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Acknowledgement of Country

Honi Soit is produced, published and distributed on the stolen land of the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation. Sovereignty was never ceded. For over 235 years, First Nations peoples in so-called 'Australia' have continued to suffer under the destructive effects of invasion, genocide, and colonisation. As editors of this paper, we acknowledge that we are each living, writing, and working on stolen Gadigal, Wangal and Bidjigal land, and are beneficiaries of ongoing colonial dispossession.

We acknowledge that the University of Sydney is an inherently colonial institution which is not only physically built on stolen land, but also ideologically upholds a devaluing of Indigenous systems of knowledge and systematically excludes First Nations peoples. We recognise our complicity in such systems. We strive to remain conscious of, and actively resist and unlearn, colonial ideologies and biases, both our own and those perpetuated by the University and other institutions like it.

As a student newspaper, we pledge to stand in solidarity with both First Nations movements and all Indigenous struggles toward decolonisation worldwide, endeavouring to platform Indigenous voices. *Honi* is committed to countering the exclusion, censoring, and silencing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in mainstream media.

Always was, and always will be Aboriginal land.

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Ishbel Dunsmore & Simone Maddison

Editorial

Simone Maddison

The photograph on this week's front cover features St. Joan of Arc Church in Haberfield. It was taken just past sunset, at a small 6pm Mass when the tower bells began to ring and the priest was starting his sermon. Beyond a dim yellow glow emanating from inside the nave, only the crucifix at the centre of the image kept Dalhousie Street alight.

My family has attended this church since my great-grandparents migrated from Italy in the 1950s. My mother was baptised here. It is also where we held her father's funeral. When I refused to undertake my communion in Year 4 — my scripture teacher could not justify why a woman would never be the Pope, so I no longer saw the point in going to church — St. Joan of Arc became somewhere I could no longer go.

Life, death, and purgatory: these are the themes you will find in my edition's focus on Antichrist.

Lotte Weber first reckons with the meaning of volunteering in "faithless nations" like Australia, and queries if we would still be selfless if not for our religion. On page 8, Ravkaran Grewal critically reflects on Bhagat Singh's seminal essay *Why I Am An Atheist* amidst contemporary anti-colonial struggles. Later, we hear from Purny Ahmed on the interconnectedness between Islam, family, hardship and defiance.

Of course, no reckoning with Antichrist would be complete without a little bit of sin and blasphemy. In this week's feature article, I explored how politics manifests in the bedroom for self-proclaimed 'left-wing' or 'progressive' couples of all sexualities. A far cry from the visions of ecstasy and reciprocity we hope to find in these spaces, intimacy remains coloured by the quintessential Christian values of shame, guilt and gendered power.

Although I no longer believe in what it represents, I still pass that neon blue cross every morning and night. When it was first installed, all I could do was stop and stare. I hope that you have the same feeling — a mixture of blind awe, fury and grace — as you explore the brilliant work of each writer and artist who has contributed to this edition.

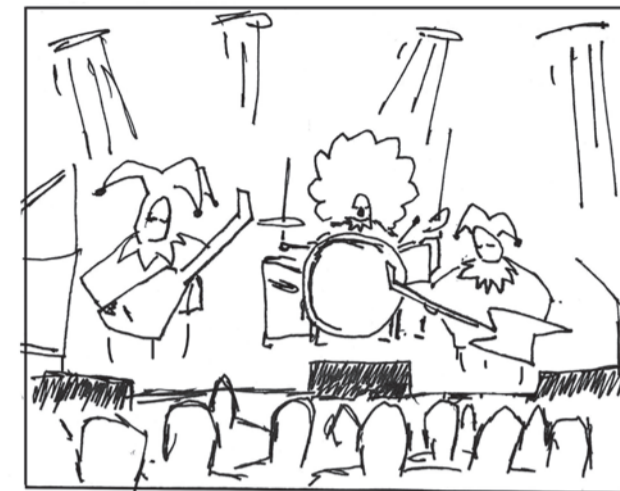
Yours without faith,
Simone.



Photography: Ishbel Dunsmore



Cartoon Caption Contest



Cartoon: Huw Bradshaw

Submit your best caption for the above to editors@honisoit.com for a chance to WIN and be published in the next edition! Winners receive a personalised limerick from Angus McGregor.



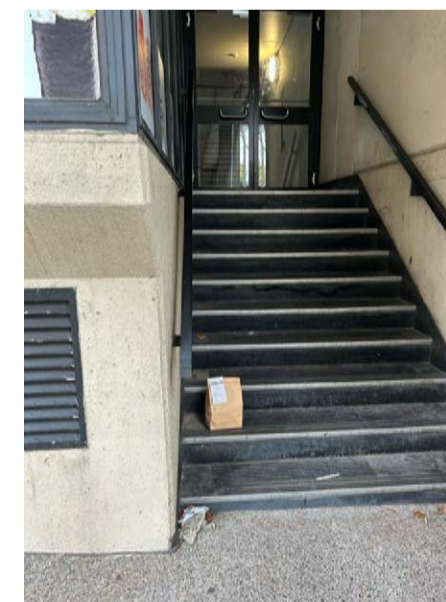
Cartoon: Sascha Zenari

Winner:
"Bird wheel."
— Kamyar Murphy

Winner's reward:
*Two birds with beaks long on a couch,
Sat chatting, not leaving a slouch.
They chirped and they chattered,
Their beaks never clattered,
Just gossiping, preening, and crouch.*

Spotted on campus!

Simone ordered Uber Eats this weekend and the driver left it on the stairs behind the Wentworth Building. The paper bag looked both lonely and esoteric. The egg fried rice from Thai-La-Ong was still warm, though!



Honi's Activism Guide

While it is daunting to attend a protest — with others or alone — if you follow the social media of organisers, activists and community members you will feel more familiar with that particular solidarity movement beforehand. Plan your trip ahead by looking at public transport timetables and don't feel lesser than for having not attended before. If you attend one protest, you are guaranteed to want to attend again to listen to speakers, join in chants and march with others for a common cause. If worried about your rights as a protestor, visit Legal Observers NSW social media or website for more information.

Monday 06/05 May

Teach-in: Boycott & Divestment with Dr Claire Parfitt, 12pm @ Gaza Solidarity Encampment, Camperdown

Teach-in: Anti-apartheid Solidarity Movement in Australia featuring Robert Austin, 3pm @ Gaza Solidarity Encampment, Camperdown

Tuesday 07/05 May

Students for Palestine Rally, 1pm @ Gaza Solidarity Encampment, Camperdown

Wednesday 08/05 May

Students Against War protest tour of USyd buildings with ties to Israel, 2pm @ Gaza Solidarity Encampment, Camperdown

Thursday 09/05 May

Sydney Student Strike 4 Palestine, 2pm @ Town Hall

Saturday 11/05 May

Rally to end the privatisation of school and government cleaning, 12pm @ Parramatta Square

Sunday 12/05 May

Palestine Action Group Rally, 1pm @ Hyde Park North

Wednesday 15/05 May

Protest 76 Years of Nakba: stop the genocide! Free Palestine! Protest, 5:30pm @ Town Hall

Letters



Dear Editors,

I am delighted to report that our benevolent co-SRC Vice President has intervened on behalf of Amplify Angus (Fisher) to salvage his moonwalk and inform us of NLS' disabilities platform. In Jasmine Donnelly's own words, she sought to alert us of Fisher's plans for a "streamlined academic plan" so students do not need to renew every semester and emails between IDS and students should be "individualised" rather than a mass email.

First, our VP and the still absent Fisher commit the rookie mistake of maintaining a blank page as to their vision for DIAP. Must we remind Fisher & co of their run for the University of Sydney Union and that their policies on USU staff – disabled or otherwise – remain a question mark?

Second, though I agree that a better Academic Plan portal is indeed useful, how the USU has remits over IDS' email communications is a puzzling one and that's before we question the usefulness of a personalised email policy. Will it make any substantive difference other than a cosmetic change? I'm fairly certain that curated, individualised emails from Labor NSW did not deter me from scrapping my membership.

One might even point out that NLS' compatriot-in-unity James Dwyer took the effort to compile a response rather than the lack of one by Fisher. As for whether we deserve more than a proverbial pair of dead fish eyes to scrutinise Union policies, I'll ask you, Honi readers, to decide for yourself.

Yours,
Khanh (SRC Disabilities Officer).

Entering the (soap)boxing ring: 2024 USU Soapbox recap

Sandra Kallarakkal and Angus McGregor throw some punches.

After the drop out of former NLS-aligned candidate Harshita Bhandari hours before the Soapbox took place, the remaining nine candidates contesting the USU Board took to the stage at Manning Bar to convince students they deserved

Cost of living
In their opening remarks, all of the candidates argued that expanding the USU's role as a service provider was essential to help students tackle the cost of living crisis. While lowering the cost of food on campus and expanding subsidies are universally supported ideas, some candidates differentiated themselves with more specific knowledge of the USU's existing initiatives. Simon Homsany (Independent) argued the USU needed to focus on the supply

side and evaluate all their existing partnerships to ensure they were getting the best deal. He argued his experience as a chartered accountant made him well placed to take on this role. He did not, however, point to any specific changes he would make to suppliers or the current distribution model. Georgia Zhang (Switchroots), drawing on her experience as a FoodHub volunteer, was able to point to very specific issues with the current program including a lack of fresh fruit and vegetables

chaired the debate with USU President Naz Sharifi, PULP editor Huw Bradshaw, and our own *Honi Soit* editor Sandra Kallarakkal asking questions. Key issues discussed included how the union could best assist students during a

and the over reliance on student volunteers. She also suggested FoodHub could expand its offerings to include other essentials such as toiletries. Phan Vu (Independent) also suggested improvements noting the long queues to use the service. Angus Fisher (NLS) argued that key to solving the issues with FoodHub was expanding the hours it was open and suggested the USU further subsidise GP and Pharmacy services in the USU run Wentworth Building. In terms of accessing

cost of living crisis, the best ways to assist the unique issues facing international students, how to make the union more inclusive, and how the governance of the board as well as clubs and societies could be improved.

cut and Dwyer suggested a full financial audit. However, external audits already take place, and the rhetoric of some candidates assumed there was a pile of money not currently being used. When pressed if his policies surrounding divestment would cost the union money, Floyd disputed that it was an overall loss, pointing out that investing in First Nations businesses and community organisations would pay off in the long term.

International students
Four of the candidates contesting the election are international students which speaks to their growing role in campus life. All four, Vu, Naomi Viegas (Independent), Daniel Park (Independent), and Shirley (Zixuan) Zhang (Independent) argued that it was important to have international student representation on the Board. All four also argued their experience

in multiple countries taught them how to reach out to students not traditionally involved in campus life. Besides broad calls for diversity and inclusion, very few candidates provided a specific vision for how to engage international students and the specific problems they face. Commendably, almost all of the candidates have at some point

expressed public support for the Fair Fares campaign. Zhang argued that the key issue was a lack of communication and understanding of what the USU was and what they did. She suggested translating USU messages into languages other than English and creating USU accounts on social media platforms like Whatsapp and WeChat would address

communication initiatives. These are promising ideas but when questioned under pressure she was unable to explain how this policy would be implemented when similar efforts had failed in the past and her other policy of creating cultural exchanges was vague at best. Homsany is proposing a 'Buddy Program' where international students would

Political activism
The candidates had a wide range of views of how political or factional the union should be and to what extent it should advocate for and take political positions on political issues. Traditionally, the USU has been a distinctly corporate body in comparison to the more activist SRC. Homsany and Vu both argued their independence and separation from campus politics was a benefit. When asked a question from an anonymous submission regarding independent-running candidates being managed or supported by politically aligned individuals, Homsany said that his "politics were his policies." Vu argued that

the average student on campus was apolitical and not attached to any faction. However, when asked by *Honi* whether her executive position as International Student Officer in the Sydney University Law Society (SULS) would cause a conflict of interest if Vu were elected — considering SULS recently proposed a change to their constitution which bar the President, Secretary, Treasurer and Equity Officer from running for Board — she did not provide a clear answer. Vu pointed to her running for Board on a separate platform to her SULS position, though she has received support from fellow SULS executives, and stated that if elected the other directors would "work with me as

a person[...]who brings changes." Fisher, Zhang and Floyd on the other hand, talked up their left wing credentials as key to their policy platform and vision. Fisher pushed for the largely accepted pipe dream of mandatory student unionism and when pressed if policies like his graffiti tunnel rave matched his activist vision, Fisher responded by affirming that putting students first was political, defending his record as an SRC counsellor. Zhang, who is one of the SRC SASH Officers this year, proposed an environment and sustainability review and committed to implementing BDS (Boycott, Divest, Sanction)

principles. When asked how she would engage students not familiar with student politics in her revamped environment and consent week programs she proposed an expanded advertising campaign, more USU staff, and expanded collaboration with the SRC. Dwyer walked a fine line between the two camps. He argued for reviewing investments to make sure they reflected the values of the whole student body but did not give any specific examples of unacceptable investments while also refusing to give a straight answer on whether he supported BDS principles when pressed by Bradshaw.

