

"YOU are a BANANA, YELLOW on the OUTSIDE but WHITE on the INSIDE" - Friend

By Sophia Li ’19

"WHAT ARE YOU?"

By Pari Palandjian ’20

"YOU SHOULD EAT MORE"

By Annie Corcoran ’20

I Too Am Milton: A Series
A Letter To An Outsider Like Me

BY JOSHUA HWANG '19

Eventually I attained what I perceived as “American,” and “not other” - at least on the most superficial level. I could speak their language as well as any other child my age could. I believed myself to be immersed in the American culture, a true American kid. I read Magic Tree House and watched Curious George. My name wasn’t Yee June, it was Joshua.

One day I got back from school to see my mom pulling out a book from her bag. Seeing the spine, I rushed over to her lap only to be confused when I read a gibberish language, the characters curled and spiked in ways that were faintly familiar, yet completely alien.

It was Korean.

Yet, even while knowing I had forgotten my native language, I felt no concern. After all, my identity was not Korean - I was an American. In what circumstance would I possibly have to use Korean?

Turns out that such a circumstance was imminent, and only an year from then.

“We’re moving back to Korea,” my mother explained.

The reality was crushing. Just when I felt like I belonged, as if I had shed my outsider status in lieu of a better, shinier, American one, my family decided to move back to my home country. Korea, a land the size of an American state - a country I had forgotten about.

I landed on my home soil in April 2010.

And just like that, I was an outsider again.

Only this time, it was worse. I looked like all the others - no different, in fact, in Korea’s racially homogeneous society. Adults spoke to me in Korean, and when I responded to them in a broken line of words, they glanced disapprovingly. I was an outsider in an insider’s body, at conflict in every sense of the word. Being old enough to notice these things was a cursed knowledge - I pined after my oblivious, blundering youth.

I was a loner, not because of my looks or my personality, but because no one understood me. In the simplest terms, I was ashamed. I turned my head or tried to hide when someone spoke Korean to me.

My previous triumph went to waste, for now I was an outsider once more. I hated the feeling with a passion, an emotion compounded every time kids would laugh at me for not being able to respond to the teacher’s question properly.

For the longest time, I wished to move back to the United States so I could speak English again.

“I spoke in Korean less and less—eventually, not at all.”

ty - there was an invisible yet solid obstacle in the classroom. A barrier I had yet to realize was language. It was especially frustrating for my younger self because it was such an intangible obstruction. I was used to pushing things out of the way or crying if I couldn’t; unfortunately, being a foreigner was something no amount of bawling could remedy.

Yet it was something that I strived to change, and with a passion. I would sit at the dining table every day after school, religiously committing the alphabet and English pronunciation to memory. I tore through books with a hunger.

My conversations with my parents would be dominated with the newest words I had learned in English. I spoke in Korean less and less—eventually, not at all. “American” was what I wanted to become, and Americans spoke English. So I did, too. As far as I was concerned, Korean was a foreign language, a thing of the past, wholly irrelevant to my existence.

Eventually I attained what I perceived as “American,” and “not other” - at least on the most superficial level. I could speak their language as well as any other child my age could. I believed myself to be immersed in the American culture, a true American kid. I read Magic Tree House and watched Curious George. My name wasn’t Yee June, it was Joshua.

One day I got back from school to see my mom pulling out a book from her bag. Seeing the spine, I rushed over to her lap only to be confused when I read a gibberish language, the characters curled and spiked in ways that were faintly familiar, yet completely alien.

It was Korean.

Yet, even while knowing I had forgotten my native language, I felt no concern. After all, my identity was not Korean - I was an American. In what circumstance would I possibly have to use Korean?

Turns out that such a circumstance was imminent, and only an year from then.

“We’re moving back to Korea,” my mother explained.

The reality was crushing. Just when I felt like I belonged, as if I had shed my outsider status in lieu of a better, shinier, American one, my family decided to move back to my home country. Korea, a land the size of an American state - a country I had forgotten about.

I landed on my home soil in April 2010.

And just like that, I was an outsider again.

Only this time, it was worse. I looked like all the others - no different, in fact, in Korea’s racially homogeneous society. Adults spoke to me in Korean, and when I responded to them in a broken line of words, they glanced disapprovingly. I was an outsider in an insider’s body, at conflict in every sense of the word. Being old enough to notice these things was a cursed knowledge - I pined after my oblivious, blundering youth.

I was a loner, not because of my looks or my personality, but because no one understood me. In the simplest terms, I was ashamed. I turned my head or tried to hide when someone spoke Korean to me.

My previous triumph went to waste, for now I was an outsider once more. I hated the feeling with a passion, an emotion compounded every time kids would laugh at me for not being able to respond to the teacher’s question properly.

For the longest time, I wished to move back to the United States so I could speak English again.

“I spoke in Korean less and less—eventually, not at all.”

Eventually I attained what I perceived as “American,” and “not other” - at least on the most superficial level. I could speak their language as well as any other child my age could. I believed myself to be immersed in the American culture, a true American kid. I read Magic Tree House and watched Curious George. My name wasn’t Yee June, it was Joshua.

One day I got back from school to see my mom pulling out a book from her bag. Seeing the spine, I rushed over to her lap only to be confused when I read a gibberish language, the characters curled and spiked in ways that were faintly familiar, yet completely alien.

It was Korean.

Yet, even while knowing I had forgotten my native language, I felt no concern. After all, my identity was not Korean - I was an American. In what circumstance would I possibly have to use Korean?

Turns out that such a circumstance was imminent, and only an year from then.

“We’re moving back to Korea,” my mother explained.

The reality was crushing. Just when I felt like I belonged, as if I had shed my outsider status in lieu of a better, shinier, American one, my family decided to move back to my home country. Korea, a land the size of an American state - a country I had forgotten about.

I landed on my home soil in April 2010.

And just like that, I was an outsider again.

