

# BEATS

NEWCOMER YOUTH VOICE + PERSPECTIVE



**ISSUE 13**  
FALL 2018



BEATS recognizes the Unceded Coast Salish Territories of  
Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh Nations.

# EDITOR'S NOTE

GOLSA GOLESTANEH

Hello and welcome to BEATS Issue 13! We are so excited to share this new journey with you! Issue 13 is filled with stories of migration with a flavour of each editor's personal passions. We explore the many definitions and experiences of the Brown identity while learning about migration and how different it can be for each individual. We have many styles of art, from comics to painting, photography and storytelling which illustrate the various skills of our editors. I am honored and grateful for another chapter with BEATS and the opportunity to work with such talented, intelligent and powerful youth on this issue. Special thanks to our funders at Telus Community Grant for supporting another process of our favorite youth-led magazine!

## 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)



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## **Tanvi Bhatia:**

I'm a writer, activist, and cinnamon bun enthusiast studying political science and creative writing at UBC. I have been part of the Fresh Voices Youth Advisory Team since 2012, trying to ensure that the voices of immigrant and refugee youth are heard in conversations about issues that affect them.



## **Debanhi Herrera Lira:**

My name is Debi, I am 14 years old. I was born in Mexico Aguascalientes, but raised in Canada. I came here 8 years ago with the best family I could ask for. I speak multiple languages and still learning more. I am passionate about science, art, photography, books and animals. When I graduate high school I want to study marine biology.



**Aritro Mukhopadhyay:**

A fruity and flamboyant design student at SFU. Apart from being an aspiring artist and author, I adore photography, writing and cuddling cats. If I don't end up as a famous artist then you will most likely find me working at a zoo.



**Farhang Ahadzadeh:**

This is Farhang Ahadzadeh, and I am from Iran. After living in Turkey as a refugee for 3 years, I moved to Canada 4 years ago. Currently, I am working part time, volunteering for different organizations, and studying Microbiology and Immunology at UBC in hopes of getting into Medical School. I am interested in hiking, soccer, volleyball and taking pictures in nature.

# EDITORIAL TEAM

# WHO WE ARE VS. WHO THEY SAY WE ARE

"I am Filipino. I am not a dog eater.  
But I am an educator."

"I am a Canadian citizen from Afghanistan.  
But I am not a terrorist.  
I love to listen to Kanye."

"I am an Indian and fortunately enough I have never directly faced racism. But blatant ignorance isn't cool, that's why I make an attempt to always update myself. I am much more than congested cities and polluted rivers, I am the collective bundle of comfort food, amazing cricket and colourful festivals."

"I am from a  
Middle-Eastern country;  
I am not violent, I  
believe in human unity,  
equality, and love."

"I am Mexican.  
I am not a brick layer. But I am a filmmaker."

"I am from Iran; but I am not Muslim, I'm a Baha'i."

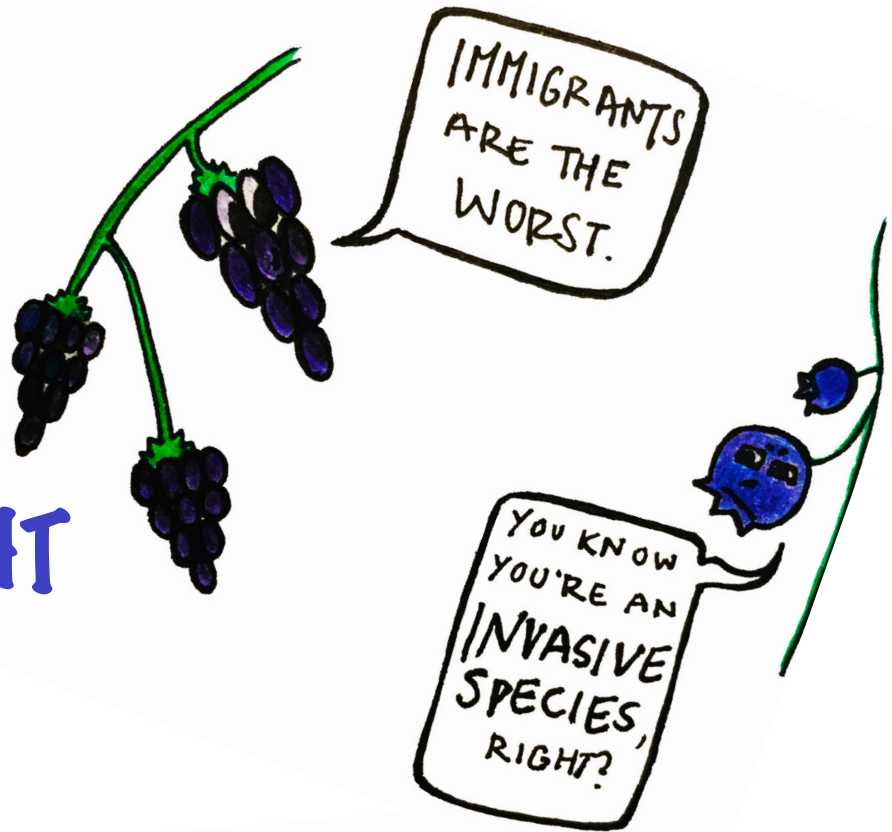
"I am a Mexican who grew up in  
Vancouver.  
I am not a criminal.  
But I am an optimistic Latina that  
still believes in humanity."

