SOAS Decides: The New Faces of the SU

The elected 2019 SOAS SU co-presidents: Valeria Racu, Maxine Thomas-Asante, Youssra El-Maghboul, Peadar Connolly-Davey (Credit: Khadija Kothia)

Jude Omidiran BA Economics and Development

After a season of hard-fought campaigns, the Students’ Union’s new executive team has been decided. The student body chose Maxine Thomas-Asante as their Co-President Democracy & Education while Peadar Connolly-Davey won his campaign for Activities & Events. The Welfare and Campaigns role went to Valeria Racu, and Youssra Elmagboul succeeded in her re-election campaign for Equality & Liberation.

Voters also chose fourteen representatives for the SU’s part-time executive positions. The new team will be in office for the 2019/2020 academic year. The four new co-presidents will be taking a year out to dedicate themselves to their roles full-time, while the part-time officers will volunteer time alongside their studies.

The campaigning window opened on 25 February, as candidates rushed to plaster the JCR with alliterative campaign slogans and photos of their most electable smiles. The hustings on 28 February offered them the opportunity to deliver polished speeches and take questions from a packed JCR. All SOAS students, as well as students here for a year on exchange, were eligible to vote and could cast their votes online and at a voting desk in the main building. Turnout for this campaign reached 1364 voters, surpassing the 1207 votes cast in last year’s campaign, but falling short of the SU’s all-time record, which remains 1807 votes in March 2017.

“This election season has been celebrated for its calm and respectful tone; all candidates accepted the results and there has been no suspicion of overspending by any parties.”

Though previous years have seen their fair share of controversies, this election season has been celebrated for its calm and respectful tone; all candidates accepted the results and there has been no suspicion of overspending by any parties.

A tie between Lyndon Nana Yaw Opoku Appiah and Giulio Grilli Cicilioni in the second round of the Activities & Events race was arguably the most eventful occurrence of the campaign. The 310-310 tie threatened a possible need to consult the SU’s constitution in an unprecedented outcome. As it emerged, no matter which candidate was determined to have passed through to the final round, they would have been pipped to the post by Peadar regardless, who gained 339 votes in the second round.

The new co-presidents will spend the coming months learning about the intricacies of their new roles during a handover period before they officially enter their roles on 1 August. As with past co-president teams, they will be accessible through email or by visiting their office in G8.

A motion for a new full-time Black officer position was
Dear Spirit readers,

It is with a combination of feelings – from sadness to anticipation of the Spirit's future – that we publish our last issue of this academic year.

This issue focuses heavily on the 2019 Students' Union elections. From previous personal experience, understanding the inner dimensions of the Students' Union, student representation and what the elections entail can be a difficult task to undertake. Over the last few weeks, we have closely been following election coverage. We live-streamed the hustings, interviewed each candidate and published their answers on our website. We also live-streamed the results, which are available to watch on our YouTube channel via our website. In this print edition, our front page story breaks down the results that were announced last week, as well as providing insight, statistics, and highlights of this year's election.

In other news, a lot has happened around the world since we last published. This issue tries to cover these events, both in News and Opinion. Our News Made Easy covers the Venezuela crisis. Other news stories follow India/Pakistan tensions, the Sudanese uprising, the Guatemala orphanage fire, and the latest in US and UK politics.

We hope you enjoy this issue and, as always, feel free to send us your feedback.

Khalida Kothia
Managing Editor of The SOAS Spirit.

Your SOAS Spirit Team

Khadija Kothia • Managing Editor • 637933@soas.ac.uk
Arooj Sultan • Co-Editor-in-Chief • 611281@soas.ac.uk
Uswa Ahmed • Co-Editor-in-Chief • 638268@soas.ac.uk
Jude Omidiran • News Editor • 640661@soas.ac.uk
Frances Everett • News Editor • 646889@soas.ac.uk
Ludovica Longo • News Editor • 639997@soas.ac.uk
Syrant Butt • Features Editor • 648141@soas.ac.uk
Fisayo Eniilorunda • Features Editor • 657593@soas.ac.uk
Hana Qureshi • Opinion Editor • 647908@soas.ac.uk
Sumayyah Daisy Lane • Culture Editor • 637349@soas.ac.uk
Holly Sampson • Societies and Sports Editor • 638061@soas.ac.uk
Filip Kostanecki • Copy-Editor • 652972@soas.ac.uk
Indigo Eve Liburn-Quick • Copy-Editor • 640261@soas.ac.uk
Alexandra Bate • Copy-Editor • 628286@soas.ac.uk
Swareena Gurung • Copy-Editor • 666887@soas.ac.uk
Peter Smith • Senior Layout Editor • 629625@soas.ac.uk
Anna Pax, Sarah Andre, Uswa Ahmed, Hana Qureshi • Junior Layout Editors
Swareena Gurung • Online Editor • 666887@soas.ac.uk
Sumayyah Daisy Lane • Social Media Co-ordinator • 637349@soas.ac.uk
Zahraa Choudhury • Marketing Co-ordinator • 638600@soas.ac.uk
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passed in the most recent Union General Meeting on 27 February. The process for determining the new position’s remit will take place over the coming year to allow the first holder of the position to be selected in 2020. Some students’ unions already have similar paid roles in place, including at UCL, though it is yet to be decided whether SOAS SU will have an elected officer or a full-time member of staff.

