

# BEATS

NEWCOMER YOUTH VOICE + PERSPECTIVE



ISSUE 11  
SPRING 2018



Photographed by: Parisa Pajooh

BEATS RECOGNIZES THE UNCEDED COAST SALISH TERRITORIES OF  
Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh Nations



AN INITIATIVE OF  
van**co**uver  
foundation



# EDITOR'S NOTE

GOLSA GOLESTANEH

Welcome to Issue 11th! This is the first time I'm writing on this page as an editor! Before anything, I would like to express my gratitude to Jennifer Sarkar who started BEATS and continued leading it for 10 issues and five years, while still supporting the process of Issue 11th. As a young racialized migrant woman, it's amazing to be able to navigate young people's many skills and strengths in a way that they can share their powerful stories and messages through several forms of art. I will be forever grateful for being given such an incredible opportunity to accompany our migrant youth in their journeys of storytelling.

Our Issue 11th Editorial Team decided to focus on mental health and their stories as individuals, not only as migrants. The reasons for this decision are: 1. Mental health is not always a comfortable topic especially in migrant communities. 2. Migrants are usually expected to talk about their migration journeys, ignoring other aspects of their identities; this time, our editors decided not to put pressure on themselves in talking about their migration stories if they don't want to.

We would like to thank our funders, Fresh Voices and Telus for making this issue possible. Our communities are able to grow more strongly when we support each other through the tools and resources that we have.

# LOVE BC

LEAVE OUT VIOLENCE BC

LOVE is a youth-driven media arts-based non-profit organization that facilitates violence prevention and intervention programming to youth who face multiple barriers. LOVE youth use media arts to document their experiences, share their views of the world, and build leadership skills to break the cycle of violence in their lives and communities.

To learn more about LOVE BC's work please go to: [bc.leaveoutviolence.org](http://bc.leaveoutviolence.org)  
or Email us at: [vancouver@leaveoutviolence.org](mailto:vancouver@leaveoutviolence.org)

# EDITORIAL TEAM



## Fatima Haidari

I am Fatima Haidari; I live in Burnaby. Currently, doing General science at Langara College. I love adventures. Still figuring out how to live far away from my beloved family.



## Peggy Chien

My name is Peggy Chien; I was raised in Taiwan until about five years ago. My passion ranges from design, travelling, to anything sweet. I am an absolute lover of going on adventures and trying anything new, as I believe travelling gives one the opportunity to see the world, learn about different cultures, and broaden one's horizon.



## Parisa Pajook

Hi, I'm Parisa! Originally from Iran, I'm grateful for the opportunity to live, work, play, and learn on the traditional and ancestral lands of aboriginal peoples over the last few years. I am truly passionate about the concept of globalization and enjoy travelling, connecting with nature, and photography. I spend a lot of my spare time volunteering, studying foreign languages, and trying to become a better cook! :)



## Jackie Obungah

I am Jackie Obungah. 2nd year international student. Passionate about activism, literature, everything and anything that enriched my soul. I'm also a tropical child, so I love the sun! The sun and Mangoes!



## Afeef Ahamed

My name is Afeef Ahamed . I was born in Puttalam, Sri Lanka . I enjoy playing cricket and jogging. Eight years ago , I moved to Canada with my family for better education. I have twin brothers also a brother who is two years older than me . I like to volunteer in youth projects. I am currently upgrading English requirement before going to college.



## Sydney Reforada

Hi, my name is Sydney Reforada. I was born and raised in the small island of Marinduque, Philippines. I came to Canada when I was only 11 years old. I love learning about new cultures and meeting different people from all over the world. My dream is to become a nurse.



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Photographed by: Golsa Golestaneh

Photographed by: Peggy Chien



# EXPECTATION vs. REALITY

Written By: PEGGY CHIEN

**“I STILL CAN RECALL, SOMETHING PEOPLE SAID TO ME WHEN THEY KNEW I WAS LEAVING: ‘YOU’RE ABOUT TO HAVE AN EASIER LIFE’, “YOU WILL NEVER NEED TO STUDY ANYMORE.”**

- Peggy Chien

I remember the day when I was saying goodbye to all my friends in Taiwan because I was about to leave that place, where I was born and raised, for a new journey in Canada. I still can recall, something people said to me when they knew I was leaving: “You’re about to have an easier life”, “you will never need to study anymore”, etc. The kind of lifestyle that they were expecting me to have and describing was so easy, as if I will never need to put an effort into anything anymore. In reality, however, life doesn’t run like that.