"I am from a Middle-Eastern country;  
I am not an isolated person; I have a  
diverse, and great friendship cycle."

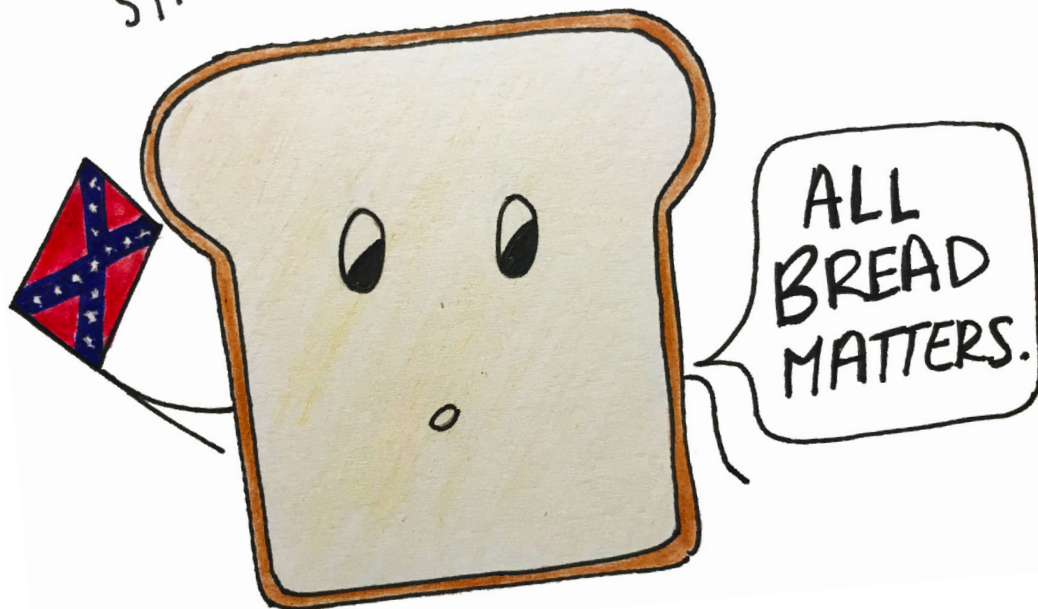
"We are racialized migrants, we are not illegal, uncivilized, troublemakers, criminals, or what you think we are. We are the people on whose backs this country was -illegally- built. We are the migrants who did not come here to shed blood, cause fear or build a colony. We survived colonialism and yet we are here on unceded lands; where we will fight injustices until all of us are acknowledged as who we are, not who they say we are."

# FOOD FOR THOUGHT

By: Tanvi Bhatia



"STRAIGHT WHITE BREAD"



# WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE AN ARTIST?

By: Aritro Mukhopadhyay

What does it mean to be an artist?

Are we born with a special purpose, or is it just a sham that we tell ourselves. Do we feel this way because we feel more? Because we are philosophical? Or not. Who knows. Our journey is full of shrugs, deeper beliefs, trances and re-learning or else we would become obsolete. Obsolete because we are just mere messengers wherein art is the message. You or I are not important, what's important is the message that is to be mitigated. Is this an ascension to higher learning? Perhaps it is because art and expression are most definitely a gift. A gift that is meant to be appropriately used in order to rile up a generation and raise wild questions. In this story, you can either be the protagonist or the anti-hero, either way your importance will only be realised once you're gone. Existence, fame and being known are all elusive yet very reachable aspects. But is that all we fetishize for?