Only this time, it was worse. I looked like all the others - no different, in fact, in Korea’s racially homogeneous society. Adults spoke to me in Korean, and when I responded to them in a broken line of words, they glanced disapprovingly. I was an outsider in an insider’s body, at conflict in every sense of the word. Being old enough to notice these things was a cursed knowledge - I pined after my oblivious, blundering youth.

I was a loner, not because of my looks or my personality, but because no one understood me. In the simplest terms, I was ashamed. I turned my head or tried to hide when someone spoke Korean to me.

My previous triumph went to waste, for now I was an outsider once more. I hated the feeling with a passion, an emotion compounded every time kids would laugh at me for not being able to respond to the teacher’s question properly.

For the longest time, I wished to move back to the United States so I could speak English again.

“I spoke in Korean less and less—eventually, not at all.”

Eventually I attained what I perceived as “American,” and “not other” - at least on the most superficial level. I could speak their language as well as any other child my age could. I believed myself to be immersed in the American culture, a true American kid. I read Magic Tree House and watched Curious George. My name wasn’t Yee June, it was Joshua.

One day I got back from school to see my mom pulling out a book from her bag. Seeing the spine, I rushed over to her lap only to be confused when I read a gibberish language, the characters curled and spiked in ways that were faintly familiar, yet completely alien.

It was Korean.

Yet, even while knowing I had forgotten my native language, I felt no concern. After all, my identity was not Korean - I was an American. In what circumstance would I possibly have to use Korean?

Turns out that such a circumstance was imminent, and only an year from then.

“We’re moving back to Korea,” my mother explained.

The reality was crushing. Just when I felt like I belonged, as if I had shed my outsider status in lieu of a better, shinier, American one, my family decided to move back to my home country. Korea, a land the size of an American state - a country I had forgotten about.

I landed on my home soil in April 2010.

And just like that, I was an outsider again.

Only this time, it was worse. I looked like all the others - no different, in fact, in Korea’s racially homogeneous society. Adults spoke to me in Korean, and when I responded to them in a broken line of words, they glanced disapprovingly. I was an outsider in an insider’s body, at conflict in every sense of the word. Being old enough to notice these things was a cursed knowledge - I pined after my oblivious, blundering youth.

I was a loner, not because of my looks or my personality, but because no one understood me. In the simplest terms, I was ashamed. I turned my head or tried to hide when someone spoke Korean to me.

My previous triumph went to waste, for now I was an outsider once more. I hated the feeling with a passion, an emotion compounded every time kids would laugh at me for not being able to respond to the teacher’s question properly.

For the longest time, I wished to move back to the United States so I could speak English again.

“I spoke in Korean less and less—eventually, not at all.”
When I was little, I used to put my left hand on my chest and hold my breath. Waiting for the faint pumping I would feel under my skin, I would stiffen into a statue. Once I felt those tell-tale beats, I would take my hand off and conclude that it was still alive. If I ran too fast, I would press my hand chest in pain as I felt it thrashing around my ribcage. This thing inside of me was alive, separate from myself. It moved without my command. It felt foreign. It ruled my chest in a beastly manner, doing what it wanted when it wanted. As I lay still in bed, I could feel it moving in my body because it never slept.

“They both flipped their American brown hair and leered at my feet.”

I overslept my alarm and woke up ten minutes before school. The first day of middle school was in just hours. I ran downstairs to eat a quick breakfast in my back to school outfit. My mother had let me pick a new shirt, skirt, and shoes for the first day of school from that popular clothing that would sell ripped t-shirts for $50. She never usually let us buy extra things. The smell of kimchi creeped up the stairs to meet me as I almost tripped in a hurry.

I scrambled onto the chair at the kitchen table and my mom placed a steaming bowl of spicy pickled cucumbers, kimchi, egg, and rice in front of my watering mouth. Shoving the food down, I felt the big lump travel down my throat and into my chest, making it feel tight. It stopped moving once it reached right between my lungs, and my mom had to come over and hit my back so that I could swallow properly. She looked at me from across the marble table the whole time I was eating. Absentmindedly, she was fumbling with her yellow-gold chain, pressing it into her chest until it turned red. The second I finished she swooped in and took the bowl.

“You feeling ok?” she said.

“Oh mom, I’m fine, I gotta go,” I said. She opened her arms and instinctively I folded into them.

“Make some new friends,” she whispered in my ear, “and do your best at school.” She held me for a couple more seconds, tight, like I was a flight risk. Her chest was pressed against me so I could feel the beating of it in her. It was slower than mine. I settled in her softness, her beast reached out from under her bones and rested its warmth next to mine. My chest felt lighter. My arms reached around and touched her shoulder blades, feeling her wings bristling from her back. I had never seen her fly.

“Oh mom, I’m really late,” I started towards the door but before I could leave my mom handed me the new lunchbox I had gotten.

“‡§¶¶¶! (Fighting/You can do this!”) my mom yelled in the doorway as I ran to the bus stop a block away. My new sneakers hurt to move in, not flexible like my lungs that were fluctuating with effort. I picked up speed, my little monster inside squeezed with anticipation. I got to the stop and saw some other older kids in a circle, kicking dirt and laughing. With my mind, I measured ten feet and stayed that far away from the kids as I pretended to be interested in my new shoes. They were Converse lace ups, neon green. My mom helped me pick them out at the store.

She had seen them on the store display and made me buy them. They were the most vibrant shoes she had ever seen. I liked how they reflected green light off of them in the rising sun—grass on concrete.

It was just the kids, me, and a sparrow that was sitting on a telephone pole for five minutes at the bus stop. It glanced at me then opened its thin wings and spun away. I kept my eyes trained on it until a I heard a powerful, low pitched scream. I whirled around and saw the school bus honking and spitting its way to the stop.