Accessibility
Increasing accessibility and inclusion on campus was a key policy platform for the majority of candidates, with several focusing specifically on disability access and services. All candidates, with the exception of Fisher, submitted statements to *Disabled Honi* outlining their vision for the upcoming USU Disabilities Inclusion Action

Plan (DIAP) that is set to be developed and consulted on within this year. Viegas, when questioned by *Honi* on her failure in her DIAP vision statement to consider disabled USU staff and labour rights for staff who may be injured on the job, responded with broad puff statements about disability inclusion, affirming her

commitment to working together with disabled people and being "one with them." Park was pressed by both *PULP* and *Honi* on his flagship policy initiative — a student-run USU counselling service. When asked about the initiative causing further overreliance on student volunteers, Park responded by saying "a lot of students are

willing [to engage] if the cause is positive" and also spoke to encouraging staff members to volunteer. On matters of training, safety and liability — especially in the handling of more serious mental health concerns — Park stated he would employ "training workshops" and referral systems, and would "engage with existing support networks like

Considering the limited speaking time and amount of questions that can be asked, it is difficult to discern candidate policy platforms as a whole. Additionally, also considering that the majority of the

Soapbox audience are candidates' own campaigners and not prospective voters, it is hard to gauge their popularity. With two candidates already having dropped out, it is now left to be seen which

of these nine hopefuls will gain the six coveted Board Director seats. Head on out to Eastern Avenue in the next week to hear them out and make up your own mind.

All USU members are eligible to vote. Voting will take place online from Monday May 6 to Friday May 10.

Adolescent allegiance: Unravelling the mysteries of baby cults

Emily Bentancort considers her childhood.

When you think of a cult, you straight away think of extremists like Charles Manson or members of The Children of God Cult. We never seem to question if youth groups are just 'baby' cults in the making.

One thing that stuck with me while watching a documentary, *How to Become a Cult Leader* (2023), is that cult leaders often impact those who are most vulnerable within society. Specifically, young adults and adolescents who struggle with identity, self-esteem and free will. Charles Manson wholeheartedly used this method by targeting teenage runaways and other 'lost' souls. Similarly, youth groups use welcoming gestures and tactics for members to feel as if they 'belong' to this group and must follow 'all' practised faith-based ideologies. It comes to the question of why we don't call the local youth group a 'baby cult' or a place for 'coming-of-age culties.'

Growing up, I also went to a youth group organised by the Catholic Church. But surely my group was not like that? We didn't brainwash people and call it 'enlightenment', nor did we force our opinions on others — at least, that's what I thought until I looked over at my poor friend's reaction when I was invited to this group as we sang "Shine, Jesus Shine" to her. *Fuck*.

And just like that, those red-tinted glasses were thrown off. The iconic youth group cheese pizza was no longer iconic anymore, and the religious chants no longer sounded like I was in a community.

Sometimes you need to see things from another perspective in order to realise how warped that reality is.

To explore these issues, I made a survey regarding youth group experiences where participants anonymously provided their experiences of both "enlightenment" and being "brainwashed". While it is important to acknowledge that some have had a welcoming and great experience, I am here to address the tainted childhoods that were induced by toxic, harmful and self-loathing narratives.

One anonymous participant, who went to a Pentecostal youth group, reflects on their experience of brainwashing having "Worship Nights" and a youth leader who would "dim the lights and sing a repetitive Jesus chorus with the same four lines over and over again. Another youth pastor would come around and put his hands on me and scream at me in tongues".

Another iteration of cultish behaviour is the use of fear to manipulate members into doing certain acts. When these survey members were asked about any experiences with religious youth organisations using harmful tactics, many answered with "the 'devil' as the means of scaring us into doing the right thing". Such "right things" meant to practise intense faith-based ideologies and to have others join the "path to salvation".

Normalisation of tactics why was it never questioned?

In retrospect, the purpose and cult-tactics of youth groups were never questioned as they are often associated with religious organisations. Although Australia declares itself a secular country, religious institutions have played a large role in our society since the beginning of colonisation. Over time, cult tactics behaviours have been used consistently and thus became the normalisation of cult behaviours within certain groups. And with that association, there is a normalisation for young kids to go to the Church's hall with much older 'youth leaders' and speak in tongues.

It has become apparent that this normalisation has become an issue; it has turned into an epidemic where previous youth members who have now turned into adults are coming forth to discuss their unsettling experiences and/or religious traumas. This implies that religious organisations should only provide 'community' groups for adults, as many kids are too young to declare their devotion to these religious beliefs.

In all honesty — I think we were all too young to be a part of some organisation that promoted oppressive, homophobic, and terrifying dogmatic beliefs, as well as sex prejudice.

To this day, I still remember one childhood friend who converted to Mormonism (also recognised as Latter-day Saints) just so they could join the Mormon youth group and talk to "the hot Mormon guys" — her words, not mine. In that scenario, do we think it is a good idea for young girls to be a part of religious institutions and to be doctrine with certain dogmas in the name of interacting with "hot religious guys"? The answer should be no.

'Thank God' these youth groups aren't encouraging the murder of celebrities — because then these committed youth groups would be killing it. And 'thank God' we do not see the extremes of the youth surrendering their identity as an individual to be a part of the whole. However, the idea that youth groups do use cult tactics to both lure young individuals and provide a zero-exit strategy should be recognised.

Cult tactic 1 Trojan Horse

One common cult tactic that is used is 'The Trojan Horse', where youth groups have used innocuous events as a platform to introduce ideological or religious concepts. Similar to cults, true intentions are never given to its members. Often newcomers are told that the youth group is hosting a 'movie night', 'pizza night' or even a 'party', but are shocked when it comes to reality. I have never recovered from the time I had invited my friend to one of those 'movie nights'; we were told that we would watch *Finding Nemo* (2003) but it was miraculously missing and we watched *God's Not Dead* (2014) instead.

Cult tactic 2 Transactions

Within this cult tactic of the Trojan horse comes another — the conditioned belief of transactions. These groups have often lured young people with free food in return for God's full salvation. I believe this is ethically questionable. In our context of cult behaviours, cults have incorporated transactional concepts into their practices such as quid-pro-quo relationships and emotional transactions.

Another survey participant disclosed this transaction behaviour in their first time going to a youth group: "It was a very strange experience — I was only really there for the company and free food". As a previous member of a youth group, the discourse was always focused on "God loves you, here's some free food, now help our community".

Youth groups have conditioned members from a young age to believe that life itself is a transaction. But the transaction of chanting intense dogmatic beliefs to receive free food in return has been overlaid.

Isolation and zero-exit strategy

Have you ever heard anyone refer to their "second family" or "community" as their youth group?

If not, you might be surprised to find that it's a common sentiment, due in part to many youth groups employing social and emotional manipulation tactics to impart to their members a sense of "us versus them". These "zero-exit" and inferred isolation strategies are expressed within snarky comments and are disparaging towards those who are outside this group. It leaves

members who have been brought up by these religious groups to feel a sense of urgency and dependency on their group peers.

Some may argue that these youth groups are virtuous, building a sense of community and close-knit friendships, but my question to you is this: what happens to those friendships if a person leaves or is cast out of a youth group?

In most cases, these 'withdrawers' are merely categorised as 'others' and amicably parted from. In the worst cases, they are completely ostracised from a community that once promised to be a safe space for self-expression and friendship.

Knowing this, and being completely dependent on your youth group, it becomes very hard to leave these communities. One survey participant who grew up attending a youth group shared their last encounter: "the last time was painful, more so because I no longer enjoyed it, but also because I was struggling to let go because it's all I have known my entire life".

The ending

I do not want to say that youth groups are cults. However, most youth groups do fall into the category of 'cult-like behaviour' by using the Trojan Horse and the actions emphasising 'outsiders vs youth members' — as such, it does become alarming.

Maybe we were too young to be introduced to such religious organisations that pressured us to be their future and spread alarming dogmas about sex, the queer community and "allegations" about anyone in their appointed church. It's time that we become our own individuals.



Art: Lauren Maccoll

Why I am an atheist

Ravkaran Grewal reconnects without his faith.

"Is it due to vanity that I do not believe in the existence of an omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient God?"

The notion of atheism today invokes shallow teenage rebellion and dogmatic atheism à la Christopher Hitchens or Richard Dawkins: in essence, smug individuals with an inflated sense of self. In highschool, I too fell into the trap of replacing a belief in God with faith in my own ego. It was not until I, while researching for my History Extension project, came across Bhagat Singh's seminal essay *Why I Am An Atheist* that I started to develop a deeper understanding of what atheism could mean.

Inside of South Asia, Bhagat Singh is one of the most popular anticolonial agitators and thinkers — rivalling even Gandhi's stardom. In December 1928, Singh assassinated a British police officer and, a few months later, threw smoke-bombs in the Delhi Legislative Assembly before awaiting arrest. While in jail, Singh staged hunger strikes, debated Gandhi and wrote extensively. At just age 23, Bhagat Singh was hanged by the British, being remembered today as a martyr for the anticolonial struggle and the progenitor for a revolutionary movement that challenged Gandhi's liberalism.

Written during his time in jail, *Why I Am An Atheist* serves as a response to criticism from his fellow anticolonial comrades who had suggested that Singh had become an atheist because of fame and arrogance. In it, Singh charts his philosophical development towards atheism and ends with a critique of religion. Singh's essay has remained one of the most popular of his works, serving as an alternative to Anglo-American dogmatic atheism and inspiring a lineage of South Asian atheistic thought. More recently, the essay counters the co-option of Singh's image by the Hindu nationalist right.

"Any man who stands for progress has to criticise, disbelieve and challenge every item of the old faith."

Growing up it was difficult to reconcile my family's Sikh beliefs, attending a Christian highschool while also not believing in God. Many non-white non-believers are familiar with the intrinsic link between religion and culture; with self-identifiers such as 'cultural Sikh' and 'cultural Muslim' serving as an expression of irreligiosity in conjunction with cultural pride. The Anglo notion of atheism is largely a Protestant concept that presents a clean separation between religion and other realms such as culture and society.