People might have an impression that Asians who come to Canada will never struggle with school, since the education system in their home country has built a solid academic foundation for them. What they don’t know is that the language barriers we need to overcome as an immigrant/refugee can be a key factor that hinders us from fitting into the community. As it could be quite difficult for us to communicate

our thoughts into words in a second language, newcomers might have a hard time making new friends and getting involved in the new environment. In addition to language barriers, adapting to cultural differences is also a transition that most newcomers have to go through. As multicultural as it is in Canada, you are still not likely to find your favourite taste right around the corner. With little knowledge of how cities in Canada would be like, the quiet and less dynamic city is also something that I wasn’t expecting and needed to get used to.

Expectation can sometimes be completely different from what is showcased to us in reality. There is no lifestyle as easy lifestyle; people will constantly be facing different struggles and milestones in life that other people cannot think of or imagine.

# BLACK HISTORY MONTH

## DREAMS AND NIGHTMARES

Written By: JACKIE OBUNGAH

In my dream I see this tree  
A black tree with the shape of a woman, her back arched as if in pain.  
She is carrying a heavy gourd  
Her branches shaped like hands holding the gourd up on her head  
On her head I see long stems, stems with beads in on their ends. The beads resemble the hair of a Fulani woman

Her leaves are withering away, they fall on the ground  
I see scribbling on them  
I move closer  
I pick one up: I read  
"Black silence"  
I pick another  
"Systematic policing of black lives"  
another  
"The destruction of black communities"  
another  
"The silence of black women on issues of gender"..."  
"The killing of trans men and women"..."  
The leaves fall off one by one until the tree is bare  
I see the roots are dry: I pick up a watering can

Her roots start to spread  
They get stronger, wider, longer  
The tree stands tall  
The look of pain is gone  
The gourd overflows with water  
In the gourd I hear laughter  
I climb the tree to take a peek

I see children, different shades of one colour  
I see maps, shapes of different countries  
I see gold and I see honey  
In the children's eyes I see love and I see strength

I wake up from my dream but the tree is still here  
It never left.



Mural Artist: Allan André (Toronto) [www.allanandre.com](http://www.allanandre.com)

**“IN MY DREAM I SEE THIS TREE  
A BLACK TREE IN WITH SHAPE OF A WOMAN,  
HER BACK ARCHED AS IF IN PAIN.”**

- Jackie Obungah

# WHEN WAS THE HAPPIEST TIME OF YOUR LIFE?

Written By: SYDNEY REFORADA

*"I remember I would jump and scream loudly whenever I hear the waves crashing and the sight of the seashore appearing bit by bit."*

Whenever this question is brought up, my mind always wanders back to when I was living in an old house, wearing tattered clothes. I grew up in a farming village in the small island of Marinduque, Philippines. My alarm clock is the rooster's crow in the morning and my bed is a straw mat laid on the floor. Wearing a torn t-shirt, patched up shorts and worn-out slippers, I was excited to spend the day with my friends. Sometimes we would go to the nearby river to catch small shrimps, climb tall trees to get fruits or we would just watch cartoons in a neighbor's house who have a television and usually there are also other kids. The best days were when we walked to the sea. Often, my cousin and my auntie would join us, we would bring bananas and other fruits with us and we would stay there for half a day.

Walking to the sea always relaxes my mind as the scenery looks very calming. After we passed the last house on the paved road, the dirt road towards the sea starts. There would be rice fields on both sides and if you turn back you will see the mountains. When there were suddenly more rocks and pebbles, it is a sign that we were near the seashore. I remember I would jump and scream loudly whenever I hear the waves crashing and the sight of the

seashore appearing bit by bit. Mostly because I could not wait to swim in the warm waters and also since we would race to the seashore every time. The vastness of the sea and the sky meeting together in the horizon is my favorite sight in the day and during the night, it would be the huge number of stars in the dark sky that are very visible without any lights.