The bus pulled up and I got in the back of the line to board it. The bus driver yelled at me to find a place to put my ass when I entered, so I scurried to the last empty row in the middle of the bus. The bus doors closed with a satisfying hiss. There were three girls my age chatting in the row behind me. Remembering my mother’s words, I held my breath and turned to make eye contact with one of them. Her green eyes dilated as she saw my face. She looked down at me.

“Cool shoes, where were they made? China?” she said, loud enough so her two friends could hear. They both flipped their American brown hair and leered at my feet. The animal inside of me was purring, as a cat does before it pounces on a flying bird. The one to the left of the green eyed girl snorted as if she had drunk something toxic and the one to the right made eye contact with both her friends, raising her plucked eyebrows into perfect upside-down Us. My chest started feeling heavy and I turned around to face the seat in front of me, tracing the dried up gum and sharpied in insults. The pumping was increasing and I felt myself being jolted by its power. Before I knew it, my shoulders were shaking and I
stuffed my face in my hands. I took deep breaths to make it stop, but it kept squeezing my chest so tight it was hard to breathe. The world tiled around me.

At school bodies moved against me so that every step I took I was pushed back. The dim hallways were filled with energy that I couldn’t feel. It was finally recess. Everyone was in their own pods of friends in the school yard, so I went to the closest one.

“Isn’t Emma Stone the most prettiest actress ever?” exclaimed one girl.

“No way, Jennifer Lawrence is better.”

“But Blake Lively has perfect hair.”

“I really like Jennifer Aniston,” I said, seeing the pattern. Ballooning air from my mouth turned into a thick, yellow, fume that smelled terrible and wrong, like kimchi and pickles. I felt this air coming from within my chest, as if my monster had been smoking a korean joint. One girl with curls that defied gravity clamped two thin and translucent fingers on her nose. Making eye contact with her other friends they all giggled and gagged. My chest was contorting so much it made me breathless. The two girls next to me started edging closer to the middle, effectively cutting me off. I slowly backed away like I was trying not to startle a flock of birds, not too fast but fast enough for my redding cheeks. I waved my hands in front of me, trying to dispel this cloud of smells but it followed me everywhere. Cupping my hands together I smelled my breath and the thing in my chest seemed to have jumped down into my stomach along with my smelly breakfast.

The bell rang and I flew inside. I sat in my classes but couldn’t hear what the teachers were saying. Everything was background noise. In English class the windows were open and I saw an American Goldfinch, those yellow, petite birds that I read about for science homework. Sleeping on the tree outside our window, it ruffled its feathers and glittered almost gold in the sunlight. Mesmerized, I wondered what its life was like, not having school and being free to spread its wings and fly. All it had to do was sit on that warm branch and soak up the sun. My chest started to frantically beat against its walls. I was confused until a long shadow overtook the bird’s sunlight. A crow had come to the same branch, causing the Goldfinch to be pushed out of sight. With a loud caw, it alerted the whole class to its presence and even my teacher stopped to admire the crows glossy black feathers and large physic. I wanted the yellow bird to come back.

Lunch time came around at 12:30 and I walked to the cafeteria. I got to my locker and took out my new, Hello Kitty lunchbox. Excited to eat what my mother had made me this morning, I traced over the kitten with huge eyes and the pink, frilly border. My grandmother had bought this for me and sent it all the way from Virginia. I hugged it close to my chest, feeling my monster beat against the metal sides. Taking it by its handles I walked to the cafeteria.

“ It felt like [my heart] was trying to fly out of my chest.”

I pushed open the heavy doors and was assaulted by the clamour of lunch time. Most people had bought lunch, but I did see some other lunchboxes as well which soothed the increased throbbing in my chest. Finding an empty table, I neatly sat down, flattening my skirt under me. I was about to take out the white rice container when I saw a shadow coming up behind me. Not wanting to look back, I focused on taking out all the separate containers and arranging them in no particular order.

“Look what she has now!” a voice behind me said.

“Is that even food?”

“I’m gonna puke”

The beast inside me was seizing so fast, I thought it would damage my lungs. Taking a shaky breath, I turned to face them. There they were, flipping their American brown hair and chewing minty fresh gum. I opened my mouth to speak but nothing came out, only the same cloud of yellow smells. They all stepped back to avoid it, laughing and holding their nose for the world to see.

“What is that two year old box you have there” one of them said.

“Oh I know, Herro Kitty” another said, using her middle fingers to pull her eyes to a slant. They all doubled over laughing, but my chest felt like it was on fire. I had to pinch my thigh in order to not cry out. The pain was growing with every sound coming from their mouths. Blindly, I stuffed my food back in my pink lunchbox and tried to fly to the door. Just as I was ten feet away from the exit, I tripped over my neon converse and my food went flying everywhere. Kimchi juice splattered my new, white shirt like I had been stabbed repeatedly in the chest. Not bothering to pick any of it up, I grabbed my lunchbox and ran.

I sprinted to the bathroom. I didn’t care if anyone was already in here. I found the smallest stall I could and locked myself in it. I couldn’t stop the convulsions in my chest. The blindingly white walls were squeezing me even tighter. The beast kept beating faster and faster. I banged on my chest. I begged it to stop. It felt like it was trying to fly out of my chest. I pushed my hand between my two breasts and felt it. It was snarling. Pushing further I reached within my cage of ribs and for the first time, touched it. It was more soft, like life, than I imagined. It was no bigger than my fist. After one particularly strong convulsion, agony spread from my chest to the tips of my fingers. My hand was still touching my torture. This flesh had grown with me and had anchored itself with my cells. I knew I needed to take it out for this all to stop, needed a quiet, docile chest. With a pull, I ripped it from my chest and my body went still. My new green sneakers were now soaked a deep purple. My monster sat in my hands. It felt familiar in some distant way. I was surprised it didn’t have any wings to fly away. Unconsciously, I stroked it as it strained to beat. There was a yellowish fat that was tightened around it; no matter how hard I pulled it wouldn’t come off. I sat on the chilling floor, cradling my heart. My monster was curled up, shivering against the cold it wasn’t used to. I found my lunchbox. I placed it in my lunchbox on the toilet seat. I unlocked the stall. I walked out of the bathroom and never felt back in me.
I’ve been excited for this night ever since
I found his number in the phone book.
A street lamp winks as I find my place
On the bench outside the restaurant.