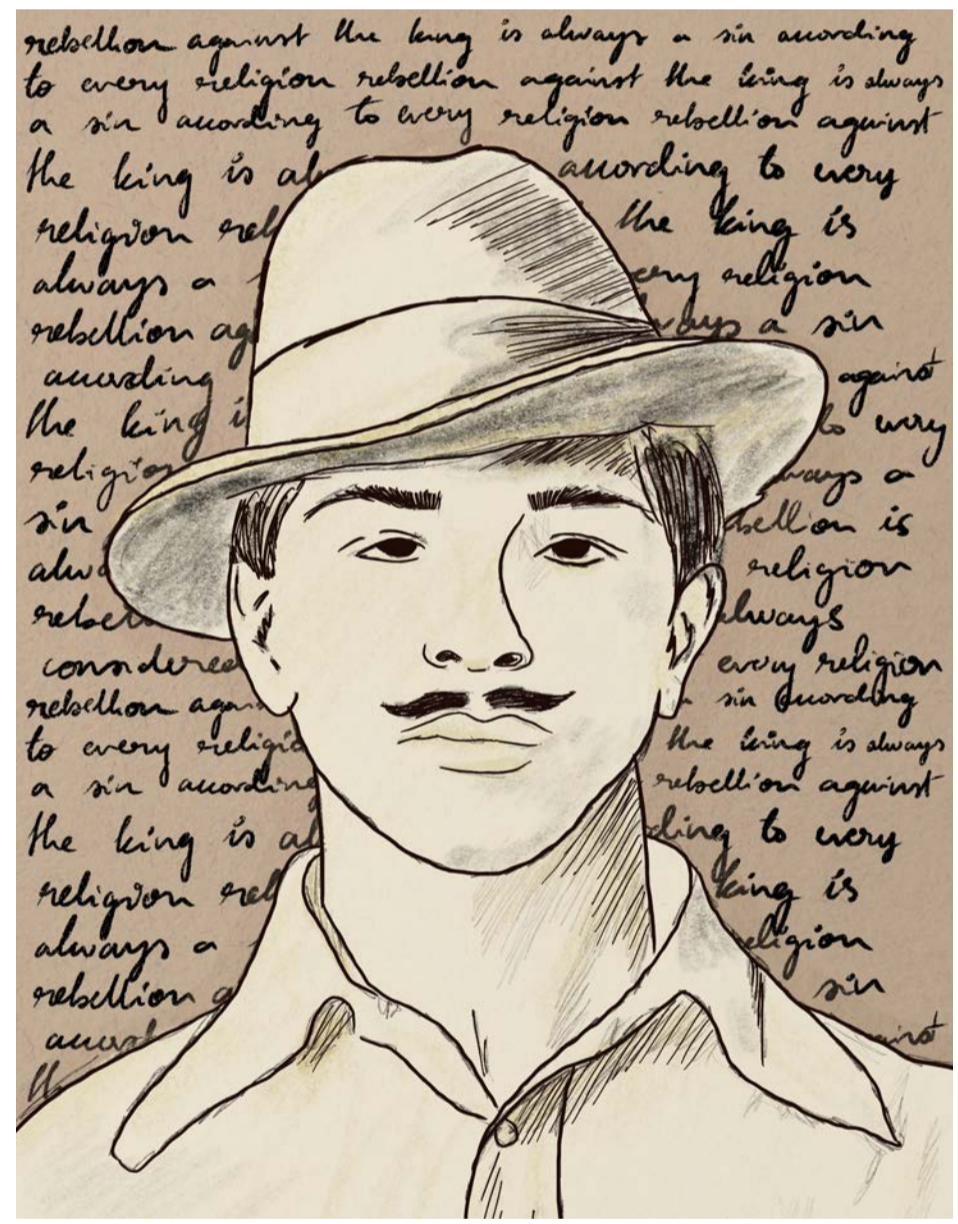
According to historian J.D. Elam, Singh's context — coming from a

Sikh family and active in the Indian Independence movement, witnessing the horrors of the Great War and the hope of the Bolshevik revolution — helped cultivate a "form of pessimistic utopianism". As such, "atheism" was the name given to colonial doubt and anticolonial unknowingness — practices that resuscitated the secular human in the absence of metaphysical assuredness. While not always explicit, Singh's main point is that the anticolonial agitator must revoke belief in both transcendent truth and self-knowledge — to reject all forms of "metaphysical assuredness".

It was not for vanity that Singh became an atheist, but through critique: "study to enable yourself to face the arguments advanced by the opposition.

"You go and oppose the prevailing faith, you go and criticise a hero, a great man, who is generally believed to be above criticism because he is thought to be infallible... Because Mahatamaji is great, therefore none should criticise him. Because he has risen above, therefore everything he says — it may be in the field of Politics or Religion, Economics or Ethics — is right."

While Singh does not provide said criticism in this text, it is possible to infer it through his atheism. Gandhi's notion of satyagraha, translated as soul-force, aligns the notions of 'truth' and 'soul' with political action. As the two offered competing political programs for independence, one can understand Singh's atheism, which rejects self-



Study to arm yourself with arguments in favour of your cult ... No more mysticism, no more blind faith. Realism became our cult." Singh's study included the revolutionary thought of Bakunin, Marx, Lenin, Trotsky and so on. While they were all atheists, their critique extended beyond religion to all forms of mysticism. Indeed, the disbelief in God represents the rejection of ultimate authority which — in the colonial context — is intrinsically linked to the colonial authority: "British rule is here not because God wills it but because they possess power and we do not dare to oppose them". Singh disavows the transcendent truth of not only religion and colonial rule but also to anticolonial authority:

knowledge and the metaphysical 'soul', as a challenge to Gandhi's satyagraha. The challenge is not that truth does not exist (in a postmodern sense) but rather that there is no universal truth. This is one of the fundamental epistemological insights of dialectical materialism: theories of reality, through their application, will be critiqued and replaced ad infinitum — nothing is eternal or unchanging. Far from the dogmatic nature of Western atheism, Singh's anticolonial philosophy embraces critique while rejecting infallibility:

"Any man who stands for progress has to criticise, disbelieve and challenge every item of the old faith. Item by item, he has to reason out every nook and corner of the prevailing faith.... His reasoning can be

mistaken, wrong, misled and sometimes fallacious. But he is liable to correction because reason is the guiding star of his life. But mere faith and blind faith is dangerous: it dulls the brain and makes a person reactionary."

"A short life of struggle, with no such magnificent end, shall in itself be the reward if I have the courage to take it in that light. That is all."

Politics without metaphysics, without first principles, is essential in a revolutionary programme that seeks to make the world anew. Like all revolutionaries, Singh struggled to realise an ideal — sacrificing himself for an imagined future of independence. Notions of sacrifice, martyrdom and fantasy, while familiar within the Sikh tradition, do not sit comfortably with the standard notion of atheism. Instead, Singh recognises the dialectical unity of the ideal and reality: "the most important thing was the clear conception of the ideal for which we were to fight". It is only through facing reality in all its hardship, without the cushion of belief, that one can set out to change it. Absolute devotion to the cause is the only principle needed by a revolutionary, everything else is to be constantly thought out anew. His atheism, while tested at times, underscored his commitment to the struggle for independence:

"I know, the moment the rope is fitted round my neck and rafters removed from under my feet, that will be the final moment. That will be the last moment. I, or to be more precise, my soul, as interpreted in metaphysical terminology, shall be finished there... A short life of struggle, with no such magnificent end, shall in itself be the reward if I have the courage to take it in that light. That is all. With no selfish motive, or desire to be awarded here or hereafter, (in fact) quite disinterestedly have I devoted my life to the cause of independence, because I could not do otherwise. The day we find a great number of men and women with this psychology who cannot devote themselves to anything else than the service of mankind and emancipation of the suffering humanity, that day shall inaugurate the era of liberty."

Inquilab Zindabad ("long live revolution") — the chant that Bhagat Singh popularised during his arrest — should, if we are to stand for progress, reverberate eternally not only in society but in our minds and thinking as well. Singh's atheism — the rejection of ultimate authority and transcendent truth — is necessary in any revolutionary thought.

Art: Bipasha Chakraborty

Why we do good things: Volunteering in a faithless nation

Lotte Weber soul searches.

When was the last time you hiked up your sleeves and ladled out soup at your local community centre? Can you recall when you phoned your ageing family member? Perhaps the last time you rescued a cat from a tree?

Volunteering is a dying act in Australian society. Despite a federal government investment of \$10 million into the volunteering sector in August last year, a mass volunteer shortage continues. In an age where young people have never been more aware and engaged with social and political issues, reports from the Australian Bureau of Statistics reveal volunteering rates to be on a disheartening downwards trajectory. At the same time secularism is on the rise. Could the two be connected? Religion is often presented as a key motivator for mission-associated community work. Why do we perform selfless deeds if not for our religion? Is it merely to plump our resumes or sleep easier? Where are our ethics inherited if not from scripture?

As of the latest national census, while Christianity remained Australia's favourite faith group at 43.9%, its numbers decreased by over one million individuals. Australia is also becoming more religiously diverse, and a staggering ten million Australians reported having "no religion", not including atheist and agnostic parties. The sharpest drop in religious affiliation was young people aged between 18 and 25. Increasingly, headlines refer to this group as the "nones", distinct from atheism due to their neutral, rather removed, stance.

parents." Another student, an activist stationed at the University of Sydney Gaza Solidarity encampment, shared the sentiment that "a lot of religions operate on a basis of fear, and that's not something our generation buys into as much." They said that, as a younger generation, "we've been given the tools to be more free-thinking and decide what 'right' and 'wrong' is for ourselves."

What does this mean for volunteering? Since the COVID-19 pandemic, volunteering organisations and charities across Australia have experienced an irreversible drop in community engagement. While around one third of people aged between 40 and 54 engage in volunteering, just one in five below the age of 24 participate. According to the Australian Institute for Health and Wellness (AIHW), these figures dropped over the past decade, from over 34% of adults actively volunteering in 2006 to less than 25%

According to Dr Renae Barker, a Senior Lecturer at the University of Western Australia Law School, the relationship between public, state and religion has social, legal, and political implications. State-religion relationships "exist on a spectrum from theocracy where religion and state are fused, through to abolitionist regimes where the state actively seeks to destroy religious belief." Popularly conceived as a secular state, but with longstanding Christian roots, Australia remains nestled in the middle. I interviewed a number of students at the University of Sydney about their personal experiences grappling with moral ideals in a secular nation. One agnostic, second-generation student explained, "I inherited my values from my parents, and them from their

participation in recent years. One study showed that while religious "nones" are less active in their community than religious individuals, atheists and agnostics contribute at similar levels. Indeed, indifferent and apolitical groups seem to volunteer the least.

"Speaking out against injustice is my faith"

At the University of Sydney, attitudes largely reflect these statistics. Non-religious students who I spoke to report not having the time to volunteer, stating that while volunteering is something



they've always been interested in, they simply "don't have the time during Semester". In correlation with a decrease in volunteering and faith, the AIHW also reports Australians having less time to devote to "recreation and leisure, and social and community interaction". Yet for politically active students, a broader problem was the struggle to find organisations and charities they could trust.

Community service has long been associated with missionary work and somewhat problematic narratives surrounding the assertion of white saviourism and religious assimilation. 'Altruist' has become synonymous with 'do-gooder' and in-need communities are taking a hit due to volunteer shortages. Students looking to find authentic, uncompromised organisations to volunteer with are repeatedly met with challenges finding secular charities. At the Australian Red Cross, a well-

Additionally, whilst receiving religious tax-exemptions, 2023 saw the acquisition of \$95 million in "donations and philanthropic gifts".

On campus, several collectives exist to attempt to reclaim a platform for secular, youth volunteering such as Effective Altruism, Random Acts of Kindness, and the Food Co-Op among others. More excitingly, student activism offers a safe space for active, grassroots changemaking to function without the shackles of a traditional charity bureaucracy. In fact, if there's anything inferable from the waves of pro-Palestinian protest taking over the University's campus, it is that young people's engagement with social justice is alive and well, even if not motivated by missions of faith. Another student protestor told me, "it makes you feel like you're doing something good and just puts things into perspective. Speaking out against injustice is my faith".

respected humanitarian aid provider, religious neutrality is a contentious issue. Heralding the catch-cry: "we don't walk away when the cameras stop running", the Red Cross oversaw some 18,450 volunteers per their 2023 annual review. Hosting a Youth Advisory Committee of "diverse young people" as well as First Nations members, the organisation prides itself on diversity. Despite taking these steps, we are yet to witness any tangible change toward the broader culture and upper management of the volunteering sector. They have also received international acclaim for their neutrality, a facet which has been constantly challenged since their formation in 1863. However, while the Australian Red Cross outwardly maintains a claim of being

"an organisation independent of government and with no political, religious or cultural affiliations", it operates in many nations offering tax exemptions for religious organisations including the United States, Turkey and several members of the European Union. In the United States specifically, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is tax-exempt under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, meaning religious neutrality may not be as fully realised as the organisation would like to advertise. An unclear history leaves some questions of past ICRC religious affiliation unanswered.

Who's fucking who?

Simone Maddison is on her knees.

Content warning: this article includes graphic descriptions of sex. It also includes discussions of challenging topics including the ways gendered hierarchies, power, violence, misogyny and discrimination manifest through sex.

