



# United

Samanwita Sen

One of the memories I look back upon fondly happens to be tucked away in the cozy little enclave of a bus seat, lit by the scintillating bobs that blurred outside as we drove past and the shadows of strangers bouncing off the window. I let myself fade into the lull of the murmured discussion, the soaring skyscrapers, the rhythmic motion of the bus...

And then I perked my ears as the hazy sound of voices came into sharp distinction. I remember catching phrases in Cantonese, the native language of Hong Kong, interspersed with other conversations in Japanese, some dialogue communicated in Mandarin, and the occasional English. I marvelled at how wonderful it was that in such a compact space, a vessel designed purely for pragmatic purposes of travel, that there could be this confluence of rich, diverse cultures. Indeed, most walks around the district I called home were always peppered with languages I had the immense privilege to witness – the gentle, nostalgic shades of Bengali, the racing rolls of Hindi, the fervency of Cantonese...

I always considered myself lucky for such an upbringing. While my thoughts and primary

modes of conceiving the world manifested in English, I was always acutely conscious that it was not the dominant way of viewing the world. I was also aware that such a conception of the world was heavily informed by an education system that at times glorified Western ideals. There were even ways when I would find myself slipping into Bengali ways of thinking – being ethnically Bangladeshi, there were always emotional expressions that could only be done justice to with the redolent, soothing beauty of my mother tongue. Having grown up with the opportunity to learn Mandarin, I often found myself describing situations with Chinese idioms – the four-character, pithy statements summing all the complexities of what was happening so much more succinctly than English could.

My affiliation with such an international sense of self was solidified by my experiences at school. I found myself bonding and uniting with my friends not on the basis of similarity, but on notions of difference. We were all young, impressionable teenagers, many of whom were of ethnic backgrounds that did not originate in Hong Kong or were of mixed heritage, and having gone to an international school, many of the Hong Kong students themselves identified more as having a polymorphous cultural identity due to such exposure. We all found ourselves in this ever-shifting nexus of a city, and together we cultivated that shared identity of fostering this unique sense of self – negotiating our own native backgrounds with this simultaneously inter-

national and specifically Hong Kongese upbringing, trying to reconcile the two in the entity we called ‘me.’ My friends and their refusal to comply to absolute cultural norms but amalgamate them played integral roles in this formative aspect of my identity, and I can’t help but cherish this understanding of myself as ‘international.’

Of course, I have acknowledged the importance of learning about my cultural background while maintaining this international sense of self. I grew up having been surrounded by not many Bangladeshis, and found myself falling into thought patterns where I considered myself “rare” and often having to specify to people that Bangladesh was next to India on the world map – rather annoyedly. However, this uniqueness of cultural heritage – the breadth and scope of our literature’s ability to capture the complexity of human emotion, the cultural songs replete with soul-churning verses – is one I’ve come to adore and seek increasingly to assert in my identity. The same goes for my ‘Hong Kong’ upbringing – whether it be the complexities of the entangling language or listening to Chinese music (most often in Mandarin rather than Cantonese due to my stronger grasp of it) and appreciating the lyricism of the words – I sought to integrate both of them harmoniously into my life.

I think in a world with increasing political tensions and racial divisions, or even in top tier universities where international students struggle to

find someone else of a similar upbringing, embracing our differences and viewing it as a force to unite rather than separate is especially important. I once had an Indian man at the airport tell me Bangladeshis were essentially Indian, and after seeing how annoyed I was, he clarified that asserting such differences were only divisive, and seeing us all as part of one unified entity while cherishing our distinct identities was more cohesive to an integrated world. Of course, I still believe Bangladeshis are their own type of unique people, but I won’t deny our cultural ties with the rest of the world.

Ultimately, we are all similar in how uniquely different to one another we are, and making that conscious effort to learn about someone’s background and how that informed who they are now can be a very enlightening experience. It is especially at university, where I find a significant paucity of people of colour on my course, of a lack of improvement in how widely people of my ethnic background are represented in the student demographic, that I am making a more conscious effort to unabashedly cherish where I come from. Of course, I don’t go around insisting that I’m the focal point of every conversation or that I had the best upbringing, but rather that I’m more than willing to talk about how my perception of the world is different to yours, and why that’s actually really cool – after all, it means the world can be just as polymorphous as we are.■

# Border Maintenance

Martin Yip

Someone (in)famous once said that borders were very important. Millions of people were rushing across the border every day. They were bad, bad people. They commit so many crimes, tremendously many. They are a threat to security. So, he said, we must BUILD A WALL to protect the borders.