It’s a good day,
even as the drizzle poofs the curls
I spent half a bottle of hairspray on.
I won’t be sitting for long.

Cars flood the street.
My eyes search for a certain silver Mazda
in an ocean of Subarus.
I see one,
two,
seven.
They all pass me.

My head tilts back and
my eyes lock onto the twinkling families above.
Imaginary lines connect cousins to aunts,
Mothers to in-laws,
Fathers to daughters.

A whole world of constellations
gracing the sky,
reflecting life down below.

Well,
some of it.
This series of photographs entitled Tension embodies the relationship between expression and the limits of the physical body. Through the articulation of the body in a way that pushes the limits of the human form, I wanted to express the cathartic experience of creating.
Do You See What I See?

BY ASIA CHUNG ’19

I have always hated my eyes. People always ask me if I’m sure I can actually see. Yes... I am. My prescription is only -1.25, but I believe they are not referring to my glasses, but my slanted eyes. It also didn't help that they were dirt-coloured. I used to beg my mom to buy me coloured contacts so I could have blue or green eyes. She said no. Then, as I got older and started learning about makeup, I would try to recreate fancy looks by celebrities, all who had very big eyelids and bigger eyes. I tried eyelid tape, eyelid glue, but nothing worked to increase the size of my eyelids. I feel like over the years, having monolids and hooded eyes has become trendier, and so I have become more okay with my own eyes. Is it sad that I can only find confidence in the social prominence of bodily features rather than knowing my own unique and personal definition of beauty? yes. but that’s a problem you have to take up with the Eurocentric standards of beauty I guess.

I knew I wanted to play with the idea of a handheld mirror, where the viewer picks it up and looks into it. However, they see me, tugging and stretching my eyes, the gesture people would do when making fun of my eyes. The continuation of the paint onto the frame started as an accident, but I thought that it made the piece stand out more, and elevated the depth. This isn’t just a physical insecurity, but an existential insecurity. Why was I born with these eyes? Do you see what I see when I look into the mirror? A slit-eyed chink.*
Cross Country While Black, An Interview

BY VICTORIA JISOO HAN '19

INTERVIEWEE: KENYA MATHIEU '19

What sports do you play?
I do cross country and track, but I also used to play varsity basketball.

Since when have you been on cross country teams?
Since middle school.

Have you always been the only black girl on the team?
In middle school there were about three to five of us but when I got to Milton Academy, there was one, but she quit, so no.

Have you had coaches of color before?
Outside of School.

“sometimes I feel like I conform to white culture”

How do you think that affects your social life (or the lack thereof) in the team?
I mean… sometimes it’s weird because my hair is straightened or something and we go on a run outside when it’s raining. I can’t just be like “Oh… I can’t go because of my hair.” I just have to go and it gets messed up and it’s annoying. A lot of other people don’t have to think about that because they have straight hair and they can just blow dry it afterwards. And sometimes I feel like I conform to white culture, like the leggings, and whatever you wear, it has to be nice or something.

Has it ever affected your personal interactions with the teammates?
Um… not really. It is what it is. But I will say that when I was on varsity basketball, it was easier, because there were other black girls on the team to talk about stuff around black culture.

How do you think that affects your performance as an athlete?
I don’t think it affects my performance, really, cross country is the only sport that is like that. It makes me happier to see people like me on the same team, but if I don’t, it doesn’t affect the way I perform.

Do you think the coaches ever recognize that?
Probably not. Because they’re stuck in their own little bubble, or like I guess they are color blind or don’t see the difference…? Or because I’m the only one it might just not matter.

Do you and your teammates talk about racial inequality or your experiences as a black girl in general?
No. I mean we did one time because we were talking about affirmative action, and then I was like telling them how white women benefit from affirmative action the most, so I guess that’s the only time that’s happened. There might have been other times, but I don’t really remember. Because we were talking about college, and affirmative action, and we were talking about the misconceptions of it, and then, I said, “well, another misconception is…” [that white women have advantages as well.]

Have you talked to your teammates about being the only black girl on the team?
Nope. I don’t think I would feel comfortable.

“certain people think that girls’ sports are not good or girls are weak”

Which part of your identity makes you feel more of an outsider as an athlete: being a girl, or being black?
Overall, being a girl, at this school, not gonna name names, but certain people think that girls’ sports are not good or girls are weak. And I think that you can even see it in the fans. More people will show up for boys’ sports more than girls’ sports. And even if they do, they would make fun of them if they make a mistake or something, but if a guy makes a mistake, it’s like fine. And I see that more often in the winter season, especially basketball. The girls don’t have as much fans as the guys, and that’s sad. Also the whole sports bra thing, that was in the Paper article, it happened in the cross country meet. I guess it would be fine to say that everyone needs to have a shirt on, but if you say it the girls and not to the guys, then it’s not fair. So being a female definitely affects… not my performance, but self esteem when playing sports.

When do you feel most like an outsider?
Probably in like class, especially when we’re talking “being a female definitely affects not my performance, but self esteem when playing sports.”

something about race but you’re the only person of color, and most of the books that we read are about the black experience, the immigrant experience, the Asian experience… One day, my English teacher was like, “so Jackson, what do you think this says about Asian culture?” and he was like, “I don’t know, because I’m not this specific type of Asian, like I can’t speak on behalf of the black experience or the immigrant experience.” Automatically placing labels on people because they are part of this group. That, I definitely see that a lot.