Make no mistake — this article does not pass the Bechdel Test. Its earliest inception is marred by original sin, born from a conversation between women about men. “I used to fake my orgasms all the time”, confided one of my friends after one too many white wines in the dim candlelight of a Newtown bar. “But I’ve stopped doing that now. It’s just not worth it.” Across the table, my lesbian friend plugged her ears and shook her head.

While I agree with my friend’s sentiment wholeheartedly, I cannot help but remember the times I had let male fantasies overwhelm and undermine my own preferences; for example, when I let a man take my pair of black underwear home with him after sex, despite the fact they were my favourite and I had to catch the train home. Why, as a leftist and educated young woman, did I let this happen? And if I had, how many people like me were doing the same?

However naive or embarrassing, these thoughts represent important issues related to sex amongst left-wing Australian young people: we’re having it, we prioritise enjoyment, but we remain tied up by asymmetrically gendered power dynamics and undeniably heterosexual standards. When we cannot fulfil what is expected of us, we revert to traditionally religious feelings of guilt, shame and failure. Alternatively, we buy into supposedly liberatory discourses prioritising sexual empowerment. To be sure, we have come a long way. But pleasure is rarely ever just that — increasingly, it is being disguised as a world of pain.

The altars at which we worship

Recent studies have shown that young Australians are sexually active and regularly discuss intimacy with their partners. Just under half of those completing secondary school also reported ever having sexual intercourse in the National Survey of Australian Secondary Students and Sexual Health, with 77% talking about using a condom and 36% talking about avoiding STIs during sex. The 2018 Household, Income and Labour Dynamics Survey (HILDA) found that young people aged between 15 and 24 were “very satisfied” with their intimate relationships, returning an average satisfaction score of 8.5 out of 10. Oral sex remains the most commonly reported sexual experience, followed by penetrative vaginal sex.

It is significant, then, that many Australian young people are reportedly moving towards the political left — and that this mobility is occurring

across gendered lines. During the 2022 Federal Election, the Australian Election Study found that only one in four voters under the age of forty voted for the Coalition. In particular, 67% of those born after 1996 voted for either the Greens or Labor — almost twice as many women voted for the Greens in the House of Representatives than men. Not only does this represent a historic low in the Coalition’s level of support amongst young voters, but it also marks a shift away from trends in the 1990s which saw women more inclined to vote for the Coalition, and men for the Labor Party. While young men remain more conservative than their female counterparts, they are generally more progressive than men of previous generations at the same stage of life. Men are also still more likely to prioritise stereotypically ‘masculine’ issues like economic management and taxation while voting, while women tend to focus on climate change, education and health.

“A lot of the time heterosexual cisgender men feel entitled to the female body. They are enabled by the patriarchy to be self-centred and in control, so this carries over into sexual behaviour.”

So, how do these ‘left-wing’ politics manifest amongst Australian young people? Despite greater emphasis on rhetoric around ‘equality’ and ‘empowerment’ in intimate relationships, the 2017 National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey (NCAS) found that these gendered differences persist. Very few respondents aged between 16 and 24 supported rigid gender roles and stereotypes; only 5% agreed that a woman earning more than her male partner is “not good for the relationship”. However, almost one third of young people believe that women prefer a man to be in charge of their relationships. Furthermore, 22% agreed that there is “no harm” in men making sexist jokes about women in front of their male friends.

Sex on-campus

Of course, these statistics only provide very narrow insights: they define ‘left-wing’ ideology according to mainstream electoral politics, they focus exclusively on heterosexual relationships, and do not interrogate the broader myths, cultures and intricacies affecting sexual politics.

While we can recognise the same kinds of gendered power in our own relationships, the details, feelings and repercussions of the behaviours they produce are continuously dismissed and underrepresented.

The radical history and contemporary culture in activist spaces at the University of Sydney represents a unique space to critique and correct these deficiencies. Members of the Students Representative Council (SRC) — and, by extension, the contributors to *Honi Soit* — have long been engaged in more nuanced left-wing political debates around anti-colonial, feminist, sexual, socialist and queer liberation. In the 1970s, it was leftist students who won the introduction of a “Women and Philosophy” course at the University and stopped the publication of sexist car advertisements in the paper; today, activists in the same spaces lead the fight for a free Palestine on equal terms.

Of course, the University as a whole is continuously marked by high levels of misogyny; according to the 2018 *Red Zone Report*, female students living in the residential colleges are 66% more likely to experience rape on-campus when compared to the national average. Furthermore, left-wing spaces are notoriously marred by systemic issues of weaponised incompetence, casual sexism, harassment and the reinforcement of gendered labour divisions.

The inequality of ecstasy

Consequently, I put a survey addressing the insidious forms of gendered power, discrimination and exploitation we experience in our private lives to this year’s editors and reporters for *Honi Soit*. Composed of seven questions, this survey explored the ways sexual politics manifest in the bedroom (and other intimate settings) for self-proclaimed ‘left-wing’ or ‘progressive’ couples of all sexualities. In particular, it targeted feelings of obligation around making one’s partner orgasm, levels of reciprocity around sexual needs, the impacts of gendered conditioning in relationships and broader tropes used to talk about pleasure inside and outside of relationships.

“Women often aren’t used to their pleasure being prioritised.”

The results show that gendered power remains one of the largest determinants of a sexual relationship. It is often heteronormative, held by a male partner, and overrides the material needs of those involved. Many respondents noted that heterosexual cisgender men feel “entitled to the female body”, and are therefore more likely to be “self-centred” and seek “control.” Another wrote that sex is often spoken about through the “prism of weaponisation”, either in “highly romanticised terms which become gossip fodder” or in “highly suppressed terms” which leave people who choose to abstain from sex “out of the conversation”. Overall, it seems that we are letting other people do the

talking — whether that means being “completely guided by a partner”, or letting cultural expectations dictate our preferences.

These asymmetries set the scene for more specific behaviours during sex. For women, the consumption of pornography that is “exploitative of women” and “catered mainly towards men” within a relationship means that a male partner’s understanding of female pleasure is “distorted and misinformed”. For queer men, associations between ‘femininity and bottoming’ and ‘masculinity and topping’ mean that partners “are usually not very open-minded to trying a role that they don’t feel like they fit into”. While some respondents felt that their sexual needs

were “met” and “reciprocated in most cases” despite these dynamics, others felt their partners were “selfish” and cared more about their own needs. Some were able to work through these issues via “communication and habit-building during sex”, but most attempts at reciprocity still did not feel like “the pleasure was personalised to me [sic]”.

“Most times there were attempts to meet my needs but only in a box ticking kind of way. Fortunately they’ve all tried to reciprocate it just never feels like the pleasure was personalised to me.”

To cum or not to cum?

Orgasm was the largest point of contention in relationships raised by this survey. When asked if they feel obligated to make their sexual partner(s) orgasm, all respondents answered “yes”. When they are unable to achieve this, they feel “sad”, “disappointed” or “frustrated”. For heterosexual women, this also resulted in feeling “like a failure or that there is something wrong with me”, or like “I am not pleasurable/sexual enough”. The same group also revealed that they have faked orgasms in the past, either “out of guilt”, to “hurry it along”, or to “get the other person closer to orgasm”. Although the university students I interviewed appear to have moved past an apprehension towards sexual indulgence associated with maintaining faith, they are nonetheless bound by familiar forms of nominally ‘Christian’ guilt and shame in the bedroom.

Misconceptions around orgasm also continue to permeate sex in young people’s public and private lives. During sex, respondents explained that the myth “women never orgasm” is so widely accepted that it is never actually discussed in relationships — let alone challenged. Instead, male partners will opt to

pleasure women first in what one heterosexual woman described as a tactic akin to “getting it out of the way”, so that “penal pleasure would always always last longer.” Outside the bedroom, respondents confirmed that men regularly brag about being able to “orgasm in a woman without a condom”, and for “making a woman orgasm from penetrative sex alone.”

However, these issues were noticeably absent from the responses discussing queer experiences. One queer man noted that he has never faked an orgasm because “this is very hard to do, especially in a gay sex setting where it is something that people often look out for directly.” Another lesbian revealed that she found it easier to rationalise her feelings about being unable to make a partner orgasm, stating that “you can blame yourself at first, but there are factors out of your control.” While respondents also noted that the expectation for both women to orgasm in lesbian relationships “can create pressure”, they also noted that there are far more heterosexual tropes that they have “100% had talks about with straight friends” but “never experienced first-hand.”

Yet there is a significant body of academic literature explaining how and why orgasms are treated in this way within relationships. As scholars Sara B. Chadwick and Sari M. van Anders argue, women’s orgasms have never been more visible in popular culture and medical discourses as “symbols of sexual liberation and satisfaction.” However, a focus on how to give women orgasms, receive them, and make them more “frequent and mind-blowing” instead only serves men’s sexuality. When a man tells his friend about the ways he can make his girlfriend cum, he is exercising ownership over her body in the most intimate way possible. When his friend responds with a similar story, he flexes his sexual prowess, boosts his ego and treats orgasm as a “masculinity achievement.” The situation is not too dissimilar within queer relationships: according to psychologist Katherine L. Goldey, both heterosexual and lesbian women are more likely to view orgasms as a “nice bonus” and use their partner’s pleasure as a proxy for their own.

Socialising sex

According to the young people I surveyed, this new iteration of male chauvinism is borne from more entrenched forms of binary gender conditioning in heterosexual relationships. Many female respondents had been taught that men supposedly “orgasm easily” through vaginal sex. This creates two issues. One heterosexual male respondent noted that this myth “has made people expect certain things of me”, adding that it can be “difficult” to orgasm and that “lots of foreplay” is particularly enjoyable. However, some women regularly adopt a sense of “hyperfemininity and performance”

or accept male dominance over their sexuality as a “means of being more desirable.” Others felt sex is “ultimately centred around male pleasure”, and that “women aren’t used to their pleasure being prioritised.” This can be especially difficult for women who identify as asexual or do not want to have sex, as withholding intercourse is often “perceived as a bargaining chip which can be talked about by others, either in front of her behind her back.”

A moment of reckoning

These results show that Australian young people are aware of the challenges they face in their sex lives. They can articulate and reconcile their feelings, but perhaps only within the confines of an anonymous online survey or amongst their closest friends. The problem, then, is that we are not communicating these seemingly universal issues with our sexual partners. We might choose to blame broad overarching sociocultural structures, rather than the hypocrisies of our own habits. We can ignore complicating factors, such as the existence of queer identities within heterosexual relationships, to avoid difficult conversations. We often forgive hurtful behaviour from our partners, like ‘bragging to the boys’, to keep the peace. But instead of making life easier, these decisions compromise our ‘left-wing’ values and further entrench gendered imbalances. Similar interrogation is also pertinent in transgender and gender diverse experiences, a limitation of this article due to identity and demographics of its respondents.

“Very few sexual partners have been able to meet my needs for sexual pleasure. Majority of my partners have been heterosexual cisgender men and I find them to be the most selfish in the bedroom and they mainly care about their pleasure and not yours.”

In many ways, sex is our antichrist: it is powerful, euphoric, and at times antagonistic. I don’t expect it, or anyone, to save us. But I do anticipate a serious reckoning before the Second Coming.



Art: Ella Thompson

Year One and then what? Life after beginning HRT

Evelyn Redfern reflects on life after transition.

As a young trans guy, one of the only things that tends to inspire you is musing upon what the future holds. Particularly the ways in which testosterone will change your life or improve your general existence. For me, it was the only thing keeping me going, as — though contrary to conservative talking points — being trans is a struggle and I needed an emblem of hope.

My life became this myriad of imaginative writings and checklists for when I'll be considered "man enough." All started and seemingly ended with testosterone, affectionately named "T" by many trans masculine people like me. Yet, as I sit and write now, coming up to 12 months on T I begin to panic: why am I not a man yet?

You always tend to see the famous voice update videos — which of course I too have participated in — and you see how masculine these men look after transitioning for just one year. What you don't see is everyone else: the men like me. I am currently 11 months on T and do not pass. I do not even fractionally pass in a university setting where everyone knows and doesn't pretend to hide that they do. I find that I pass more to the older generations than to the younger. When I'm in my hometown I tend to be referred to with 'he' rather than 'they' as I do in places like Newtown.