At the end of the day, everything that I did with my friends became precious memories that I wrote down on my small notebook and I would dream again of what fun adventures we would do the following day. Looking back now, I guess I had based my happiness on my experiences in the village, instead of what I possessed. I felt content with the simple life, I led. Running in the small narrow streets, bathing in the rain and playing street games with other kids. No amount of video games, expensive clothes or fine dining can replace the feeling of happiness, I had back then. Poverty did not affect my joy but became a way to create the invaluable memories with my childhood friends and family and I am always thankful for my time in the farming village.



## MIGRANT STORY

Photographed by: Parisa Pajooh

## MIGRANT STORY

# EDUCATION ACROSS THE OCEANS

Written By: AFEEF AHMED



ZAHIRA SCHOOL (PUTTALAM), SRI LANKA

Zahira School is a Muslim boys school. It is located in Puttalam, Sri Lanka. I used to bring my bicycle to school, not only me; there were many students who used to bike to school, too. Students have to respect the teachers very well, especially when they enter the class, students stand up to show respect. We have to call them "sir". There is no clean washrooms in the school so many students avoid using them. Every student needs to wear a school uniform. It includes white long pants, shirt with a school logo, a tie, Muslim hat and shoes. Most students don't like to wear a tie because it's very warm in my city. Often,

teachers check students' hairstyles which should be cut accordingly with the school regulations. Each year, we have two midterms and a final test for high school students. Teachers take average score from those three main tests only, but they won't look for student's behavior and homework completion. Sri Lanka has many public holidays (such as any religious festival, full moon, independence day etc.) so students can't have many absences in regular days.

Continuing studies in Vancouver Technical secondary school is very hard for me as a newcomer. First, I struggle with English language because back home I did not learn English at all. We just learned basic grammar and conversational English. But not much practice for writing skills. I complete the math without much difficulties because back home, math lesson is more advanced compared to here. In Van Tech, there are no uniforms for students and teachers. Also, it's easy to communicate with teachers and ask questions when we need. In high school one

of the essential courses is physical education. It helps to stay fit and be a healthier. When teachers prepare final report card of the year, they not only take your average score on your exams but they look for your overall performance such as assignments, projects, presentations, etc. An interesting fact is I don't want to carry heavy textbooks for each subject instead of carrying them every day, it's easier to use my locker. There are many elective courses to learn such as drafting, graphics, cooking and hair design etc. I enjoyed studying here.



VANCOUVER TECHNICAL SCHOOL, CANADA

Education across the oceans are very different from each other. I learned a lot from both experiences and though it was difficult to figure a place and the learning environment it taught me to be grateful to be able to learn and

grow. I hope by reading my experience other newcomer youth gets hope and continues to pursue their goals both academically and in the community.



# CHOSEN SILENCE

Written By: JACKIE OBUNGAH

I understand why my grandmother and my grandfather chose silence

In their world your voice was your death sentence

I understand why my mother chose not to cry

In her world tears were symbols of weakness, a sort of vulnerability that left you at the mercy of others

I understand why my father and his father

chose to be affectionless

In their world affection took away your masculinity and your masculinity was your key to survival

Because of their sacrifices and their pain I, two generations later choose to be loud, to be affectionate and to be vulnerable.

Most importantly I chose to put my mental health first in a world that would like otherwise.

Photographed by: Ali Jaf

# IN MY JOURNEY

Written By: **FATIMA HAIDARI**

Mental Health impacts our lives severely, so it is important to talk to someone who can help you. Mental illness is not black and white; it comes in different shapes and forms. We cannot expect everyone to express their mental struggles in the same way. For me, mental health issue means when I feel like I am the loneliest person, no matter how many people are around me or how crowded the place is. When I try to drag myself out of my bed, but there is something that glues me in the bed.