Has it ever affected your personal interactions with the coaches?
No. I mean we did one time because we were talking about affirmative action, and then I was like telling them how white women benefit from affirmative action the most, so I guess that’s the only time that’s happened. There might have been other times, but I don’t really remember. Because we were talking about college, and affirmative action, and we were talking about the misconceptions of it, and then, I said, “well, another misconception is…” [that white women have advantages as well.]

I guess I can talk more about the affirmative action. So basically a lot of people think that affirmative action is just made so that people of color and can get into college more easier than white people, and like because of affirmative action, you will automatically get into a college just because of the color of your skin. That is not true, because, one, colleges can’t have quotas, and two, with people of different background, colleges want to create a community that is representative the country, they should be accepted because they have their qualifications, like their test scores, grades, and extracurriculars were good. And, they can provide a different perspective because they are a person of color. That is the last thing if they do consider a black person, or Asian, or Hispanic. I think that a lot of people think that it is something that we need to dismantle because it is a problem, especially with the Harvard case.*
Art
BY EVITA THADHANI ’20

Art
is the knife
of Roman sculptures,
carving women
clayed in time,
stuck

it is mixed in the oil
of A Sunday Afternoon,
glossed over bustled ladies,
paled as the clouds
blocking heaven

it blooms around the curves
of their bodies,
sketched by men
who love the seriousness
of sunken eyes

it creeps from Picasso’s
distortions,
flirts with the pinks and reds
of angled faces
lingers in the pretty white face of Rosie,
riveting through lipsticked lips

it is the smoothness of magazine covers,
the coconut oiled limbs of tanned women
flaunting

it is not the sun
glittering my grandmother’s grey hairs,
the wisps she no longer plucks from her chin.

it is not the way my sister’s eyes
crunch when she smiles, the way
she licks her fingers when eating fruit.

Art is not how my mother wakes me,
not the soft music tugging sleep nor
the light she whispers around opened curtains,
not the movements I feel across the room,
her body a cloud,
drifting through my blurred awakening,
angelike, beautiful.

Untitled
BY ADRIAN HACKNEY ’19

Untitled
BY ADRIAN HACKNEY ’19
我不说牙买加语

我不说牙买加语 translates as ‘I don’t speak Jamaican’ from Mandarin to English. This piece blends two of my identities together: being Jamaican and Chinese. The dragon painted in the background represents my Chinese zodiac symbol, the dragon. Specifically, I am a golden/metal dragon since I was born in the start of a new millennium.

White is also associated with metal, as it is used as its color representative in the Chinese Element system. People often ask me to ‘say something in Jamaican,’ which is inherently incorrect, because ‘Jamaican’ is not a language; we speak a dialect of English known as patois. This question is also double sided, as it is often asked for me to prove my Jamaican-ness, which is not something I should ever have to prove. People seem to think that only black people can be from Jamaica, when, in reality, there is a whole demographic of many, many other races and ethnicities. The irony, however, is that I also don’t speak Chinese. I was never taught by my great-grandmother, who was the last person in my family to speak Chinese. This text was kindly translated by my roommate (thanks Jen), who has slowly been teaching me bits of Mandarin. My annoyed facial expression is usually my reaction to whenever people ask me to ‘speak Jamaican.’
Mental illness doesn’t reside only in white walled hospitals or Adderall it lives

in the crease from a hair tie too tight for a wrist

in the slurred words of a father with a belt in his hand

in the pursed lips of a mother who holds a report card

in the smoke at a time too late to go to sleep and too early to wake up

in the lipstick in a hand of a girl in a boy’s bathroom

and in a bruise of love of lust or lust of love

you didn’t know you could feel dead without being dead.

KUWAIT

BY NATASHA ROY ’19
Hiding

BY LYNN YUAN ’21
The Dinner Table

Food is an integral part of our lives. Of course, we need nourishment to survive, but our cuisines also express who we are. Cultural dishes can make us feel closer to our roots, but in doing so, they also announce to the world that we have roots somewhere else: we are other. And though good food brings everyone together, it’s often the moments when we sit around dinner tables with our families that can feel the most ostracizing. Food has a unique ability both to unite us and and drive us apart. Here are some students’ stories in which food has sparked pain, comfort, or both.

Untitled

BY PARKER HITT ’19
Zhajiang is black fermented soy bean paste. Zhajiang mian, then, is noodles with black paste. Think miso, only much more drastic and hearty. I love zhajiang mian—the nutty, savory flavor seeps right into the tofu and perfectly complements a typical Shanghainese supper of hand-rolled noodles and pickled vegetables.

It’s the most frequently ordered item off of the Chinese version of DoorDash—the dish you eat when your mom is giving you crap about your grades, when your boyfriend has just cheated on you, or when you’re feeling so fat that the only rational thing to do is to eat something extremely delicious and full of fat (none of the listed are necessarily personal).

“**That kitchen always has some exotic smell on Friday nights.**”

When I was younger, my father would venture out beyond our own kitchen and take me and my cousin into the city—two kids in the backseat of a Volkswagen hatchback with no mission but to eat his favorite noodles for lunch at the sleepy little eatery tucked in the corner of webbed alleys. We would often be the only customers at 11 a.m. (the minute they opened), and dad would order two “sanxian zhajiangmian”: one for himself, one to split between my cousin and me.

“Yikes, is it just me or do you also smell something?”

The limited space in the kitchen of Robbins House is swarmed with the smell of my ingredients. I wash the noodles until the water runs clear; I slice the zucchini and dredge it into the egg-flour mixture; I quick-boil the squash blossom and marinate it with soy sauce, minced garlic, and sliced green chilies. Then, I fry the zhajiang paste in the oil until the sizzling grows from a whisper to a chatter. Soon, the dishes have crowded the table, and the steam trapped inside the room has fogged up the windows.