Across the globe, thousands of years ago, a Great Wall was built. They wanted to fend off invaders from the north, so they went to the mountains and stacked brick after brick. Over the centuries, their successors reinforced and extended the wall. It was so Great that people said you could see it from space. (Spoiler: you can’t.)

Borders aren’t meant to be like that, not in times

of peace. In times of war, borders are attacked and defended vigorously. Some of them shift, some of them are created, some of them are eradicated. But in times of peace, while borders retain their significance, they are much more open. The greatest post-war project after World War II brought about the free movement of goods, service, people, and capital. That didn’t erase borders, nor was it an attempt to do so (as much as some might think). Borders were kept together with the rewards of peace and prosperity.

That was, at least, the case until recent times, when the power aspiring to build walls clashed with the power which has built walls. In the bal-

ance are the days when borders can be relaxed; a bipolar or tripolar future looms, in which everybody is forced to take sides. The Iron Curtain may not be returning; but that is hardly any solace.

It takes a lot of effort to establish borders, and to take them down. But we need not concern ourselves with international relations that much. Our own mental borders are just as hard to manage, and they have a much greater impact on our day-to-day lives than international or even national borders.

For some people, it’s easy to build a wall around their hearts. Perhaps the heart comes under attack, time and time again; perhaps it is the one traumatic event you wouldn’t have imagined in your wildest of dreams. Sometimes the wounds bleed, sometimes they don’t; but deep down, they all hurt. And so over time, we build and fortify a wall. It’s an easy defense mechanism: push everything away. Nothing to gain, but nothing to suffer from either.

Only that walls are often not the best solutions to problems (a simple lesson that may have eluded some world leaders). Yes, there has to be border control, so let’s face up to what’s coming in and what’s going out. If you run the borders, you need to know, and you need to make choices about what to accept and what to reject – and be confident about it.

Borders help create a sense of identity, of autonomy and control. This is not at odds with openness and mutual trust, the foundations on which borders can be transcended for mutual good. And so, instead of going to extremes, either building hard borders or destroying them, moderation is the way to go. That is how borders can best be maintained.■



# Split [2/4]

Leo Gillard

On a normal day, Bel woke up when an alarm went off. Sometimes that alarm was just his alarm clock, sometimes it was the gas warning, sometimes a medication alert, sometimes a car on the street below or the house across the road, and sometimes it was an air raid alert.

That day, however, it was one of the more normal options available. His alarm woke him up to tell him to go to school. Trying and failing to rub the tiredness from his eyes, Bel pulled on the uniform he definitely hadn’t forgotten to hang up when he got home the day before.

And when he wandered downstairs, perhaps slightly later than he should have been to get to school on time, everything was perfectly normal. He ate a normal breakfast, had a normal conversation with his mother, and took a very normal journey on the bus to school.

It was lunchtime when things were no longer normal. First came the air raid warning, when they all bundled into the shelter at the bottom of the school fields. It had become routine, now the war had been going on for three years; once they were all settled in the shelter, they put in their headphones and continued the online classes that had become a necessity.

That was when the news started to come in; the attack had come from a different direction than usual. The opposite direction, in fact. The reason the air raid had come at a strange time, the reason that the distance between the warning being given and the planes flying overhead was shorter, was because they’d come from the southern border.

The southern border that was only a few minutes away from the school by bus. The southern border that Bel had crossed on the way to school that day. The southern border he crossed twice every single day.

The course of action was so clear and so unclear at the same time. Clearly, the school wasn’t safe; there was now an enemy air base barely a twenty minute drive away. The whole area would be a war zone within weeks, if not sooner.

The only problem was where anyone would go. Where Bel would go. The hostilities had been declared so quickly that there was no crossing it right then, no negotiations until the initial conflict had died down.