Medical transition is an experience I did alone. I turned 18

"I craved to be normal so much, so intensely, I think I lost a part of who I was before."

and very briskly attained my own Medicare card. And with that card with my mother's name located at the tippy top in bold letters, the name that has caused me some of the most grief to do with my trans identity, I handed it to a receptionist as a plea for acceptance, to the road of being taken seriously. As that's what Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) is: the quest to be taken seriously in the binary you are mischaracterised by day in, day out. What a fucking silly notion, the only way to be taken seriously as a trans individual is by 'passing' as a cisgender person.

What I have come to realise about transitioning is that I needed it just as much as I thought I did. Another thing I realised is that my life continues to transpire irregardless of the next shot of T I take.

I craved to be normal so much, so intensely, I think I lost a part of who I

was before. Part of my love and pride of being queer. I grew up as an intensely outgoing individual. I didn't care how I looked nor how I came off; I was just me. And in this pursuit to fit into manhood I've forgotten that most cisgender men don't fit that description either. Part of who I was before has become lost in the complicated existence of transhood and I fear I've lost him for good. Many may take that as an opportunity to blame that on transgender ideology, but rather I blame the strict gender I was projected into being from birth. If I wasn't forced

this, my parents. Throughout my life I have relied on my parents for not only

"My body doesn't owe me quicker changes, more masculine changes, just because I've sacrificed love."

teaching me what to think but how to

of what being gendered male means. Gender is undeniably an identity that everyone has the right to prescribe themselves as and I don't mean to discredit that. Yet the experience of a binary trans person is that of many self and societally inflicted pains. You begin to develop this hyper awareness of trans people because you are so insecure of your own presence, you begin to lose a sense of creative expression due to the binary you find yourself identifying within, or, like me, you begin to develop a disdain for non-passing and non-gender conforming individuals because you hate yourself so severely.

"There is nothing clean cut and polite about queer history, nor queerness currently. If I believe myself to be free of prejudice I've missed the point of progression."

It is incredibly taboo to discuss this internalised transphobia in a current tense because so many people on this campus, in this city, are very addicted to their own binary of 'valid' and 'bigot'. But being trans cannot be sanitised in this fashion; it's truly anger-inducing watching people attempt it. There is nothing clean cut and polite about queer history, nor queerness currently. If I believe myself to be free of prejudice I've missed the point of progression.

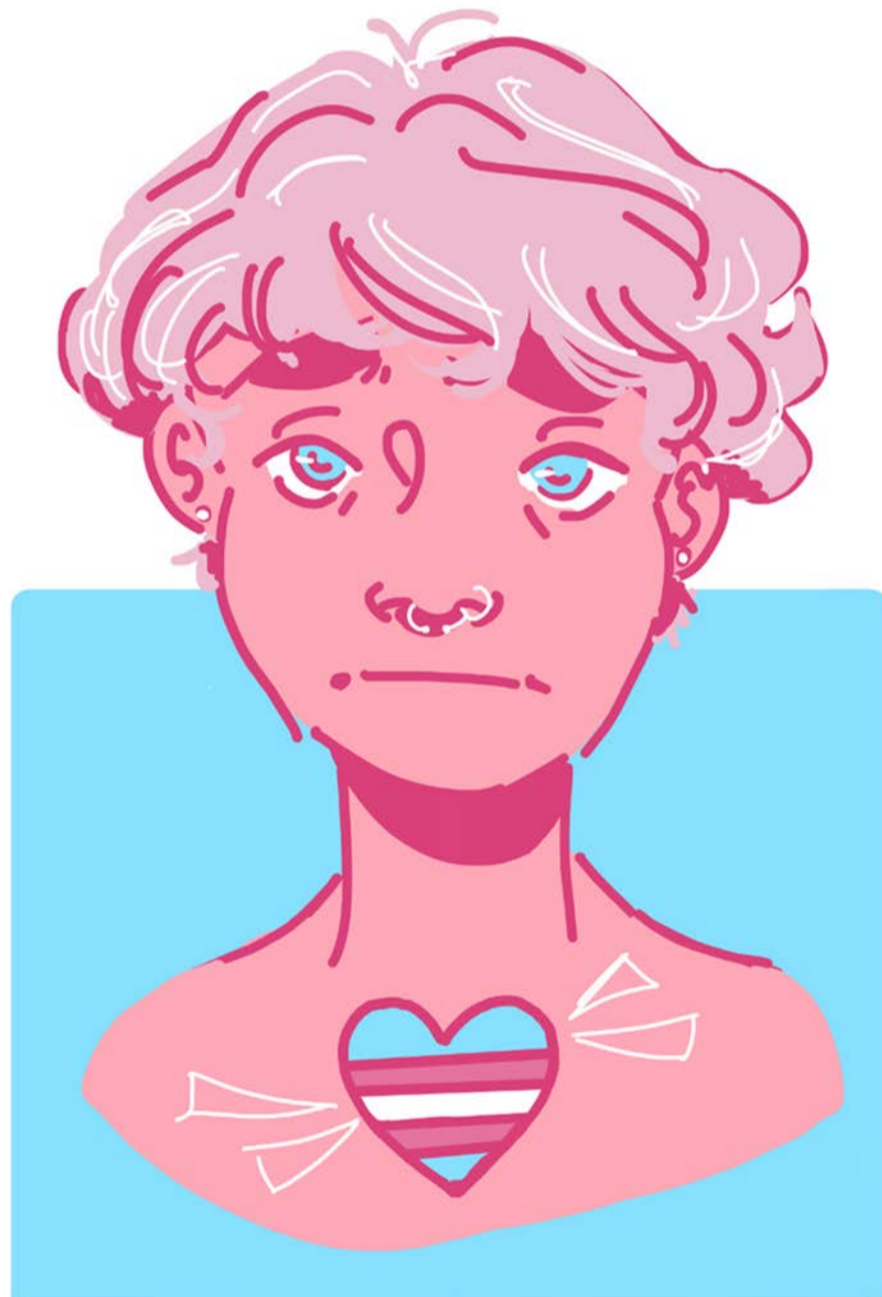
So, to answer my own question of why I'm not a man yet here is what I've come to. I will never be a man if I continue to label myself as a work in progress person. If I continue at this rate two, then five, then fifteen years on T will begin to feel like a fruitless quest of self fulfilment. And it's just not.

Testosterone saved my life, but it also humbled my expectations. I will never be a man if I base my identity off of a hormone I get injected by every three months. I will never be a man if I have such a strict, inherently transphobic definition of what a man is.

To any trans people reading: your pain is not isolated, please continue to surround yourself with your chosen family, or blood if you're so lucky. Just know you aren't a half baked nor work in progress human, who you are right now is who you'll continue to be into the future. HRT or not, binary or not, out or not, you are loved, and you are real.

think, especially about myself and who I am. And because of this, I wanted T to prove to my parents that I can be normal, a normal man, a normal child, again. But your body doesn't owe you anything. My body doesn't owe me quicker changes, more masculine changes, just because I've sacrificed love. Unfortunately, retribution and justice aren't concepts that mean anything to the chemicals that make up your physiology. My body, though incredibly hard to believe due to my upbringing as a woman, has very little politics to it. It just is.

I am only now just entering into being socialised as a man and only now can begin to understand a massive facet



to be a girl who knows who I would be, who knows how much freer I could've been.

Another aspect of trans existence is the notion of give and take. I have sacrificed my relationship with two of the most important people in my life for

"If I wasn't forced to be a girl who knows who I would be, who knows how much freer I could've been."

There is nothing to do but pray.

Purny Ahmed speaks to God.

Bismillah.

I lost faith in my religion around the same time I lost faith in my father.

My relationship with my father always mirrored my relationship with God. Tenderness and hope, pleading and mercy, and a whole lot of disappointment. It's as Nicole Yoon articulated, "Growing up and seeing your parents' flaws is like losing your religion. I don't believe in God anymore. I don't believe in my father either."

I discovered my father's flaws at an early age, watched as they unravelled onto the kitchen tiles like shattering rose-tinted glass. I tried to pick up the pieces with the same palms I used for supplication, but they cut and bled — I wondered what it was I was praying for. Thus, I was ten and emancipating myself from God, deciding that if my 'test' for this *duniya* was to love a man who did not deserve it, to show him mercy and forgiveness, then I would simply not sit the test. It was shortly after that I decided that I no longer loved my father.

Now, when I am asked the unavoidable question, "So, are you religious?" I remember my scraped knees on a soft, maroon jai-namaz, begging for mercy, and being met with silence. "No," I tell them, with the aching distant memory of my father ever-present. "No, I'm not religious," I say, because no one ever thinks to ask you if you still love your father.

In Islam, the religion is passed down from the father to his children. It is the first thing we inherit, before our eyes or noses or anger. Funnily enough, my father has never been considerably religious. He held onto his faith simply because he knew that he should. It was the way he was raised; to not question, to not defy. I forget that my religion is inherited from him due to his nonchalant, 'could-do-without' attitude.

"My relationship with my father always mirrored my relationship with God."

When I did pray, it was always for my mother. She held onto her faith simply because it is everything to her. It was the way she was raised, to not question, to not defy — but it is also the way she has survived, believing in a merciful God that may, one day, prove to her that all this hardship was worth something.

It was on the way to fourth grade one day, the beautiful, sunny morning the day after a horrible domestic fight the previous night, that my mother told me that if I asked God for something intently enough, and if I were good, He would listen to my prayers. She had this distant look as she told me, as if she had been asking for the same thing for too

many years now. Perhaps she thought that a child might have more sway over Him.

Even though I am not religious anymore, I remember the prayers that I made as a kid. I have inscribed them into the palms of my cupped hands, memorised them like holy verses, and I still whisper them to myself so as not to forget. *Happiness. Safety. My mother's laughter. A home to invite my friends to. A family, whole and at peace. (And, if He had the time for one last prayer — if I wasn't already asking too much of Him — for that one boy to like me back, pretty please).* I'm not religious, because I remember the prayers I made as a kid. I still whisper them to myself so as not to forget that sometimes you call out to God and beg, and he doesn't hear you. "I talk to God, but the sky is empty," or so says Sylvia Plath.

Yet, while I have inherited my father's complete disregard, I seem to have also inherited my mother's hope. I have found myself calling out to God, once again, just as I have begun to feel myself losing my father, once again. The sky is still empty, but I find myself talking to God.

The anger I have held onto for the last years now feels redundant since my father's diagnosis of dementia.

Vi Khi Nao said "if [God] wants forgiveness, he shouldn't have given us memory." It is easy for me to hold onto my anger, and direct my blame towards an omniscient God, because I remember why I am angry. But as my father begins to lose his memory, I find myself grasping at any trace of forgiveness I can find in me, both for him and for God. I see no other path — dementia cannot be stopped, it is an inevitable slow death. I consider it a final act of mercy, a parting offering — I am trying to make it a painless death for the both of us.

The earliest memories go last. My father has only begun to forget where he has been in the last 24 hours, when he visited Bangladesh last, what year I graduated high school — the insignificant details of everyday life. There will come a day, however, where he won't remember why I am angry with him. He will be left with the sweet, rose-tinted memories of childhood — building pillow forts and watching Pingu and the ramen he would make for me after school — and I will be his little girl, again. I will be left to carry this one-sided hate on my own. Then, shortly after, he will forget me all together. Muscle memory remains — but loving your daughters is not muscle memory. Neither is loving your father.

Dua is.

Dua is ingrained in me. It's ingrained in a lot of us, who have forsaken their God but still find their sentences littered with Bismillahs and Inshallahs. When I want something, I return to the sky and pray that this time He will answer.

On the periphery of loss, you begin to wonder if you should have loved your father more while you had the chance. You wonder if you should have prayed

more. Would that have changed your story? It's a confusing balance which often leaves you feeling betrayed by yourself — you forgive him, you betray your past, you don't forgive him, you betray your future. It's okay to still hold anger in one hand, and kindness in another.