Weeks ago, on the plane, I watched a woman lethargically spooning mashed potatoes into her face. Her half eaten roll looked stale and unappealing. She wasn’t enjoying her food, yet the slow progression from tray to mouth did not discontinue. There was a time in my life, not too long ago, when faced with limited options and unfamiliar foods, I would have done the same thing: eaten some dry bread and shoveled gummy potatoes into my mouth. I avoided cooking my favorite meals in the dorm kitchen because I was always so self-conscious of the smell of suancai (pickled cabbage), doufuru (fermented bean curd), zhajiang, and other home foods—nothing pains me more than seeing people flinch as they pick up their pace past the stove or hearing them use “odor” to describe the lingering aroma that clings to every fiber of my being, that entangles with my soul.

“How’s that kitchen always has some exotic smell on Friday nights.”

But I dream about the zucchini that dangled off the web of vines in our backyard garden; the orange squash blossoms large enough to cover my entire face; the bottle of soy sauce that greeted grandma every morning at the door; the garlic that hung from the ceiling of the balcony, its skin cracking off after each sunny day; the green chilies, emeralds of the earth, whose appearance always resulted in a pile of tissue balls at the dinner table; and the zhajiang that came to its thick consistency under grandma’s worn hands, strong arms, and rich laughter and eventually matured after a winter-long nap in the soil. I dream about the times after we eat zhajiang noodles at that restaurant, how dad, my cousin, and I would all be sporting dark brown rings of zhajiang sauce around our mouths—the memories that my family has nurtured around this dish made me realize that if anything, these aromas of my dreams would be a blessing to this insipid campus.

So I bustled about the stove, trying to recreate the dish from the memory of my taste buds. I cooked a decent amount and served just a small portion in a bowl. I made the same slurping sounds I had grown up with, shutting my eyes the same way grandma and dad always do when they eat.

“Hmm, what are you making?”

“We call them zhajiang mian, which are noodles with black fermented soy bean paste. Would you like to try some?”

---

**Stinky Food is the Best Food**

**By Wenqi Zhao ’19**
I’m an outsider at my family’s Thanksgiving table.

Well, it’s family that isn’t my family. My once-or-twice-a-year family.

Squished between my grandpa, grandma, aunt, uncle, and cousin, I feast with chopsticks—no fork or knife—on braised pork belly, bok choy, and fluffy white rice.

“A dinner with my parents could not be a more opposite scene.”

A typical dinner with typical conversation, nothing special on Thanksgiving day. I hear English from my cousin, who complains about school and her college applications, then Chinese from her parents, who encourage her to work hard on this one last history essay.

She mutters in reply, “Okay.”

In English.

English, Chinese, English. Sometimes both in the same sentence. It’s always been inexplicably weird, this coexistence of two languages—namely, the English part.

Soon, the conversation changes. They’re talking about the latest Canadian and American TV shows when my aunt asks,

“Can someone pass the Jalapeno chips?”

“It’s Jalapeno,” replies her husband, whose tone suggests, “You should have known that, after living in Canada for 20 years.”

Meanwhile, my grandparents sit in silence, not understanding a lick of English.

I join in the conversation, making an effort to speak Chinese. But for some reason, speaking to my cousin in Chinese feels weird, so I end up saying everything twice—Chinese, then English—as we talk about Black Mirror, American Horror Story, and House of Cards. My aunt and uncle join in enthusiastically, as if to show off their knowledge of American TV shows. No Chinese ones, though.

“When did our identities become a competition?”

***

Dinner with my parents could not be a more opposite scene. Chinese state-run news from CCTV plays in the background, as the three of us eat in silence. No talk of TV shows.

We’ve never had any full conversation in English—only Chinese. In fact, when I don’t know how to say something in Chinese, I don’t say it all rather than say it in English. Not being able to express myself fully to my parents is frustrating, but I’ve gotten used to it. Often, I wonder why I only speak Chinese. Is it for myself? For my parents? Maybe.

I’ve heard the way they gossip about others, though.

“Floating between two worlds—no, many more—and never fully in one, I will never belong.”

“You know she married a white person?”

“She didn’t bother to teach her kids Chinese. What a shame.”

When did our identities become a competition? Through speaking English and Chinese, many show off or reaffirm how American or Chinese they are, but this fakeness only prevents me from truly fitting in. Without trying to convince others of who I am, I will just be. I am Floating between two worlds—no, many more—and never fully in one, I will never belong. I am an outsider.

An Outsider At Thanksgiving

BY ANDY ZHANG ’19

“Dinner with my parents could not be a more opposite scene.”
UNSAID

BY PIERCE D. WILSON ’19

When I lived at home, family dinner was the centerpiece of my home life. Whenever my parents finished preparing the delicious food, my mom would yell up the stairs, beckoning my sister and me down. We’d rush down the stairs, wash our hands, and set the table. After that, we’d make plates for ourselves, and of course, Mom and Dad.

The whole family—Mom, Dad, Brooke, and I—sat around the table discussing everything from the news, to my middle school gossip, to family drama, all the way to, most frequently, the benign goings-on of our days. Throughout this ritual, my sister and I would chew our food slowly, making sure never to do so with our mouths open or let on any suspicion that we didn’t enjoy the conversation. Neither of us stood up until dismissed, and afterwards we’d clean the entire kitchen: the dishes, countertops, stove, fridge, table, sink, oven, and trash. I felt comfortable enough at home. I couldn’t tell my parents everything, per se—in fact, I kept a lot of my feelings and opinions hidden from them—but I told them enough to make myself feel heard.

My mother and father’s lessons, which usually came in the form of lectures, too, were a part of our meals: “Never lie cus’ your mama ain’t raise no liar”; “never talk back cus’ I’ll beat you ‘like a runaway slave’”; “never walk alone at night cus’ you ain’t got no street cred”; “never go out looking like you just rolled out of bed cus’ your mama ain’t raise no bum”; “never listen to rap music or be ‘ghetto’ cus’ it’s—unbecoming”; “never be gay, obviously, cus’ your mama ain’t raise no f*****! Plus it’s not what God wants.” And, because I wanted to please them, all of these lessons were received rather well by me.