The first night, Bel went home with a friend who treated him like glass. He called his mother and they cried on the phone together, but there was nothing really to be done. He couldn’t return home, she couldn’t cross over. Soon enough, she would be moved somewhere safer. Soon enough, he would be too, yet those places would be even further removed than they were now.

In the morning, school had been suspended. The government were working out where there was space for people to be sent, if there was anyone who would take someone whose home was on the other side of the border.

Once that did come to pass (it took longer than his friend’s family were comfortable with; for a few days, Bel was sleeping on his headteacher’s sofa), he moved into the city. It was a strange experience: Bel had always been told that cities were full of all kinds of wonderful people from all over the world, people who didn’t care as much about where you were from. Not like some tiny border town in the middle of nowhere, where everyone cared.

Instead, he found that the people of the city knew his accent, and they didn’t like it. They didn’t find it interesting that he could read two languages, or that he’d grown up in a country that had been a friend less than a month before.

Growing up on the border had always been something he’d seen as a fantastic opportunity. He could do whatever he wanted, choose whatever he wanted. He’d been a part of two cultures, could engage in two completely different traditions and worlds. He could choose what he liked and mix the two, and that was exactly what he’d done.

And yet, on a very normal day, that had all been stripped away. And he was left with an empty promise of a war he wanted everyone and no one to win.■

## Note to readers:

*The Poor Print* is one of the few student-run college newspapers in Oxford. The entire team is made of Orielenses just like you, writing articles, editing, formatting, and printing the paper during term, every two weeks.

As we head towards the halfway mark of the year, we would like to invite you to join the team. Whether you have any experience in editing or not, *The Poor Print* would love to have you on board! It is a highly rewarding commitment relative to the time it takes.

Sadly, we cannot stay on forever as editors, as much as we have enjoyed our roles. We will be on the lookout for future executive editors in Trinity term. Hilary is a great time to get involved and learn how everything works. You don't need to commit to being executive editor just yet; but you can have a taste of the editing process and see if you like it! Let us know if you want to join the editing team and we will send some pieces your way!

*In any case, we look forward to your pieces: prose, poetry, art and more!*



# The Perilous Realm

Gregory Davidson

Sometimes you can see it

When the night is dark,  
Terror feeding the frightful  
Vision before your eyes.

When reality falls out of sync,  
And you join the ranks  
Of a world of dreams, lurking in  
  
The forgotten crevices of your mind.  
It's a world you know,  
More familiar than the one you own.

So cross the border  
Between the world of what is real  
And the world of all things else,  
  
A world, where ancient wishes  
Materialise in forms of stone and gold  
A world where myths and legends  
  
Are spoken honestly, and not by fathers,  
Who lie to make the world's  
Colours brighter.

Where whimsy runs like swordfish swim,  
A freedom lies within this world,  
A freedom to believe in wonders,  
  
The world demands do not exist.

# Waking Moments

Caitlin Ross

The sun, having travelled a great distance,  
Breaks soft upon one still, rose-tinted cheek.  
Glowing waking hours of our existence,  
Pale limbs stir 'neath their tangled,  
off white sheets

Light dust hovers in the shafts of sunlight,  
Like birds flitting, basking in morning heat.  
The old bed creaks, and the young sun  
highlights  
Sleepy young eyes, which crack open to meet

The day; Beating heart of a new day,  
And the birds and cicadas sing their odes  
To the morning; The moon gone on her way,  
And momentarily, the world has slowed.

My dear reader, lavish in those seconds,  
Lest the deary call of living beckon.

## UPCOMING ISSUES

Issue #52 – Progress

Submission deadline: 16/2/20

Issue #53 – Triumph

Submission deadline: 1/3/20

You can read The Poor Print online, at [www.thepoorprint.com](http://www.thepoorprint.com), where you will find all of our previous and future issues, as well as pieces not shown in the print editions.

# Lines Must Be Drawn

Martin Yip

Imagine there's no countries / It isn't hard to do / Nothing to kill or die for / And no religion too.' So passionately sang John Lennon in *Imagine*. The imagery of peace and harmony was appealing: if only the physical and psychological barriers between people could come down, we would all be able to live without dispute. The imagery, however, is utopian, and here in the real world, borders need to exist.