It's an oversimplification to say I no longer hold onto my faith because God did not 'protect' me. Now I know that at ten years old I did not entirely understand my religion, blinded by a

"Muscle memory remains — but loving your daughters is not muscle memory. Neither is loving your father."

desperation so fervent that I believed it would be enough to get a God to hear my pleas. Blinded, then, by an anger towards my father very much redirected

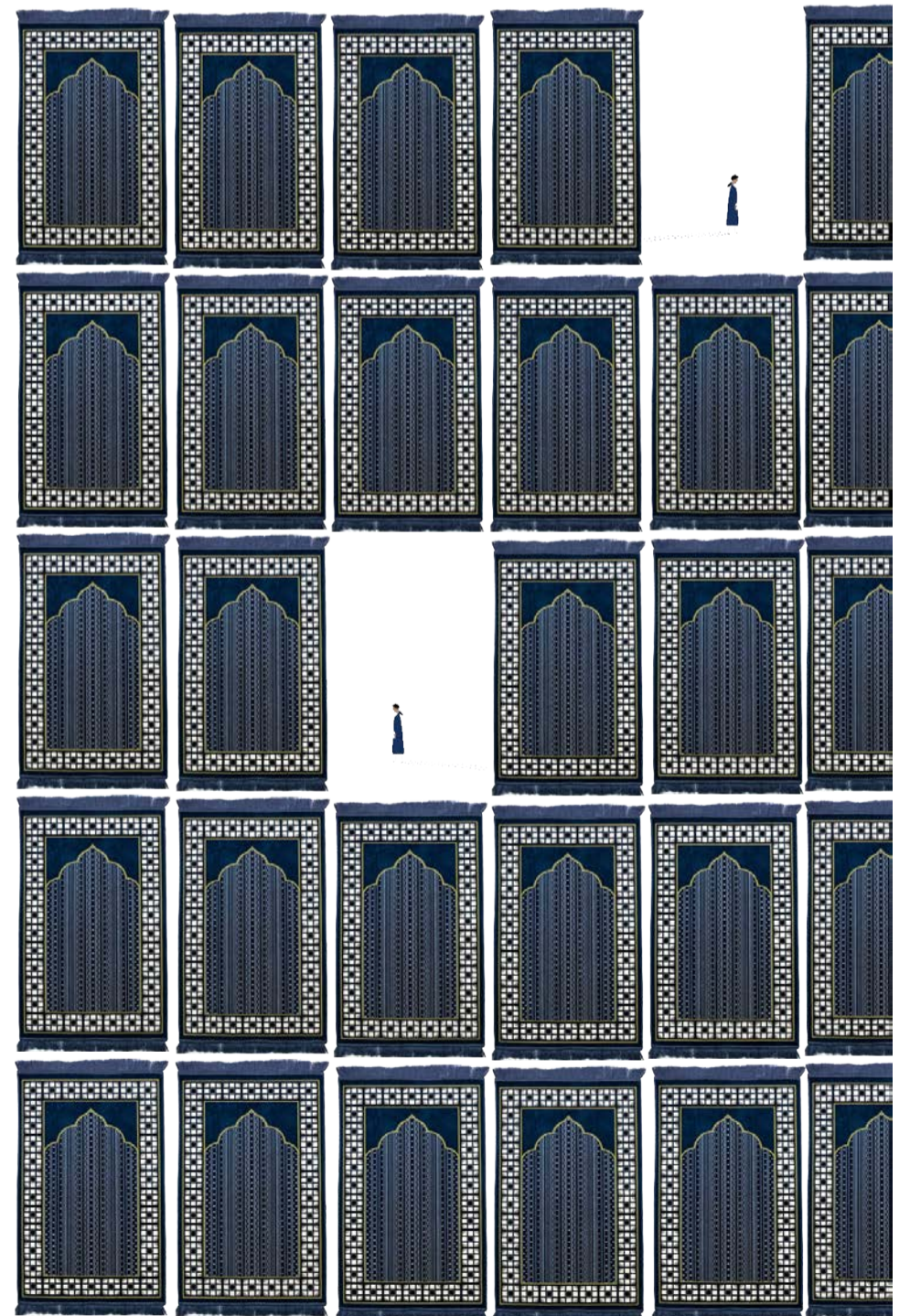
towards God, because it's easier to blame an omniscient deity than the man who once whispered bedtime stories to you. I hold anger in one hand, and kindness in the other.

And, in a way, it seems that my relationship with my father still reflects my relationship with God. Mistrust and caution still exists: I tread around the house like a ghost, I step onto the jai-namaz with a heavy heart. But my voice softens when speaking to my father the same way it softens for dua. My patience precedes me in a way that I had not experienced before. I find myself repeating and reexplaining memories to my father like a repetition of prayers: *please remember.*

Please remember — don't forget us just yet. I am not done being angry with you. I have not even begun being loved by you.

Besides. The professionals tell us there's nothing to do but pray.

Art: Sandra Kallarakkal



Civil War (2024) isn't a film about the second American Civil War; it's a film about Americans at war

Angus McGregor, Aidan Elwig Pollock, and Valerie Chidiac retake the Capitol.



In 1936, Sinclair Lewis, witnessing the rise of Fascism in Europe, wrote *It Can't Happen Here*. The dystopian novel follows the rise of a Hitler-like figure in the United States, warning the isolationist new world they were not immune to totalitarianism.

Decades later *Civil War* (2024), directed by Alex Garland, again challenges the exceptionalist narrative that Americans are safe from war and institutional decay. Following experienced correspondent Joel (Wagner Moura) and photojournalist Lee Smith (Kirsten Dunst) and their protégé Jessie Cullen (Cailee Spaeny), we track rebel armies led by California and Texas under the banner of the 'Western Forces' as their edge closer to Washington DC and America's President. While impossible to avoid projecting contemporary polarisation and the upcoming election, the film's greatest strength is the hyper-realistic depiction of America at war and the nature of modern total war itself.

Garland explicitly did not want the civil war to be viewed from a modern political lens. By uniting states on the polar opposite of the political spectrum and giving almost no details about how the war began, he attempts to take the audience where "nobody is immune." Questions subsequently arise about factors such as the formation of the Western forces, the sentiment of the general public and more importantly, what would be the international community's response to a civil war unfolding across the United States? Besides vague references to the dismantling of the FBI, firing on American citizens, and other abuses of power, the President himself is also never examined as a villain. There is a sense of inevitability the rebellion will succeed but the journalists never take a side — and neither can the audience.

Many reviews criticised the lack of context. *The New York Post* argued the film would not endure "because it does not explicitly address this moment. We as a people cannot fix a problem we cannot name." This fails to distinguish between a film about Americans at war and the specific conflict some predict is on the way. In *The New York Times*

Manohla Dargis noted that the best quality of the film was its exposing "a nation's soul-sickness," and that division is exposed by examining how Americans act toward each other. Garland is wrong in that his film could be set anywhere.

Modern cinema is full of Americans at war in other countries. From Vietnam, to Iraq and Afghanistan, the imagery of soldiers shooting M16s backed by tanks and helicopters is ubiquitous. However, depicting American civilians living in a war zone is not a familiar sight within the genre.

Seeing Joel and Lee glaze over refugee camps run by the "World Relief Fund" in Pennsylvania and mass graves filled with white suburbia as they pass through country towns is chilling. Lee takes photos of American 'refugees' moving along cracked highways while Joel weaves through abandoned SUVs. The only time Americans suffer this much on screen there is an unimaginable force like a zombie apocalypse or alien invasion. By depicting death as caused by men donning stars and stripes on their fellow citizens, the filmmakers flip the script on Western audiences who rarely have to consider the structures of their society shattering.

"Depicting American civilians living in a war zone is not a familiar sight within the genre."

Beyond the destruction, Garland's representation of how the population redefines itself in an attempt to rationalise the war strikes at the heart of America's national character. Lee and Joel drive through a town where life continues as normal, a clothes store employee dismissing the war happening just miles away. Many characters start defining themselves by their state and local militias patrol gas stations. Turning inwards with apathy and a reemergence of localism, Garland argues, is a consequence of war outside of the battles.

Other aspects of American culture such as the 'pan-am' or overly joyful smile, start to look absurd. When staying in a fancy hotel, Lee is told by a crisp receptionist that the elevator was broken because of a "power outage." "Sorry ma'am," he says, putting on the classic sales voice before directing her to the stairs.

The varied responses to war also reflect a nuanced desire to represent the irony of conflict. Modern war films tend to abuse their large budgets, creating excessive combat sequences in an attempt to shock or excite audiences. The admission that some people can continue normal lives with fighting on their doorstep is a reminder that war is never fair and it's terror, never consistent.

The film succeeds by mirroring the tactics of modern warfare, and not exaggerating battle sequences. Ammunition is used copiously, but hardly anyone is hit. Sound design is also carefully considered - many war movies opt for cartoonish battle sound effects; *Civil War* opts for almost deafening gunshots. The first active combat depicted in the film is a chaotic, small-scale encounter between rebel forces donning Hawaiian shirts and government troops. Soldiers communicate with each other; rather than the "cool" chaos of a typical Hollywood war film, these characters are allowed to be terrified as they try to stay alive.

The battle of Washington DC continues this theme on a far larger scale. A handful of soldiers hold up an army at a choke-point outside the White House. We don't see massive troop movements, or hundreds of tanks rolling across open plains; instead, we see small moments in a broader tapestry. A handful of soldiers move methodically through a landscape of flying lead — there are no heroic charges or doomed last stands. Instead, the Western Forces move slowly and carefully, communicating professionally — while the last Government diehards crumple silently in the corridors of the White House. When heroics are attempted — like a Secret Service man attempting to slide across a desk, they are instantly dismissed. It is the muted nature of this combat that gives the film its realistic edge.

That hyperrealism has been rightly criticised for at points disproportionately displaying the on-screen victims of war as people of colour. During one of Lee's 'foreign' war flashbacks, a black man is shown being burned alive but when the white characters die, the camera lingers less and we are not forced to confront the sights of their bodies. Even what is arguably the best and most tense scene in the film — enter Jesse Plemons as a bloodthirsty soldier — results in people of colour being killed, while the white characters narrowly escape. Plemons' performance was brilliant and the racialized murders could very well be intentional on part of the filmmakers, however, it is fair to argue the film did not handle these deaths with tact.

"The film's structure serves as an allegory for the obtuse dehumanisation journalism professes to thrust upon its adherents."

It's hard to miss what some have called a 'Hollywood love letter to journalism'. Positioning the readers to conflate journalism with neutrality or objectivity is not necessarily incorrect, but was thinly explained. Garland ignores that journalists — and their editors — choose what to include in coverage and what to omit. We see that briefly when Lee deletes photographs off her camera, but it seemed more so she could avoid seeing that violent imagery again. Additionally, besides wanting to interview the President we don't know what they want to achieve with the interview.

Capturing great photos is not a crime, but that is only one element to a profession which requires so much chasing up, research, writing, editorialising, editing and discussion. The reality that anyone can take a photograph remains unaddressed, especially as we are seemingly placed under the impression that journalists must remain detached from the subjects of these images. Even if they disagree with a situation they are witnessing, they recognise their duty as truth-tellers, as seen during the gas station sequence where Lee takes a photograph of two victims hanging after having been tortured alongside the perpetrator.

The film's structure serves as an allegory for the obtuse dehumanisation journalism professes to thrust upon its adherents. The plot moves from sequence to sequence — neither the protagonists nor the audience can afford to dwell on any one moment. In this way, perhaps Garland is asking us to question the detachment present in journalism as a discipline. In the climactic moments of the film, the journalists are forced to use agency - both in the vehicular murder employed in the mass grave scene, and Kirsten Dunst's final sacrifice in the White House. In these moments we are shown that journalists must address their positionality and responsibility in the events they are a part of, even if just as witnesses — and that we all have some level of agency in terms of how we respond.

Tom Wolfe quipped that "the dark night of fascism is always descending in the United States and yet lands only in Europe." Despite never pinpointing the cause of decline, Garland implicitly questions that view by focusing on making the conflict feel so real. Whether it becomes an omen or just a warning, remains to be seen.