Today, I eat dinner posted up in a dining hall with forty other teenage boys, seated around circular tables, eating food that is flavorless at worst, and edible at best, counting down the minutes until 6:30.

“When people ask how you are they really just wanna hear ‘good.’”

Sit-down conversation tends to be entertaining, and, on a rare occasion, even memorable. There are no rules, no concrete lessons, no plates prepared individually with love and care, no nurturing but judgemental parents. Nonetheless, this ritual too, gives structure and comfort to my life. No one sits down until after we’ve had a moment of silence and introduced guests, and then the ‘senior of the night’ decides the serving order. To finish, we listen to announcements from the dorm faculty and clean up, although this cleaning regiment is nowhere near as intense as the one I upheld at home. Just as I could with with my parents, I can talk with my dorm companions about a lot of things: politics, gossip, our opinions on school rules, and, still, the uninteresting realities of being a Milton student. Sometimes things get heated or the laughs get too loud, but these interactions die with the event. Lessons learned, if there are any to be learned, are inferred, and are usually less grand in nature: “Don’t bring up the Israeli-Palestine conflict unless you’re ready for a four hour conversation”; “boys shouldn’t talk about their emotions”; “you can sprinkle salt into Ryan’s water but not into Nick’s ’cause he’ll get really upset”; “don’t talk to girls from Millet or Hallowell during dinner because everyone will jump to conclusions”; “when people ask how you are they really just wanna hear ‘good’”; “don’t overshare at dinner”.

And now, instead of talking to them from across the table, I call my parents at night and tell them fewer things, as I’m more tired of trying to please their expectations, and they’re more aware of the pretenses I maintain for them. I don’t know what they’re eating, or whether they’ve eaten at all. Lessons learned are: “Yes, this is what people are wearing these days”; “No, I don’t plan on cutting my hair soon”; “Mom, that’s homophobic, please stop”; “No, I’m not listening to Kanye to turn my back on everything you taught me; it’s just good music”; “Yes, I’m vegetarian and I’m getting enough protein”; “Thank you so much for telling me I look like a thug”; “Dad, it’s not your fault you have two gay kids and I’m sure God doesn’t hate you”; “I’m sorry. I don’t mean to talk back or be rude, it’s just that I disagree”; “Yeah, I like him a lot!”; “No, I don’t know why I didn’t tell you but I promise it’s not because I hate you”; “Yeah, I’m good, but I’m really worried for the future”; “Uh-huh, I like the new episode of Blackish”; “Trump is really wylin’ out this week, huh?” “Bio is really rough right now”; “I miss you”; “I’m hanging up now.”

“I love you.”•
Untitled

BY PARKER HITT ’19
**An Open Letter To JSU**

**BY SARAH ACKER-KRYZWICKI ’19**

A letter from a young woman we know:

Dear JSU,

You’ve helped me through the “you’re Jewish?”, the “why can’t you eat pork?”, the “but matzah tastes so good!”, the “so, do you celebrate Christmas?”

You’ve helped me through the green and red winter holiday decorations, the winter break that completely misses Chanukah, the “non-denominational” Chapel.

You’ve helped me to find my friends who understand, to allow myself acceptance of my identity, to become more confident in my culture.

**“I won’t be joining in the traditions this year.”**

You’ve helped me to teach, learn, and experience my ancestors.

Jewish Student Union, I love the community I have found in you. But here is why I won’t be joining in the traditions this year.

I grew up often missing a few first days of school. I traded in playing ice breakers and meeting the new students for taking off to Philly where after sitting through an excessively long car ride, I then would sit through excessively long services, passing time by tying my mom’s Tallit into knots and braids twisting and then untwisting the silky strings.

Each Autumn visit to Philadelphia, I would eat the delicious honey cake that my Bubbie made. But each year, her recipe would get drier and drier with more and more golden raisins ruining the perfectly sticky flavor.

One year, my mom forced me to bring the now nearly inedible bread to school with a side of apples and honey. I hopped out of the back seat of the car, paper bag in hand. “A sweet and healthy new year.” My mom said to Mrs. Comstock, the school principal. “You don’t have to be embarrassed, there are a lot of Jewish students here,” exclaimed the non-Jewish Mrs. Comstock. But I couldn’t continue to my class without hesitation. There were so many reasons to be embarrassed! In a school where Eliana and I were the only Jews, no one would understand why the coming year had to be healthy let alone sticky!

The honey oozed through the paper bag, and I knew the upcoming interactions would be just as messy as the snack. No one would outright say anything, but I felt the judgement from my peers about the crumbly bread, browning apples, and gloppy sugar.

When I arrived at Milton, I finally had the chance to proudly stop practicing. But thanks to you, JSU, that first Yom Kippur, I walked to synagogue and prayed with two girls I barely knew. I wasn’t sure I believed in the holiday, but there I was celebrating it. That year, I brought apples and honey, sufganiyot and dreidels, and matzah and kosher jellies to my dorm. “No one’s ever done this before,” said a junior in Millet as she spun the dreidel I had set up. And I felt proud. But I never set up dorm dreidel again.

**“I never set up dorm dreidel again.”**

Dear Jewish Student Union, this year I was almost successful. This year I escaped the High Holy day practices. This year, I ate on Yom Kippur, I visited colleges on Rosh Hashanah. The jar of honey my mom gave to me to celebrate the holiday sits, a gooey circle surrounding the golden jar, on my window sill, used only in an occasional cup of tea, with no apples anywhere near. But why do I feel guilty about missing these traditions? I stare at the golden light filtering through the jar, plagued by the loss of a religion I’m not sure I ever believed in.
There is no Birthright.