Therefore, I fail to follow my plans. It is easy to label that state as being lazy, but it's different from laziness and nothing seems right at that moment. Let's raise awareness about mental health, so that people can share how they feel and there are people who can help them throughout that tough journey. Mental illness exists, so we cannot continue to deny it.

Photographed by: Parisa Pajoh

# READ IT IN MY ACCENT!

Written by: PARISA PAJOOH

*“I have experienced situations where people get angry because of my thick accent and start to exclude me from their activities.”*

“He was openly dismissive in class to a student who struggled with English and made it clear that he did not like her Middle-Eastern accent. According to this student, he “killed” her confidence and made her feel like “nothing,” and he screamed at and hung up on her friend whom she had put on the phone with him for help.”

“I already knew English, but it was like when I came here I could understand them but they could not understand me. They wanted to put me into an ESL program. Probably because I had an accent and I spoke fast.”

“I have experienced situations where people get angry because of my thick accent and start to exclude me from their activities. It’s terrible. Sometimes I feel like I’m less than the others or just not as intelligent as my classmates. I feel as if everything I say is wrong and no one would understand my point because they’re focused on my foreign accent.”

“I hate my accent. Is there anyone who could help me to change it?”

It’s not unknown to any newcomer youth that having an “accent” could be a real struggle in a new society. No matter how well you speak English, your foreign accent often holds you back from actually practicing the language and participating in conversations. Despite spending countless hours to learn the language; you still find people underestimating your English, because you don’t sound “natural”. You start to feel isolated, lonely and judged. You hold back

your ideas during a presentation and lose verbal contribution marks in class discussions. You feel unheard, shy and stressed. You are very self-conscious about your pronunciation, because you’re afraid of being laughed at and mocked.

I’ve personally found myself in situations where I was told to stand up and do a speech, or maybe even just to deliver a short presentation, and my accent breaks through it constantly, ruining whatever effect I was going for. Or when during a phone interview, I start talking and then the conversation sort of drops off. And I start wondering what went wrong.

Not only in classrooms and workplaces, difficulty in acquiring the language also impacts other aspects of the immigrant youth’s life including their mental health, well-being, and self-esteem. I believe language should be a way to bridge people and cultures and not a source of tension, crisis and struggle. Especially for immigrant youth who have made it through the system based on their skills and human capital, and they need to find their skills equally valued as Canadian skills. Therefore, it’s important to create an environment where newcomer youth can accept their accent, get comfortable with it and then wear it with pride! But more than adjustments, we need mutual adaptation from both immigrant community and the host society to put an end to cultural and accent discrimination.