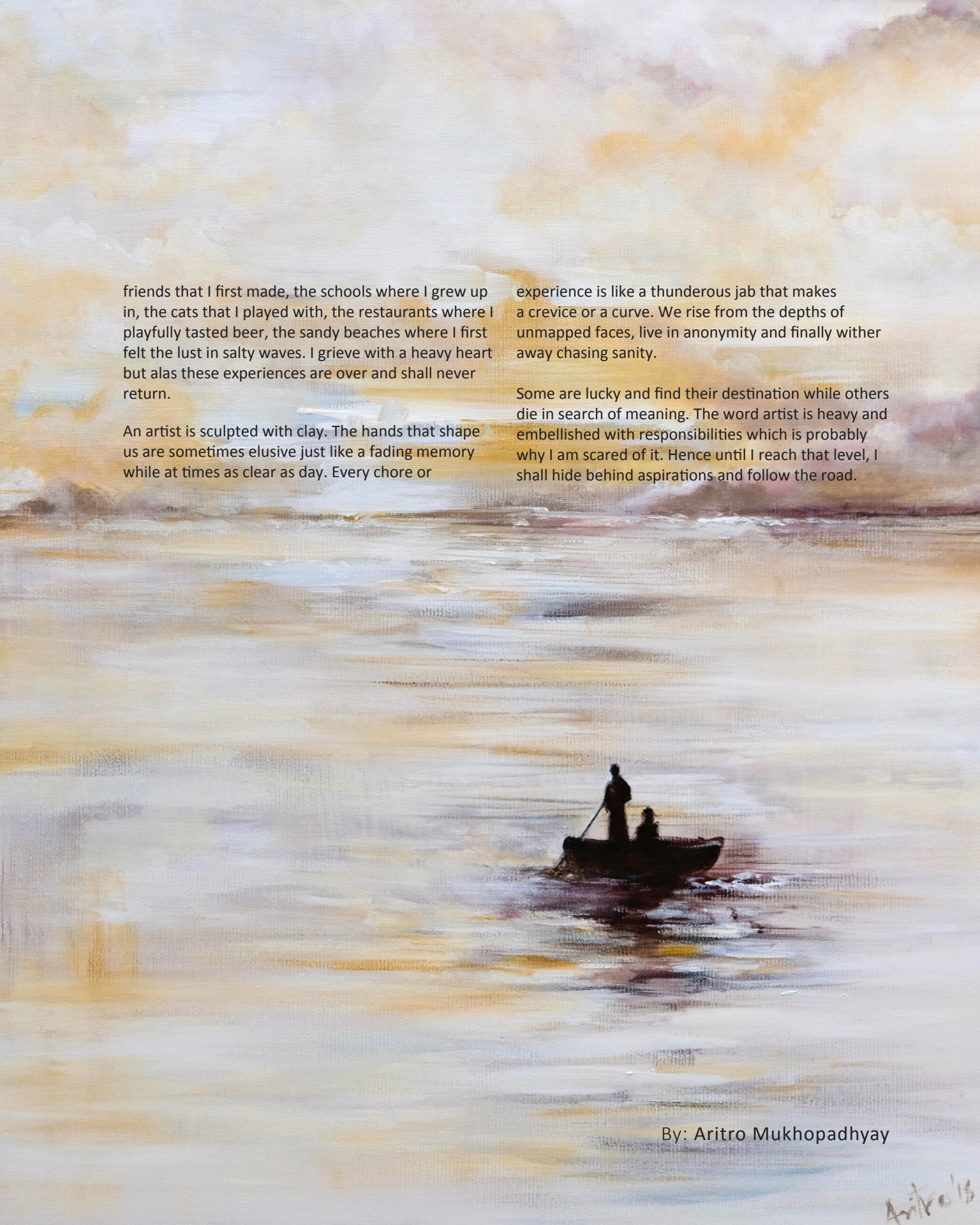
There are different kinds of artists. Some inflammatory some mute, where some like to keep to themselves others are open to everyone. Some stick to best practices while some crack open rules just like snapping a dilapidated piece of wood. But should we let our ways define us? Should I let my style define me? When I was first exposed to art it wasn't multidimensional. I started out with oil pastels and a thick yellow paged colouring book named Jumbo. It was then when I first rubbed orange on those yellowed out pages, I realised that this is going to be my virtue. But will I get there? And if I do, what exactly is this destination? It's only recently that I opened Pandora's box and realised that art is anything and everything and nothing. Even though I have read tons of literature on the theory of art but almost none of it really dawned on me. But gradually I have come to realise the hollowness of this path. The emptiness that strikes when doubt creeps in without consensual agreement, somewhat like the

stray cat that bolted into my house when Mumma opened the door to let her students in for daily tuition classes. I guess doubts are natural and will always be a part of me. It's that quintessential perk that keeps me on edge.

Do we spend most of our days thinking to ourselves, was this road a good idea? Perhaps we do. Where some are vigilant and know what they are doing, others perish in the kingdom of endless thoughts. Some doubt themselves in the process, losing out on opportunities that would otherwise define them. At times art becomes a burden, a burden of societal wrongs and expectations. The heavy sack that artists carry is the equivalent of having a journal with unborn or abandoned ideas. This road comes with inherent responsibilities but it is not grim at all. We get to witness the foetus changes of revolution that we incite.