BY NARA MOHYEDDIN ’21

August, 2017. A few days into our stay in Iran’s bustling capital city, Tehran, my family was already tired of the metropolitan lifestyle. We needed an escape. And perfectly enough, my mom chose a destination that she had run away to years before: Tafresh. A small city located only a few hours from the capital, reaching this magical and empty ghost town required only a bus ride from Tehran.

The bus got there soon enough. We took a short taxi ride through the dusty streets of Tafresh (you can always find a taxi), reaching the old house my mother had stayed in decades earlier, where her distant relatives were custodians of a degenerating estate. It should be added that this custodianship wasn’t executed with quality. Today, half of the “mansion” has fallen into itself, stuffed with decrepit antiques, dusty paintings, and broken furniture. With light shining in from opaque windows, this wooden corridor blasted from the past had become a time capsule, another mystery of this secret garden. A secret garden. Enclosed by a wall like other wealthier town properties, a beautiful garden surrounded the house, teeming with apricots, white blackberries (do they even have an English name?), and roses. Your world stops at the mud wall, it is not round, it is not flat, it is the square the bricks restrict us to and the infinite sky above, painting our glory yellow and blue.

I only knew one boy my age in Tafresh, our hostess’s nephew, a realist. Hamid was a weightlifter I only knew one boy my age in Tafresh, our hostess’s nephew, a realist. Hamid was a weightlifter I only knew one boy my age in Tafresh, our hostess’s nephew, a realist. Hamid was a weightlifter who had goals, not dreams. He hoped to represent Iran in the Olympics and take home gold, but was surprised if not repulsed. How could I give a genuine interest in the place of worship. Hamid was surprised if not repulsed. How could I give a damn about such things, religion is all a lie! I was delusional for showing interest, he was disillusioned by experience. It’s hard to live here and not be either brainwashed or completely sober, especially on the topic of faith. My cousin is sober, my uncle is angry. They spit on Islam and god in General. Iran acts as the beautiful set for the confrontation that bleeds on to it.

Periscians always ask, Iran ya Amrika? Iran or America? They always make me choose. They always have an answer too: America, obviously! People have told me that if I was stuck here I’d hate it, that I should never underestimate my luck of American birth, that I only enjoy Iran because I don’t really

house fell to peace as each member found their own corner, their own carpet to sleep on. I was next to the window, the breeze dancing past me to greet each person in their slumber. Sleep, blurry eyes, and well rested spirits make everything more magical. Your dreams enter reality.

Hamid cracked a joke once, soft and sweetly. I wouldn’t eat the apricots because of all the worms, so I was eating their pit seeds instead. Unfortunately, I lacked an apparently crucial skill to Iranianness—I was not adept at using a rock to crack open the seeds. He took my rock, handled the cracking, handed me intact and fleshy seed after seed. “You’re not Iranian enough yet to do this yourself!”

“Iran or America? They always make me choose.”

Soon we arose for a walk through town, stopping at a particularly historical site, initially just to stand in the gigantic hole in the gigantic walnut tree in front of it, pick a few nuts and snap a few pictures. Now a mosque, the building was so old that it’s poles once held up a Zoroastrian temple. Soon after pictures and walnuts were taken, I started showing genuine interest in the place of worship. Hamid was surprised if not repulsed. How could I give a damn about such things, religion is all a lie! I was delusional for showing interest, he was disillusioned by experience. It’s hard to live here and not be either brainwashed or completely sober, especially on the topic of faith. My cousin is sober, my uncle is angry. They spit on Islam and god in General. Iran acts as the beautiful set for the confrontation that bleeds on to it.

Persians always ask, Iran ya Amrika? Iran or America? They always make me choose. They always have an answer too: America, obviously! People have told me that if I was stuck here I’d hate it, that I should never underestimate my luck of American birth, that I only enjoy Iran because I don’t really

know it. You can’t live here long enough and be okay (but you will brag about rich Persian culture while in any other country), just like how Milton kids often bond over the school’s intensity but are more than ready to flaunt their education on applications. Romanticizing Iran like an imperial era artist, I am an outsider. But yet, unlike most who wish to appropriate only the trendy aspects of a culture, I want to assert my birthright in its good and bad. Isn’t it more than just “a culture?” isn’t it mine?

It seems I want so desperately to feel secure in my identity that I’d push myself into a situation that so many try to flee. But try all I want, I still have an American passport. That ticket to JFK will always save me from that feeling of imprisonment and hopelessness. That’s the fundamental of Persian psychological oppression. If liberty is hope, Iran is liberty stripped. Even if I don’t currently reside in the ‘land of the free’, my Americanness and its privilege follows me, just like how Iran guides some of my actions in America (the government is watching). Have I really earned my Iranianness when my passport can take me anywhere, I can say what I please, dress and pray as I please, and I have security in opportunities and lifestyle?

There is no birthright. I was born to Persians in America. My only birthright was confusion. My family can share their stories and pain, but I am there in empathy and not experience. I’ve been drawn a picture to memorize as my own reality. But at the end of the day, identity is just another title gained in this world without work. Iran is something I can read about, sit around, fall in love with. But there’ll always be my nearly seventeen American years between us. I’m on the outside looking within. He teased I am not yet Iranian enough. When my version of Iranian requires a new birthplace, hometown—everything—it’s not that I haven’t yet become Iranian enough. I never will be.
Baby Teeth

BY ERIN BRADY '19
EDITORS-IN-CHIEF
Adrian Hackney, Natasha Roy, and Akua Owusu

BOARD MEMBERS
Victoria Han, Andy Zhang, Lynn Yuan,
Sofia Coen, Isa Tariq,
Florence Wu, Nara Mohyeddin

LAYOUT EDITOR
Pierce D. Wilson

FACULTY SPONSOR
Tasheana Dukuly

FOUNDERS
Tiara Sharma ‘16 & Israel Moorer ‘16