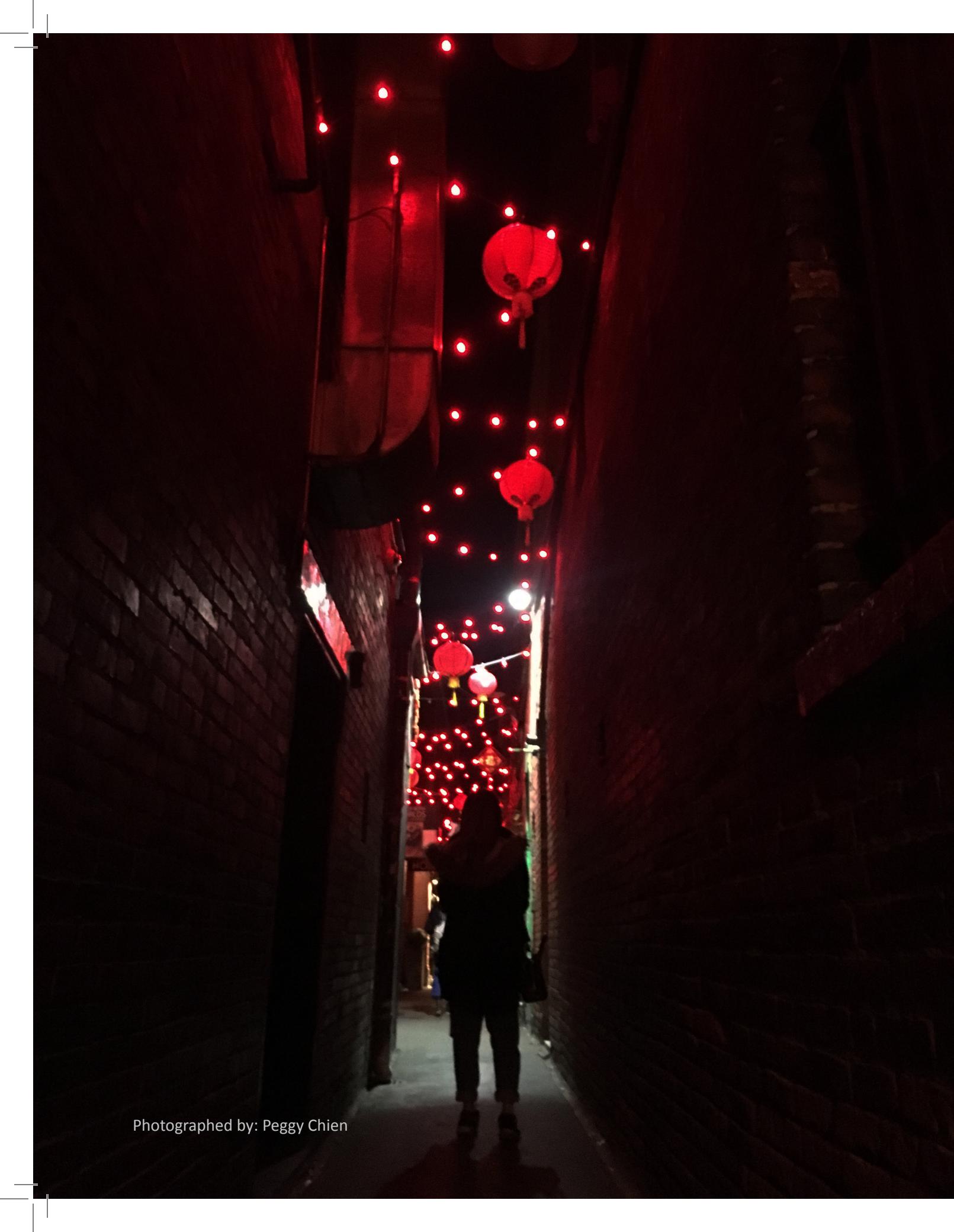
From my fatherland and mother tongue to yours; wherever they draw a border, we shall build a bridge.



My family lives in Afghanistan and I have not seen them since 2015. I came to Canada as unaccompanied minor which was not the easiest experience to go through. I understand how significant it is to build my life here first and then help my family, but the unstable situation back home keeps holding me back from my goal. I try to stick with my plans, but it is hard to do so if your beloved ones are in that situation. The ongoing explosive attacks break my heart into pieces every time, and leave me more disappointed and powerless. Once, I contacted my family to make sure that they are okay. I said to my mom "thanks god all of you are okay". You know what she replied? She said we are okay this time, but you never know if we will be in the future.

Honestly, I was speechless at that moment and did not know how to react. All I could say was "mom please do not say that". It was a tough conversation, but the bitter reality implies that. I get trapped in that kind of emotional state no matter how hard I try to carry on with my plans.

I constantly ask myself why life is so unfair and many more unanswered questions come to my mind. At the end, I wish no one had to go through that rough experience, yet I know it is just a wish. I am looking forward to reuniting with my family one day. I hope everyone's dream of reuniting with their families come true, because everyone deserves to be in safety with their loved ones.



Photographed by: Peggy Chien

# EVERY CULTURE IS TO BE APPRECIATED

Written By: PEGGY CHIEN

**“MIGRATION IS NOT SIMPLE, IT REQUIRES COURAGE AND EFFORT TO FINALLY COME TO SUCH DECISION TO LEAVE A PLACE THAT THEY ARE MORE FAMILIAR WITH.”**

Have you ever felt being judged by the way you pronounce a word? Have you ever experienced being socially excluded by your ethnicity? Racism is an issue that needs to be addressed properly and prevented in our society, as it can affect one's mental health and personal well-being to a certain extent.