Clumps of conflicting morals attached on each other like slime holding on to a rugged surface, appropriately defines an artist. The influence that my mother had on me, the principles that my father rained on me, the neighbours who incubated me, the staircase that caressed my shins, the walls that endured my nails, the smell that reminds me of a simpler time, the aroma that lets my soul entwine, the cars that smelled of fresh petrol, the squint in my dusty eyes, the cool dew that I wiped off a bike seat, the rain that I was soaked in, the sunshine that blinded my eyes, the knee scrape that bled in vain, the sweat that dropped on the bills, the chill in my virgin bones, the trees that spread their humongous shade, the street dogs that were at your mercy, the terrace where running was risky and broken kites turned into make shift bows and arrows, the bike that I cycled many miles on, the landing where I hid the stolen puppies, the parking where I buried them, the gutters where I saw death for the first time, the





friends that I first made, the schools where I grew up in, the cats that I played with, the restaurants where I playfully tasted beer, the sandy beaches where I first felt the lust in salty waves. I grieve with a heavy heart but alas these experiences are over and shall never return.

An artist is sculpted with clay. The hands that shape us are sometimes elusive just like a fading memory while at times as clear as day. Every chore or

experience is like a thunderous jab that makes a crevice or a curve. We rise from the depths of unmapped faces, live in anonymity and finally wither away chasing sanity.

Some are lucky and find their destination while others die in search of meaning. The word artist is heavy and embellished with responsibilities which is probably why I am scared of it. Hence until I reach that level, I shall hide behind aspirations and follow the road.

By: Aritro Mukhopadhyay

Aritro's







Brown is the colour my mother gave me. I don't apologize for being Latina, I love my music, my food, my culture; but it's difficult. Ever since I can remember brown isn't good. Brown doesn't save the day, brown isn't the hero, but brown is me. Growing up with the world telling you that, is hard and it hurts. But when I see my parents working 24/7 to support my family or when I'm around

other powerful and amazing people with the same skin colour, I realize society got it wrong. Brown means hard working, it means smart, it means strong, it means bold, and it means me. I am proud to be me, I'm proud to be brown.

-Debanhi Herrera Lira

Photo by: Francis Lira Ramirez

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# THE SCIENCE OF A REFUGEE

By: Farhang Ahadzadeh

Refugee: A person who has been forced to leave their country in order to escape war, persecution, or natural disaster. But, how accurate is this definition? How sensible is this definition? Science is defined as the intellectual and practical activity encompassing the systematic study of the structure and behavior of the physical and natural world through observation and experiment. Have you ever thought how the words 'refugee' and 'science' can be integrated with each other? I mean, have you ever thought about the "Science of a Refugee"?

I, Farhang Ahadzadeh, from Iran, was a refugee in Turkey for 3 years. As a Microbiology and Immunology student at the University of British Columbia (UBC) who has been studying science for three years, I would like to bring the concept of 'refugee' and 'science' together. These two have a few things in common: uncertainty, the concept of equilibrium, the concept of steady state. Collectively, I have symbolized these as  $(-,+,0)$ .

I was banned from a higher education in my country as a result of discrimination against my religion, Baha'i. My family, and I left our country when I was 16. We left everything behind, our relatives, our friends, the joy of being with them. We left our country and moved to Turkey, and lived there for three years as refugees. When you are a refugee, you don't belong anywhere. Uncertainty becomes an inseparable part of your life. When you go to sleep, you have no idea about what will happen to you the day after. It can be hard to see the light at the end of the tunnel. Like how a scientist who's conducting a research study must do trial after trial, put in countless hours, and several analyses without being certain of the result. Being a refugee was like being a scientist of life. Instead of an experiment, I wanted to design a new life for myself. I wanted to become

educated, go to University, become a doctor.