A walk through the Gaza Solidarity Encampment

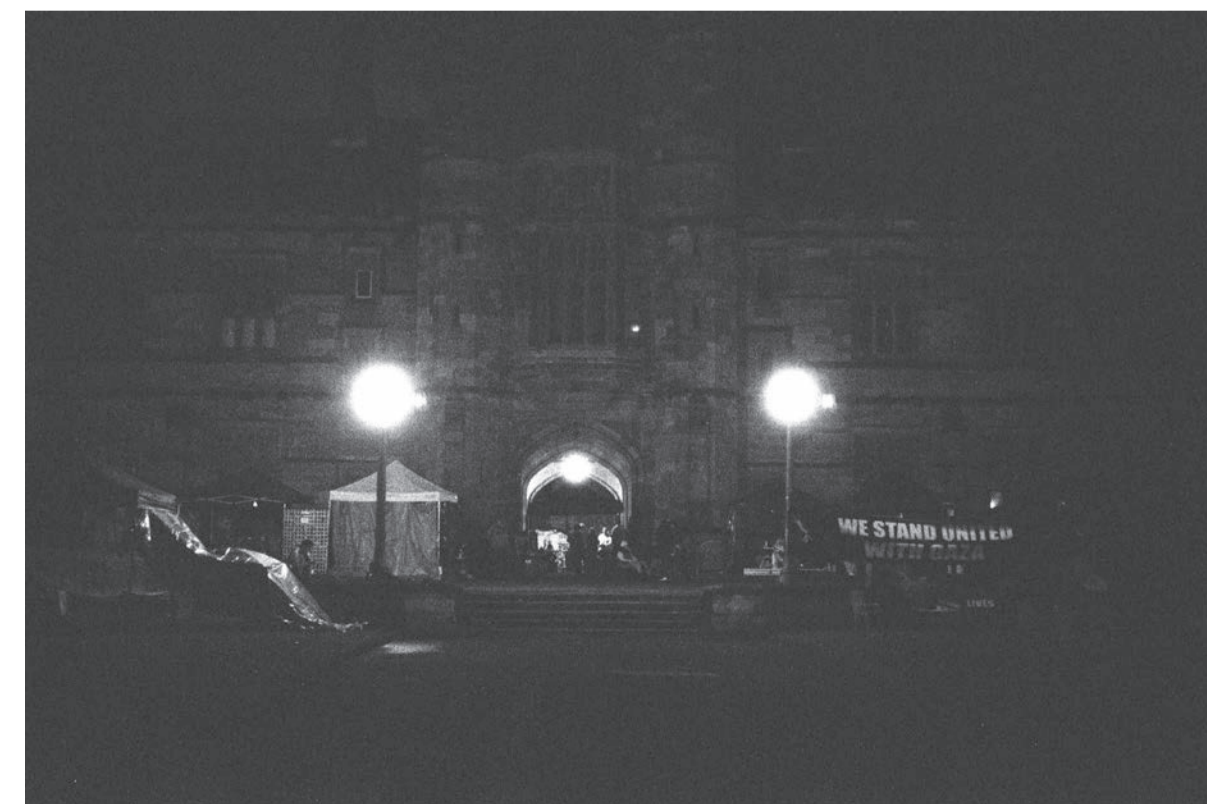
Anatasia Dale photographs.



24 April



3 May



4 May



SRC Reports



President's Report

Harrison Brennan

I've spent my week at the USyd Gaza Solidarity Encampment. I encourage all students and the wider community to join us in demanding that the University of Sydney cut all ties with Israeli institutions and weapons manufactures.

General Secretaries' Report

Rose Donnelly & Daniel O'Shea

The General Secretaries did not submit a report this week.

Vice Presidents' Report

Jasmine Donnelly & Deaglan Godwin

The Vice Presidents did not submit a report this week.

Disabilities Officers' Report

Khanh Tran & Victor Zhang

On the 19th of April the Disabilities Community Room officially launched after a 8 year long process! The Disabilities Community Room is located on the first floor of Manning House open to both undergraduate and postgraduate students with a disability.

Disabled Honi launched last week! A massive thank you to our editorial team and all our contributors for putting together a wonderful edition of Honi Soit.

On the 3rd of May we held a webinar on Disabilities justice and Palestinian liberation featuring Dr Lina Koleilat and Dr Ryan Al-Natour. Many many thanks to our two panelists and Auslan interpreters Bek Cramp and Tanya Miller! We'd also like to shoutout the ANU Gaza Solidarity Encampment for tuning in via Zoom. It is ever important to platform Palestinian voices and educate disabilities activists on the intersection between disabilities justice and Palestine.

We have also been in attendance at the Gaza Solidarity Encampment outside of the Quad. We stand in solidarity with students across the world facing police repression for standing up for their beliefs. We join the call for our universities to disclose and divest, ceasing any agreements and/or contracts with weapons manufactures and other organisations aiding and arming the genocide in Gaza. Join us at the encampment!

Refugee Rights Officers' Report

Daniel Holland, Annabel Pettit, Reeyaa Agrawal & Lucas Pierce

Israel's war on Gaza and the Palestinian people rages on. The discovery of mass graves outside the Gazan hospitals the IDF withdrew from a couple weeks ago has once again shown the world the cruelty and inhumanity of the on going occupation. Despite these blatant war crimes being committed in front of our eyes, the Australian government has furthered its commitment to boosting Israel's military capabilities, signing a new almost 1 billion dollar weapons contract with Israeli weapons company Elbit systems.

Fortunately, there is resistance. A student movement has swept the US, setting up encampments and demanding an end to the complicity of universities in propping up and legitimising the apartheid state of Israel.

In solidarity with the students in the US, and in order to challenge our own university's ties with companies currently supplying Israel, a Palestine solidarity encampment has been set up on the Quadrangle Lawns at Sydney Uni!

The Refugee Rights Office ardently supports the encampment and urges all students who are horrified by the massacre occurring in Gaza to take part in it.

The struggle of the Palestinians reflects in the most stark manner the struggle of all those oppressed under the structures of colonialism and imperialism. The same governments which aid and abet this genocide are also those, like the Australian government, who vilify and detain refugees.

Remember to get out to these rallies in the next few weeks!

The Student Strike for Palestine on Thursday 9th May 2pm at Sydney Town Hall

The Tamil Genocide Day Rally on Sunday May 19th 2pm at Sydney Town hall

The Nakba 76th Anniversary Rally on Wednesday 15 May 5:30pm

Sexual Assault & Sexual Harrassment (SASH) Officers' Report

Ellie Robertson, Martha Barlow, Georgia Zhang & Olivia Lee

A few weeks ago we attended the Day of the Unborn Child counterprotest outside St Mary's Cathedral. This was a great event and an incredibly important opportunity for us to loudly and visibly stand up for reproductive

justice and fight against religious influence in medical legislation.

Olivia attended the National Rally against Gendered Violence last Saturday. The rally took place as a result of a 28% increase in women being murdered by an intimate partner in Australia compared to last year. Despite Albanese's attempt during the Canberra rally to make the event about himself, it was because of our collective successful national activism we saw an emergency national cabinet with outcomes such as more financial support for women leaving violent relationships, work on strengthening accountability and consequences for perpetrators and outcomes related to online conduct. The National cabinet overall committed nearly \$1 billion to our fight, yet there is so much more to be done. Most importantly there must be a commitment to following up on the recommendations made on the two decades worth of reports on how to support the safety of women, particularly First Nations Women.

The Abolish the Colleges campaign is still chugging along! Head to AbolishtheColleges.org to pledge your support for the campaign and ensure your voice is heard.

Finally, we want to shout out the USyd Gaza Solidarity encampment. We admire the courage shown by students in the past weeks and affirm our commitment to showing up and putting pressure on the university until it divests from weapons manufacturers and universities currently perpetrating the genocide in Gaza.

Martha, Olivia, Ellie and Georgia

Contract Cheating and AI



What is contract cheating?

The University defines contract cheating as getting someone to complete part or all of your assessment (hand in or exam). This includes:

- buying an assignment from a tutoring company;
- having a friend complete some of your assessment;
- having someone coach you through an assessment;
- using a model answer from a tutoring website or social media (e.g., facebook or wechat);
- uploading or downloading lecture notes, assignments or exams to an information sharing site, e.g., CourseHero, Github, CHEGG;
- getting someone to do your exam;
- submitting an assessment which has been generated in whole or part by artificial intelligence, including ChatGPT.

Is it serious?

The University considers contract cheating very seriously. It puts your integrity and the integrity of your course at risk. It also leaves you vulnerable to blackmail in the future, where we have seen some students being threatened with being exposed to the University, family, or future employers, if they did not pay an ongoing "fee". The likely penalty for contract cheating is a suspension from the Uni for a semester or two.

How can you get help for your assessments?

If you need help with your assessments the best place to start is with your tutor. Ask them to clarify information you do not fully understand. If you are not satisfied with the help you are getting

from your tutor, talk to your lecturer or subject coordinator about getting extra help. Tell them the websites or tutoring supports that you would like to use and ask them if it is ok. If you are in any facebook or wechat groups for your subjects, do not use any answers to assessment questions that are published, nor should you share any answers or course notes. Be aware that most of those groups have members who are contract cheaters who are there to try to make money. It is extremely likely that anytime you use sites like CHEGG, Github or CourseHero that you will be accused of contract cheating, so it is best to completely avoid these sites. If you are working with another student on an assignment only talk generally about the concepts, rather than specifically discussing the structure or content of your assignment. Do not make notes while you talk. Do not give them a copy of your assignment or take a copy of theirs.

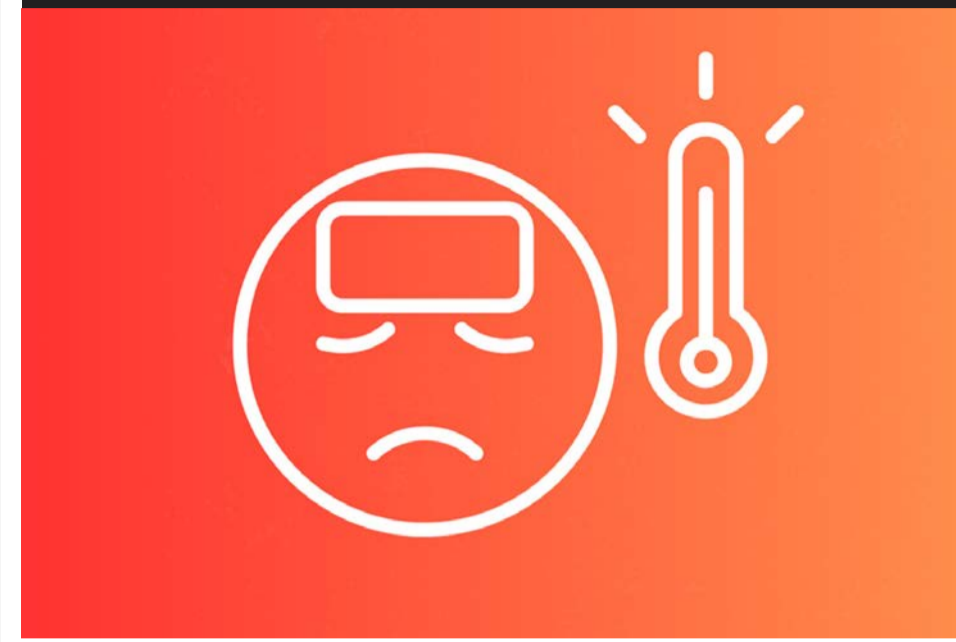
If you have any doubts at all, explain your situation to your tutor to check if they think you are legitimately cooperating or if you would be considered academically dishonest.

What if you are accused of academic dishonesty?

SRC Caseworkers can help you to respond to allegations of academic dishonesty or student misconduct. Start by reading our leaflet to get a better understanding of your situation, then contact an SRC caseworker (and send them the relevant documents) to get advice specific to your situation. The SRC is independent of the University and caseworkers will give you free, confidential advice.

More information: srcusyd.net.au/src-help/caseworker-help/academic-issues/academic-honesty

Special Consideration during Exams or Assessments



Too Sick for Exams?

If you are too sick to complete a take home assessment or exam, you can apply for Special Consideration, even if it is a replacement exam.

The SRC has a leaflet and some short videos that explains everything you need to know to apply. See the link below

For more information, links and videos on Special Consideration: srcusyd.net.au/src-help/academic-issues/special-consideration



Ask Abe

SRC Caseworker Help Q&A

Academic Honesty & Integrity



Dear Abe,

I've been told that I'm in trouble for plagiarism, but I don't think I did anything wrong. The Turnitin report has highlighted a lot of my essay, but I did put references in. What should I have done?