Case in point: the outbreak of novel coronavirus 2019. (There is advice from the university which is updated from time to time.) The first cases of 2019-nCov, as it is designated, occurred in December in Wuhan, China. Not long after news of the virus outbreak spread, countries neighbouring China began to take preventive measures, such as thermal monitoring and banning flights to and from Wuhan. On January 22, North Korea closed its borders to all foreign tourists. Mongolia followed, as did the Russian Far East. Some Asian countries have also

stopped issuing visas to Chinese travellers, and are barring infected individuals from entry. India and Taiwan recently banned the export of some face masks.

All these measures could not have been implemented without borders. Enforcing borders deters the spread of viruses. Having well-defined and operational borders means that each government is focused on protecting those within its territory (and those who are yet to return to it). As community outbreaks have been reported, self-aware citizens are keeping themselves at home, to minimize contact with others and chances of being infected. They are drawing and enacting their own borders, for the sake of not only themselves but their fellow citizens.

Alas, well-defined borders also mean there is a dominant power that can at times do wrong. Just look at the borders within which the outbreak began. Ophthalmologist Li Wenliang worked at

Wuhan Central Hospital and warned of the coronavirus as soon as December 2019. A few days later, the local police bureau summoned him and issued a letter of admonishment regarding his 'false statements on the Internet' which 'seriously disrupted social order'. 'If you remain stubborn and continue your illegal activities, you will be punished by the law! Do you understand?' it said. 'Understand', wrote Li, with a fingerprint on his answer. On the night of 6 February, Li passed away after being infected by the coronavirus. The irony is both striking and saddening.

While some borders are formed naturally by geographical features, others have been the result of negotiation and even warfare. The way they are drawn may be unsatisfactory, but they do need to exist. Yet, beyond physical borders, it is with regard to abstract borders that we must be most vigilant. These are, for example, the border between liberty and state intervention, and the border between rumour and fake news. There is much to be gained from surreptitiously moving these borders, but only for a select few. We must draw our borders and maintain them rigorously, for infections of the mind may well be more disastrous than infections of the body. ■



## عجيب الخلقت

منعم وينس

دو زبانیں بندھی ہوی  
دو دل دھڑکتے ہوئے  
دو سر ٹکراتے ہوئے  
دو سرحدیں



## Chimera

Monim Wains

Two tongues tied together  
Two hearts beating  
Two heads butting together  
Two borders

# Blurred Crayons

Monim Wains

Old crusted sand baked under the searing sun. Thin cracks stretched along the surface, marking allegiance, marking blood. Shadows loomed over the lines, walking with slow, heavy intent.

Links of chain rattled in the quiet air, as they looked over the earth. They, the powerful. They, the inheritors. They, the nations.

One of them, the largest, sat down, reclined into the back of its throne, lazy arms hanging down, spreading into the space.

It opened its eyes and surveyed the group, considering those around the table. Each gaze returned with a meekness; each head hung shyly.

It smiled, smug.

At the other end of the table, there was a tussle. It was nothing, really, but it didn't rest either. The table was too full to begin with. Each elbow crushed into the one next to it. Each shoulder had to jostle with its neighbours, squabbling for a voice. They couldn't keep out of the way if they tried.

Each of them wore pride on their chest, thinking it made them brave. It gave them courage,

the foolish kind, to grab for space, and shuffle for power. It was an open wound, if only they could tell; tender and sore to the touch, obvious by the depth of its stench. The two at the end smelled the worst.

With noise and bravado, they locked into each other, spitting and fuming, drunk with false prestige.

The thing with a table so small, with them so close, is the spread of noise. In the babble of their thoughts, the noise carries over like an infected cough, irritating everyone it touches.

It didn't take long before the head of the table heard. It looked over at the other end, observing quietly at first. It stroked its chin, working through the possibilities. After some time in thought, it smiled, and watched the two carefully.

Both of them were so small, so insignificant compared to it. The spat grew, spreading into an argument; everyone was pointing fingers now.