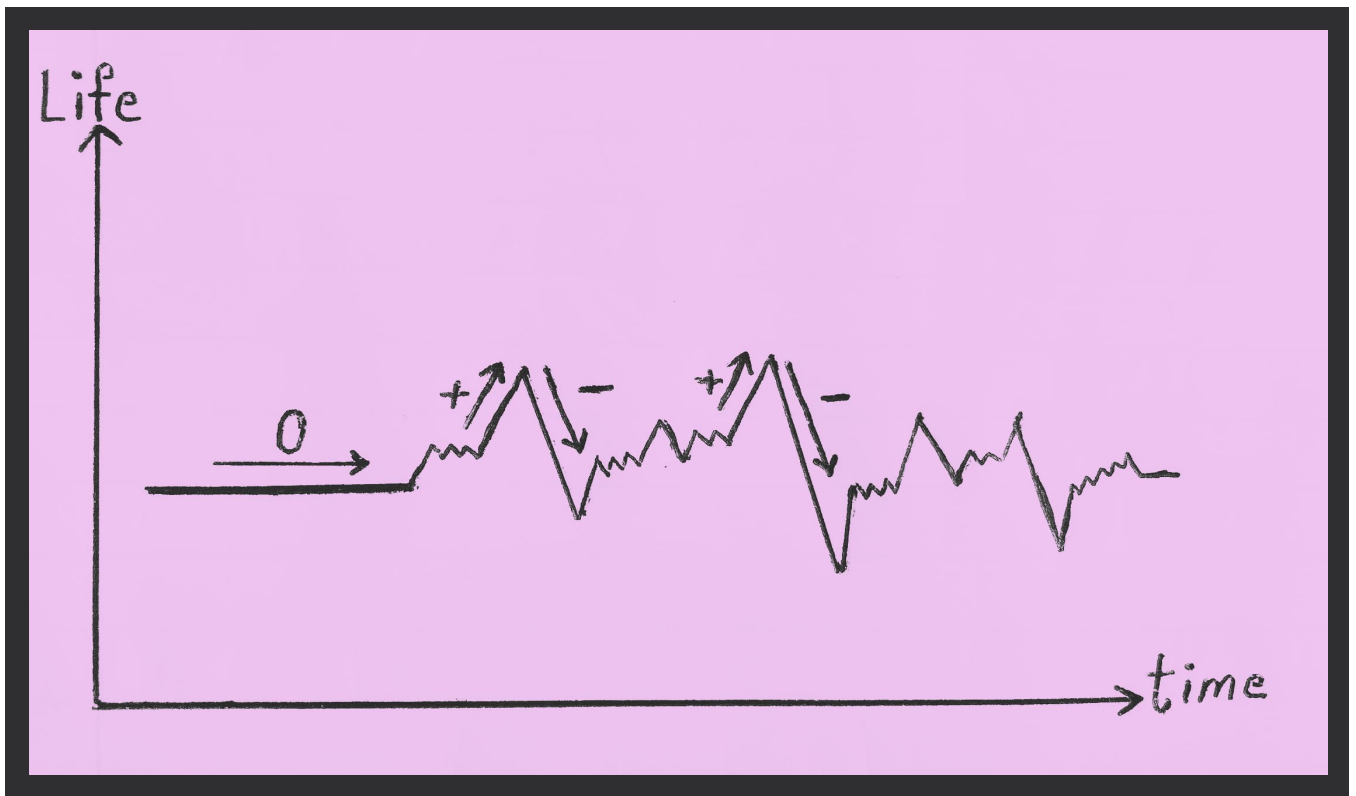
Now, I would like to introduce you the equilibrium and a steady state as well as how I have come up with the concept of  $(-,+,0)$ .

Equilibrium is all about balance, when no side is favoured: when opposing forces or influences are balanced. Liquid water at 0 degrees celcius is in equilibrium with ice under certain conditions. A slight change in temperature in either direction, to above or below zero  $(+,-)$ , would favour either liquid or solid state.

In contrast to equilibrium, in steady state, things are actually happening but at a constant rate. You do not see any changes in the rhythm, but it does not mean that things are not happening. In steady state, things are happening. Everything is functioning to get to a certain point, where no more filling or emptying is required. It is working toward that point, but it will never reach that. Steady state is essential for life. Life at equilibrium is impossible.

And now the question is how all these scientific concepts are related to humanity, and more specifically to the life of a refugee.

A person becomes a refugee because they were at equilibrium in their country (0). By being banned from making changes in my society and country, I was stripped of all opportunities that would allow me to work towards a better life. Imagine a scientist with closed eyes, tied hands, in a dark room. I was not allowed to attend higher education, I was asked to leave halfway through the entrance exam for one of the best high schools in the country; these are only grains of sand from the beach that represents my life in Iran. It all happened because of my religious