Reminiscing the time when I had just come to Canada, it wasn't easy. As a person who was still unfamiliar with the new environment and learning the new language, it was quite a hard time making new friends and getting to know the surroundings. There were people who laughed at me for my mispronunciation of a word; there were also people who showed unwillingness or reluctance to invite me to their groups. What they don't know is, all this action can ultimately become a factor that discourages someone to take the initiative to be engaged, or feel belonged, in the new society.

What a newcomer needs, is social welcoming and encouragement. Migration is not simple, it requires courage and effort to finally come to such decision to leave a place that they are more familiar with. The society should acknowledge their challenges and accept them as a new member, rather than discriminating against those people who don't seem to fit in; because they might have never even be given the opportunity to do so. Racism is a key factor that is affecting social well-being of racialized people and should be stopped. There is no such thing as “one race is superior to another” as everybody is unique and should be treated equally regardless of their race, background, or cultures.

# THE MASK

Written by: SYDNEY REFORADA

The first time I heard about the term “depression”, I thought it was an overused statement used by teenagers, just like any popular joke that eventually disappears. At that time, I never truly understood the meaning of that word. I thought depression meant, a temporary feeling of sadness one felt after breaking up with their lover. Furthermore, I was constantly reminded by adults that depression is not real and it was just a made-up term created by teenagers. Therefore, I grew up believing that idea. After all, I thought how can anyone be depressed, when you are living in a sunny place, surrounded by your closest friends and your whole family?

It was not after a death of a close cousin that I had opened my eyes to that term. At a young age, I learned that combined with stress and expectations, depression is powerful enough to take away a person’s life. Ever since, I was terrified of depression, I was scared that I would somehow catch it too and that everyone would look down at me. So, I was determined to avoid any confrontation and acquaintance with someone who has depression. However, after coming to Canada, I was faced with that challenge again, when one of my very first friends told me that she had depression. Being the coward that I am during that time, I can only think of one solution and it was to hide from her. I avoided her at school and any places that she might go to. To be honest, it was because of my image, I was worried about how my classmates and other friends would look at me if I were seen just like her. I wanted people

to see me as a positive, cheerful person. Therefore, I smiled constantly and always acted positively in any occasion. However, after wearing that “smiling mask” for too long, I felt exhausted. I became physically and emotionally tired. Despite of all the friends I had made, I despised my own image.

Most of the time, I felt that I was beneath them, I did not do as well as them in school, I’m not in the desired weight that I should be, and I’m not in the same level as them based on their external appearance. I was constantly, pushing and aiming to be the ideal person that had expected of myself. Oh, did I mention how stress and expectation is a dangerous match? Hence, during my senior year in High school, I experienced having symptoms of depression. In the end, I just wanted to take this façade down, this mask that covered and suffocated my true self with the ideal characteristics, that I myself had set up. I just wanted to express my real emotions like everyone else, unlike the constantly smiling girl who seems to have limitless patience. Although in reality, I am still afraid of completely taking off this mask. I’m scared that all my relationships and connections with the people around me, would come crumbling down once they realized that I’m not the same cheerful person anymore. I would be lying if I said that I am finally able to express my real emotions, but throughout my experience, I had learned the true meaning of depression and I’m feeling happier than I was before, by slowly taking off this mask.



Migration can be a difficult process. Moving from a familiar environment to a brand-new place can be terrifying and challenging. Besides from adapting to the new culture and lifestyle, it also requires a lot of courage and effort to learn to get involved with the new society; to learn to recognize and overcome challenges; and to accept different perspectives and judgements.

Living in such a multicultural society, it takes time and effort to change everyone's views on

how certain issues such as racism and racial segregation should be addressed. It is important for a migrant to keep in mind that regardless of how we are being viewed or judged by other people, our personal well-being should only be determined by ourselves and our own mindset. People's judgement shouldn't be the factor that defines who we are as a person. We should be proud of how we are raised, and what leads us to become who we are today.