Not Sure.

Dear Not Sure,

Plagiarism is where you present someone else's ideas and words as your own. The Turnitin report highlights the parts of your assessment that appear exactly in someone else's work, whether it is published work, an essay from another student, or one of your old assessments. Where you use someone else's ideas, you need to give them

credit in your references. When you use someone else's words, you need to paraphrase what they have written, and give them credit in your references. If you do not paraphrase you must use quotation marks and give them credit in your references. Each faculty uses a different style of referencing, so check your subject outline. The library's Peer Learning Advisors can help you with this skill, or re-do the Academic Honesty Education Module on Canvas. SRC Caseworkers are able to help prepare a response to the accusation of academic dishonesty, including plagiarism. Contact a caseworker via the QR code link below. Include a copy of the Turnitin report.

Abe



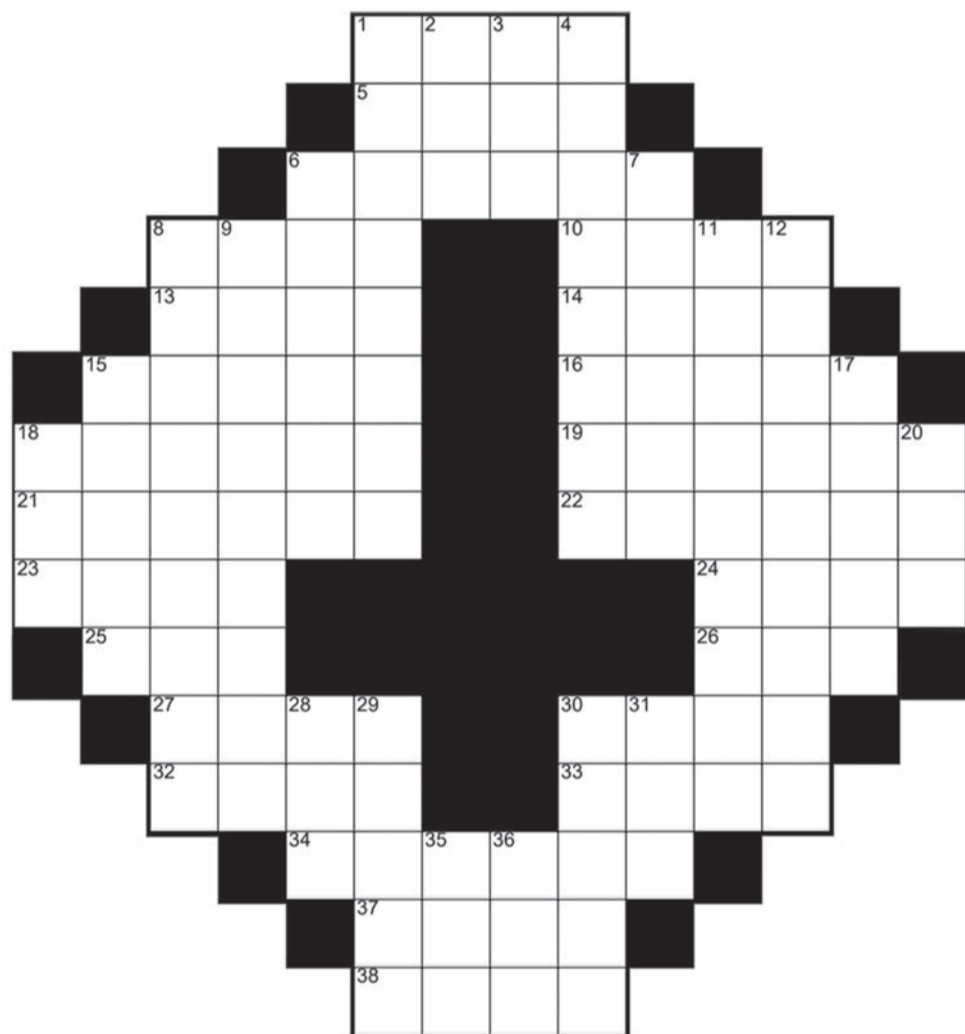
To find out more: srcusyd.net.au/src-help/caseworker-help/academic-issues/academic-honesty

Weekly quiz

1. What is the dominant form of Christianity in Austria?
2. Which Mexica (Aztec) god takes the form of a feathered serpent?
3. Which Australian actor played Ra in *Gods of Egypt* (2016)?
4. The "Westphalian System" of International Relations emerged from which conflict?
5. Justin Bieber, Chris Pratt, and Austin Butler have all reportedly attended which Australian megachurch?
6. Which real-world modern building is associated with the Olympian Gods in the Percy Jackson series?
7. Which possibly-historical king of the ancient Sumerian city of Uruk was deified by Mesopotamian mythology?
8. On what continent can you find the Crucifix Frog?
9. What is the world's second largest religion by number of adherents?
10. When was the historical Jesus born, according to ancient historians?

1. Catholicism 2. Quezacoatl 3. Geoffrey Rush 4. The Thirty Years War 5. Hillsong 6. The Empire State Building 7. Guggenheim 8. Australia 9. Islam 10. Between 6 and 4 BC

Crossword



Crossword: Michael Smith

ACROSS

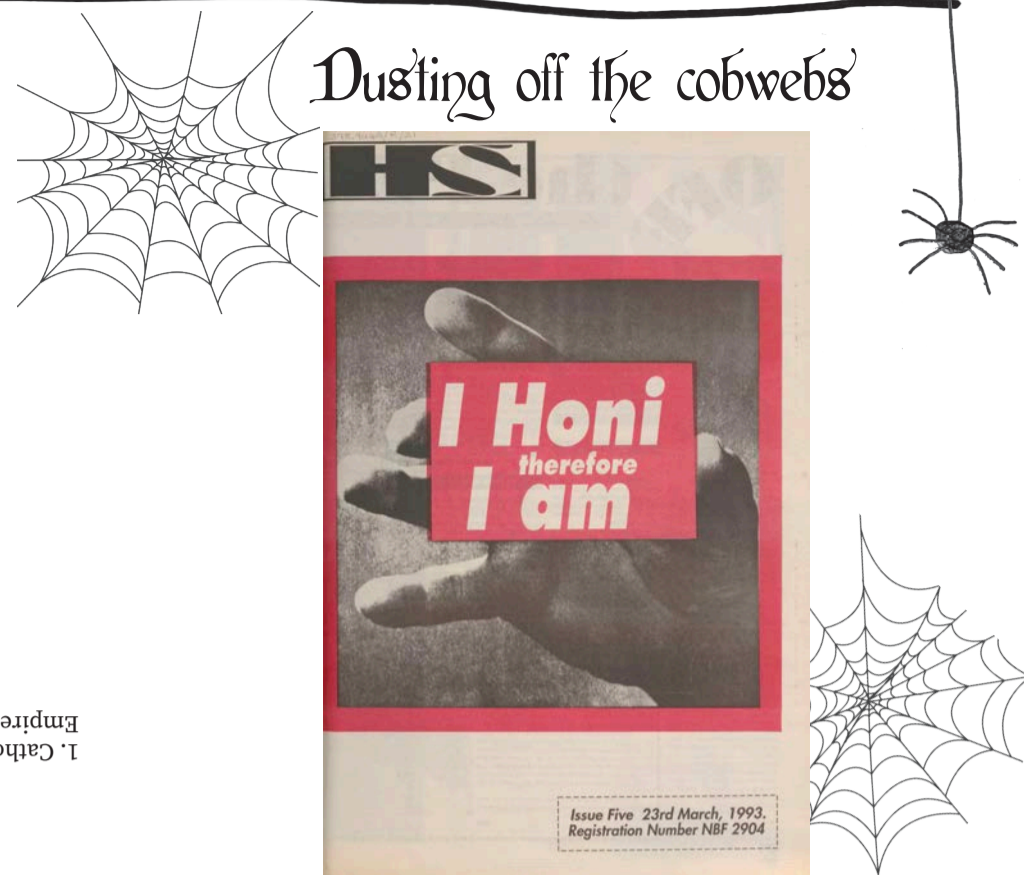
1. Ergo
5. ___ Records, label whose acts include Brian Eno, Danny Brown and 8-down
6. Lead actor Dafoe in the 2009 film *Anti-christ*
8. Forever
10. Off the ___ (improvised)
13. Total fool
14. Mythological warrior in the Iliad
15. Covert garment colour
16. Epitome of thinness
18. Australian TV channel before a 2018 rebrand as '10 Peach'
19. Swedish producer behind 2010's hits like 'Levels' and 'Wake Me Up'
21. Getting down and dirty, put silly
22. Pines
23. Major Sydney city street

24. Tiny bits
25. Classic rap group inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame in 2016
26. Food intolerance condition, in brief
27. Eczema symptom
30. Show age, as a sticker
32. *Scream* star Campbell
33. Shake off, as a pursuer
34. Artist Stevens known for melancholy indie-folk music
37. Musk currently in a legal battle with Australia's online safety regulator
38. *Succession* family

DOWN

1. Mischaracterising
2. Kubrick antagonist
3. Bit of blue text
4. Left after a hit-and-run, say
6. Wane
7. Desert where earth's hottest ever air temperature was recorded
8. Alias of electronic music pioneer Richard D. James
9. Feel attraction
11. "Family" connections
12. The pits
15. Calvin ___
17. Melon leftovers
18. Spain, on a scoreboard
20. Home to 7 of the 10 people currently in space, in brief
28. Application documents
29. Name on some Swiss luxury watches
30. Devises
31. Biblical span of time
35. ___ Rida, rapper whose name is a pun on a US state
36. Pixar character voiced by Amy Poehler

Dusting off the cobwebs



'I Honi therefore I am.' *Honi Soit*, Issue Five. 23rd March, 1993.

Sudoku

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|--|---|
| 9 | | | | 1 | | | | |
| 3 | | 7 | 2 | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | 6 |
| 4 | 8 | | | 6 | | | | |
| | | | 6 | 4 | 9 | | | |
| | 6 | | 4 | | 2 | 7 | | |
| | | | | 1 | | 2 | | |
| 2 | | | 7 | 9 | 4 | | | |
| | 4 | | | | | | | 8 |

Always Balanced Coverage

HEDONISM | SIMS 2 | SCANDAL | DRUGS | NOAM CHOMSKY |

BREAKING: 'WE R WHO WE R' — KE\$HA TOPS MARK SCOTT'S ON REPEAT PLAYLIST



Screw Bella.



HONI TEAM GOES TO SEE 'CHALLENGERS' IN THREES

IN THIS ISSUE...

NEAR-SIGHTED ZIONIST HECKLES NORTH SHORE MUM IN HOUNDSTOOTH SCARF



'THIS BEEF IS CRAZY FOR THE CULTURE' SAYS 32 YEAR OLD GRAPHIC DESIGNER FROM BRIGHTON-LE-SANDS

EXCLUSIVE: After scaring off the younger interns with his loud and unabridged rendition of 'Backseat Freestyle,' Jayden, 32, was last seen loitering by the water-cooler attempting to show Sheryll, 54, from reception, the latest nine minute clapback from Kendrick Lamar. "Nah, because its crazy that Dot did him like that. Like Drizzy has to clapback now."

"Did you want me to grab you anything for lunch, love?" She asks.

This offer went ignored while he tasked himself with decoding the flurry of instagram stories flooding the groupchat. More to come.

SALTY, SALACIOUS SENSATIONALISM

JUST IN... MALALA AND HILLARY'S BROADWAY PLAY IS COMING TO SEYMOUR CENTRE FOR LIMITED SESSIONS, WITH BIPOC ONLY TICKETS

INVESTIGATION: THERE WAS A MARATHON ON SUNDAY AND YOU ARE LAZY AND INFERIOR TO EVERYONE WHO WAS THERE

EXCLUSIVE: MICHAEL CAINE WITHDRAWS NOMINATION FOR THE USU BOARD: "I'M BACK ON MY NOLAN SHITE"

PROTEST

76 YEARS OF NAKBA



**STOP THE GENOCIDE.
FREE PALESTINE.**

5.30PM WED, 15 MAY AT TOWN HALL

ORGANISED BY PALESTINE ACTION GROUP