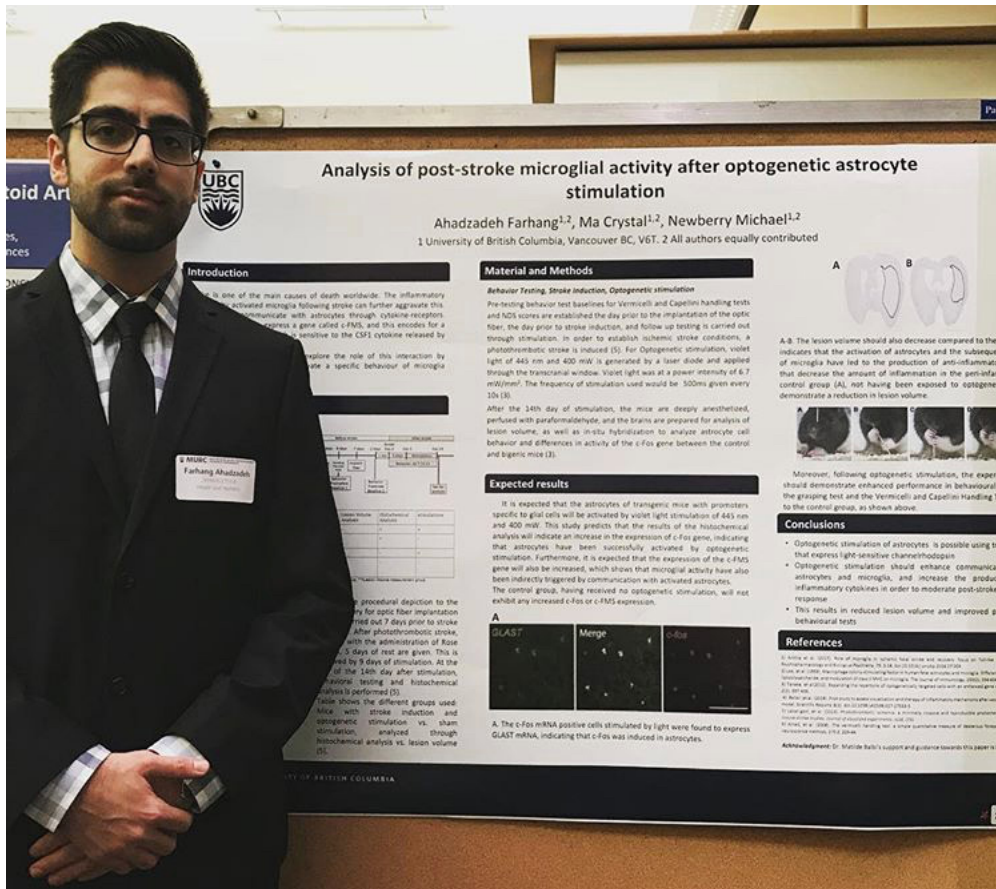


beliefs. Now, if we want to connect this to the scientific term, it would be the 'equilibrium' that I talked about earlier. I was at (0) at all times. All the hard work that my family and I were doing back home to seek a better life was being dismissed. We were being held at equilibrium, the point that no change was being made, the point that we were forced to be at: ZERO.

In hopes of a better life, we left everything behind (-). In those three days that took us to get to Turkey, my family and I were paralyzed by uncertainty. This continued throughout the three years we lived in Turkey as refugees. We had no idea what will be ahead of us. We were not even at equilibrium: we were not even at point of (0). We were below zero. Starting a new life as refugee was not a start from zero; it was a start from negative (-). Not knowing the culture, not knowing the language, not being allowed to work, not being able to go to school, and not knowing what is ahead of you even for the following day, all made it a start from negative (-) for us. However, I was happy about one thing in those moments, and that was the fact that at least I was not at equilibrium (0) anymore. Life was changing,

even though it became harder, but it was changing, it was moving, it was getting a shape. We began to learn the language; I began to self-study at least not to forget what I had already studied. It was getting better and better and it got even better when we realized Canada has accepted us, and all of these was a move toward forward (+); like a scientist, who has received some equipment to do his experiment. I was just happy that I am not at equilibrium any more, that our life is not horizontal (0). Life was becoming like a normal heart rhythm: going up (+) and down (-). However, it was still filled up with lots of uncertainty. Just like a scientist who is unsure about the result of their experiment. However, there is one huge difference. A scientist designs their experiments and runs it in a proper condition in order to eliminate any possible confounding factors that might negatively impact the result of the experiment. A refugee, someone who I call "The Scientist of Life" tries to design a path of life for themselves in darkness, but they have no control of any kind on their experiment. They just hope for the best. That is what my family and I did. We hoped for the best. We had no control whatsoever on our lives. We decided to be "The Scientists of Life". We decided not to be





at equilibrium anymore (0). We decided to stop being path followers. We decided to be path-makers.

The ups and downs, the dynamic nature of (-,+0) for us as refugees changed to a new phase when UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner For Refugee) chose Canada for us as our third country. On April 9th, 2014 we landed in Vancouver, Canada. At that time, I was just wondering what exactly had happened. I was standing in a land of opportunity; a land that at least has let me try different things to find myself. All these thoughts, which were a flashback of my life, which was my parents' sacrifice, passed through my mind within a fraction of seconds. Yes, I was awake, and it was true.

Once again, a new country, a new culture, a new language, a new education system. Again, it was time to adapt. I was over 19, and I did not even have a high school diploma (-). I had to improve my English. When I looked at others, it gave me a bad feeling. They were 18, and had a high school diploma. Again, the start of new life in Canada, was

not a start from (0); it was a start from negative (-). I had to find a job to support myself. I began to study at Adult education, to earn my high school diploma. I found a job at A&W restaurant to support myself. Life again began to move upward (+). Deciding to leave your country, deciding to be a path-maker, comes at a high cost. Imagine water, for it to go from liquid phase to solid phase, it takes some effort. It has to adapt. It has to accept the change. It has to go from (+) temperature to (0), and eventually to (-). It signifies the scientific concept of 'Equilibrium, steady state', and what I call (-,+0). Sometimes, this concept is increasing at an increasing rate in your life, and sometimes it is increasing at a decreasing rate, but it never levels off. This is exactly like science. Life, and science keep changing, but more for those who decide to be path-makers (-,+0), for those who decide to be at steady state, and not at equilibrium (0). As normal life keeps going, (-,+0) keep going as well, hopefully!