Photographed by: Peggy Chien

# CLASSROOM

Written by: SYDNEY REFORADA

*"After the teacher had introduced me, I felt a huge feeling of relief. Probably now, they won't look at me so much, but little did I know, it would get much worse"*

My dad kissed me goodbye, after he dropped me to my new classroom. "Be a good girl" he said before leaving, perhaps he didn't notice the scared look in my eyes that I had the night before. I was nervous, I always hated talking in front of people and the amount of attention I'm getting isn't helping. After the teacher had introduced me, I felt a huge feeling of relief. Probably now, they wont look at me so much, but little did I know, it would get much worse. During recess, I saw them looking at me again and whispering to each other, just like a group of birds in the telephone line. All kinds of thought went into my head, are they talking about my clothes? My thick, curly black hair? Or perhaps my tanned skin? I tried to eat my snack quietly, until one of them suddenly approached me. "So, where are you from?" she asked, with my nervous voice, I answered "Philippines" and she looked rather unimpressed, but she replied "Oh, cool" then she returned to her group of friends whom are now talking very loudly with the boys from the other class. I wanted to ask her something, but I was too afraid to talk and look at her in the eye. I was scared that if I said something, I might mess up and use the wrong word. I understood what the teacher is talking about and the conversations I heard from my classmates, but I just stayed quiet. "She is too shy" I overheard my teacher told the other teacher on the next classroom. Probably, she was not talking about me, so decided to stay a little bit just to make sure, until I heard my name. I wanted to tell her that I wasn't shy, I'm just too scared that they might not understand me, once

I started to talk to them. It was my first time seeing kids my age having different nationalities, but they look and act as if they were born and raised in here. As for me, I wasn't, I am different and I felt that I did not belong in the classroom. So the past few months instead of playing with them even though I wasn't invited by anyone, I would rather just look for a quiet spot and write on my journal. I wrote about what I did today and how much I missed my home country. In here I felt alone, secluded, like a leaf that had fallen off a tree. The only time that I felt like I belong was in my ESL (English Second Language) class, which saved me from the afternoon lessons and finally, I had met other people like myself, who struggled to communicate in English. By the end of the school year, I had made some new friends and was little by little talking to my other classmates. Although, I still felt uncomfortable in the classroom, I learned to not worry about the grammar mistakes, I said while talking. Although, I was still adjusting, I felt a little bit confident that I had improved my English and that I am able to communicate with other people. So as the next school year starts, I met another student who came from a different country and the teacher had assigned me to show her the school. At that moment, I did what I was too scared to do last school year, I introduced myself without feeling scared or embarrassed, I extended my hand and said "Hi, my name is Sydney, what is your name?".

# ILLUSIONARY SAFETY

Written by: JACKIE OBUNGAH  
Inspired by: Nayyirah Waheed

We broke oceans in half to come to places that  
don't want us  
Places that see who we are and how we are as a  
threat  
Places that demonize where we are from and yet  
despise our existence in the spaces we are in  
Places that give us little laps of choices and access  
Places where we are subhuman  
Places that formed on the blood of others

We left people we love for a place that will never  
forgive us  
Places that we want to call home but cannot  
Places that bully me for what I am and choke from  
what I can be  
Places that if choice permitted we would leave and  
never return  
Places that hold me firm and root me to the ground  
Places that end me to their will  
Places that are cursed by the blood of the innocent

We will make spaces for ourselves in places that  
"are not for us"

Spaces for our voices to be heard  
Spaces for our children to be safe  
Spaces where we channel our pain and anger into  
Spaces that are ours to rule and own  
Spaces that cannot be taken from us  
Spaces for us to thrive in supreme wholeness  
Spaces so divine

Migrants  
Portable souls

We sit next to clear windows and watch life fleet  
fast by us.

We are leaving the cities we know, the cities we  
need, the ones we love and the ones who love us.  
In that moment, we reminisce in silence. We hold  
on to the splendid memories we carry,  
we unbuild our homes brick by brick and carry  
them with us.

We only take the things we cannot touch,  
we cannot haul the weight of departure forever,

so, by the fleeting windows we create new ones,  
when we reach there, we will unpack,  
we will unpack our homes brick by brick  
the homes we took with us and the homes we will  
create here.



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