Tehran, Iran.

Photo by: Golsa Golestaneh

# B E I N G B R O W N

There is no singular definition for what it means to be brown.

In Europe, the category of Asian includes brown. I am brown, but I am also Asian, as in being from the continent of Asia. In North America, to be Asian means to be from East Asia, and Asian is not brown and I am not Asian but I am still brown. A White man once told me that in Holland, where he grew up, he never considered himself White. If I go back to India, will I still be brown?

Growing up, I was in a constant state of wondering whether I was too brown or brown enough, talking about Vancouver's brown culture and the ways in which I felt like I was never quite the right shade of brown to belong. To me, brown was everything I was and everything I was not – it was inadequacy

in every shape and form, and now, as I've grown, brownness is also home.

I form bonds with others over what it means to be brown, sometimes in the context of our specific Indian childhood upbringing, sometimes cross-cultural identification of the experience of simply being non-white. Brown means something different to each person I meet. And yet it is a common bond that we can draw on when we need to find a space of belonging. Brownness is not a constant but a metaphor for how we walk through life, and maybe the strength of it, our collective brownness, is a power we can all draw on. When we feel alone, when we feel like celebrating, when we are in need of family.

-Tanvi Bhatia







I wasn't as racially aware as I am right now before coming to Canada. I didn't care that I had dark skin but I knew that we were colonised by the British who happened to have skin much paler than mine. I grew up thinking that people who look like me are

bottom-feeders and shall always remain this way. I couldn't be more wrong. It is time to roar back to the much deserved glory.

-Aritro Mukhopadhyay

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# THE WOMEN IN MY FAMILY

By: Debanhi Herrera Lira



I grew up in a country that was foreign to me, we left our family behind. I always imagined they would be there on birthdays, on celebrations and on holidays. As I got older it became more difficult to speak with them on the phone, even harder when my uncle passed away. I came to the realization that I didn't know them as well as I thought. In fact, I've always wondered where I come from. So, I picked up my pen and notebook and marched to my mom. I explained my wondering, and asked her to please tell me where I am from. A while later I was shocked by the revelation. Not only do I come from passed revolutionaries and beer makers, but I also come from a long line of badass women.

One of my great-great grandmothers came to Veracruz from the revolution with her husband. She opened a food business and gave birth to her child at an unexpected time. After giving birth on her own for hours, she wrapped her baby in a blanket and resumed working, as if nothing had happened. My great grandmother on the other hand, is the

oldest of 20 children. She took care of every single one as if they were her own. She still lives today at the age of 99. Someone else I have to mention is my mother. She was born the eldest of three children, and co-raised them with her mother. She has been working hard every single day of her life, and always will. She helped her mom build their house at the age of 11, and became a physical education teacher for special needs kids, in Mexico. All of these women and many more had to go through challenges I may never experience. Most of them never had the opportunity to be more than a mother. Some had to encounter years of misogyny and unequal rights in Mexico. The women in my family are strong, brave and bold. I have a long history of them I yet still have to discover. Our new generation of women have more advantages we will not take for granted. We have become nurses, dentists, students, hair stylists, florists and many more in our family. I am part of this new generation. I am grateful of where I come from.









## *A Recipe For a First Generation Indian Daughter*

By: Tanvi Bhatia

My parents don't really cook. At least, they don't cook well or often, and it's because the kitchen is, and always has been, my grandma's self-declared territory. If our kitchen is a kingdom my grandma is most definitely it's uncontested queen, a fair and generous ruler who knows how to balance the healthy and less desirable (to me, anyway) daals and bhartas with the promise of paneer and puri cholay and, on special occasions, halwa for dessert. My grandma is the best cook I know.

I moved to Canada when I was two years old, and for the first few years of my life, my parents were busy figuring out how to survive. They both worked full time, so while they weren't around my grandma took on the task of raising me. This included feeding me, and it was thanks to those post pre-school lunches

and afternoon snacks that my love affair with Indian cooking began.

This relationship changed when I entered elementary school. It was a world of longer days and packed lunches, meaning that I was no longer eating roti in the comfort of my own home, but rather, in the crowded classroom where everyone could see – and smell – exactly what was in my lunch box.

It didn't take long for me to realize my lunches didn't match the one's my classmate brought. Even most of the non-white kids in my class knew enough to bring sandwiches or equally inoffensive foods to school. The smell of their ham and cheese didn't spread through the whole classroom like my lunch

did, inciting rude comments and cruel jokes at my expense. At six years old, I didn't understand that I wasn't the only one going through this, that this was the experience of immigrants across not only classrooms that looked like mine, but office break rooms and university campuses too. All I knew was that my lunch was drawing unwanted attention. It made me feel different. And, like most children, all I really wanted was to feel like I belonged.

I asked my grandma to stop packing Indian food for lunch.

Somewhere down the line, I stopped letting my mom dress me in Indian clothing for school or friends' birthday parties, and started feeling less and less comfortable in suits and kurtas. I stopped watching as many Bollywood movies. My extended family started migrating here, so we stopped going to visit India. I still spoke hindi at home, but not as much, and I found myself losing bits of my vocabulary, so that my sentences were laced with grammatical errors and English words to replace the ones I couldn't remember.

But you can never quite untie yourself from where you come from. My name, my appearance, the city I was born in – these all marked me as Indian. Try as I did, I could never be Canadian in the way my white friends could be. And as I grew older and saw immigrant friends of mine celebrating their homelands instead of distancing themselves from them, I found myself wishing I hadn't been so quick to try and let my culture go.

In the time honoured fashion of running away from your problems, I applied on a whim for a semester abroad in England. I have a distant aunt and uncle living in Nottingham, both retired, only a two-hour train ride from the town I was living in. I spent many weekends with them – whenever I missed home, whenever I missed family, and whenever I missed Indian food.

My uncle was a chef back in India. He tried a new recipe every day I was there, refusing to let me eat leftovers except when I took them back to my dorm room with me on Sunday night, meals prepared for the whole week ahead. When I asked, tentatively, if he could show me how to cook a few dishes, he was

thrilled. I spent hours in their small kitchen, learning how to make all the dishes I'd seen my grandma cook but never bothered to learn myself. Most were too complicated to remember – my uncle told me if I ever wanted to cook them I should call him, and he would guide me over the phone – but I made note of the basics so I could try them out when I returned home. Each evening, after a delicious dinner, my aunt would make us proper Indian chai, boiled on the stove top with ginger, cardamom, cinnamon, and milk. I came to love the taste of something I'd avoided as a child, finding comfort in the flavours that somehow tasted like home.

When I returned to Canada five months later I couldn't wait to show my family what I had learned. I had a pocketful of recipes and the first night I arrived, I made a point of whipping up a perfect pot of chai, a testament to what I had gained from the past 5 months. It was such a small and easy task, brewing a pot of tea, but it filled me with an inordinate amount of pride, knowing it tasted just like my auntie's.

That night, over a cup of chai, my sister told me, "mom says you speak hindi like a white person now."

I still don't feel Indian enough. I hate that my language falls so clumsily on my tongue, that I feel awkward in traditional clothing, that I still don't know the recipes for my favourite foods. I am scared to go back to India. But this is the year I learned to make the perfect cup of chai, and that makes me feel a little closer to who I want to be. As I grow and leave my parents home, my grandma will no longer cook for me, I will no longer be able to practice Hindi as often as I do now, and I will be removed from most of the strong cultural influences in my life.

Food is not just sustenance. It is memory and culture and meaning, and it has the power to remind us of who we are. My grandma's cooking is forever a part of me. Before I move out, I will ask her to teach me to cook, so that one day when I am a mother I can let my child choose whether they want sandwiches or aloo roti for lunch, so that I can have a proper Indian meal waiting for them when they come home. Through food, I plan to reclaim the culture and land that is mine. And you can be sure that I will one day teach my child how to make a damn good cup of chai.

# VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IS A MEN'S ISSUE.

By: Aritro Mukhopadhyay

We are living with a crippled social system that is rotting on the inside, gradually imploding. This needs to change and it needs to change now. I always feel like a broken record whenever I try to establish a commentary on sexual violence, that's why, this time let's talk about how we can collectively rectify the situation. Since men are the perpetrators of sexual crimes against women in India, he is to be instrumental in finding a solution to this. The problem of gender-based violence runs very deep in India. The deep-rooted patriarchy of the Indian society is nothing but a time bomb. Sexual violence crisis is just one facet of the multitude of problems that reflect the gender discrimination scenario in this country. These prejudicial attitudes are seen right from the womb to tomb. They start with the practice of sex selective abortion and female infanticide, and continue through adolescent and adult life, child marriage, teenage pregnancy, lesser wages for women, unsafe workplaces, domestic violence, maternal mortality, sexual assault and neglect of elderly women.

So where do Indian men stand in this? Start from the way a woman is treated at home, as his mother, as his sister, then as his wife and later as his daughter or daughter in law. Equality and respect has to start here at home. Stop suppressing and engage more in conversation about sex in a public space, educate everyone through proper forums not pornography. For god's sake we are the country that wrote Kamasutra! Stop whispering and talk about sex, it's the natural way of reproduction and not a stigma. Teach men to stop objectifying women whether in films, literature or life. Women are not objects or property to be owned. Educate both men and women on the concept of consent and how individuals have a choice. How no means no and yes means yes. Groom children as equals and it will help them decipher the difference between right and wrong for themselves. Don't teach them what society expects of them, teach them what they deem as being humane and inhumane.





By: Aritro Mukhopadhyay



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