Maxine Thomas-Asante was successful in her bid for the Democracy & Education role. Well-known for her dedication to the hugely important campaign Bridging the Gap, she has spent the past year fighting to eliminate the Law department’s racial attainment gap. Previously, she has also worked as vice president of SOAS’ African Caribbean Society. In her new position, she has pledged to make democratic processes more accessible, fight to preserve Africa-focused modules, and continue her work combating the attainment gap across the university.

Music student Peadar Connolly-Davey emerged as the new representative for Activities & Events. As the incumbent LGBTQ+ officer, he is perhaps best known on campus as a founding member of SOAS’ Drag Society which has organised eight wildly popular shows, many of which featuring Peadar as his drag alter-ego, Glangela Fever. His campaign pledges appealed to many different sections of the university’s students, with interdepartmental sports tournaments, film screenings, and a more balanced freshers’ week in the pipeline for next year.

The student body has said “Yes to Youss (again)” by re-electing Youssra Elmagboul as Equality & Liberation Co-President. In her first term, she organised school-wide anonymous marking, unconscious bias and confidentiality training for all academics, and the past year’s celebrated liberation months. Her plans for next year include greater mental health support provision from the SU, decolonising workshops, and an inclusive reworking of the SU’s BDS and Enough is Enough policies.

Valeria Racu’s victory in the Welfare & Campaigns co-president election represents an endorsement of her work campaigning with Justice for Workers, Crisis SOAS, and Enough is Enough as she sailed through with the largest margin of the four new co-presidents. In her new role, some of her campaign pledges include support for collective campaigning, gaining student representation on mitigating circumstances panels, and engaging with the ongoing reforms in the university and the SU to ensure that they lead to greater democracy and support for students.

The victors for the SU’s part-time positions have also been chosen, though two roles have yet to be filled: Mature Students and Postgraduate Research Officer. These remaining positions will be reopened for candidates to self-nominate in the October elections.

Interviews with all four of the new co-presidents can be found inside this issue, along with a list of results for the full incoming executive team.

Full results table is available to view on page 13, alongside interviews with elected representatives and a list of the Students’ Union’s most notable election controversies

SOAS SU Suspends “Undemocratic” Trustee Reform Referendum

Alex Barba, MA International Journalism

On 6 February 2019, an email sent out to SOAS students announced the structure of and details pertaining to a referendum on the proposed reform to the SOAS Students’ Union Trustee Board. The referendum, advanced by SU co-presidents, was almost immediately cancelled following a motion which challenged its validity and called for an emergency UGM. The motion brought up complaints that the referendum broke the SU’s own referendum procedure, and misrepresented the percentage of student representation on the new board.

Imran Jamal, the proposer of the motion and a student at SOAS, said he decided to propose the motion which led to the emergency UGM being called on 19 February after speaking to members of the SU and other students who were equally mystified by the way in which the referendum was called.

The motion concerns the unconstitutional nature of the referendum, emphasising both the lack of canvassing prior to it as well as the misleading information provided in the emails sent to the student body on the day the ballot was opened.

The proposer of the motion commented on the surprise referendum saying that: “There might have been good intentions but it was badly handled. This reform fundamentally changes the way that the SU functions and moves power away from students.”

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Jamal’s motion emphasised the fact that there has been no real public debate or discussion within SOAS on what the proposed changes would mean for the future of the SU. Schedule 3 of the SU Constitution states that the Students’ Union must provide at least 2 days canvassing before opening up a referendum ballot. In this case, there had been no canvassing period at all. The email sent on 6 February announced that the voting would be open the very same day.

A major concern, as emphasised by the proposer of the motion, was that the recommended structure would lead to a severe diminution in student representation on the Trustee Board. The information provided in the email claimed that the new structure would entail 73% student representation. This figure would be correct if one considers co-presidents to be ‘students.’ However, some argue that their status as sabbatical officers means that they should not be counted as such, in which case the framework put forward by the SU would, in fact, reduce student representation to 47%.

The petition required 75 signatures for the emergency UGM to be called and nearly 90 people signed it in three hours. Thus, the SU co-presidents had no choice but to call off the referendum and come up with a whole new framework and timeline for its resolution.

SOAS Co-President for Democracy & Education Hau-Yu Tam commented on the oversight: “It was a mistake - a failure to firstly, take proper care over the Referenda rules and secondly, a failure to properly consult students more widely. We were trying to resolve this before Spring Elections opened, in order to move SOAS SU forward to a position where we can finally look at paying our Exec for their labour, as well as have a better structure for students in terms of accountability, efficiency, and transparency.”

After scrapping the referendum, the SU took further action by organising a Governance Reform Workshop prior to the latest UGM meeting on 27 February. The workshop, which was led by an NUS Officer, was aimed at allowing students to better understand the SU’s current Trustee structure, as well as visualise and counter-propose alternative frameworks. This is just the first of many measures which will allow for a school-wide conversation concerning what trajectory the reforms to the Trustee Board structure should follow.

Hau-Yu Tam declared; “We did rush the process, and I’ll like to reiterate our apology that this happened. Every year Sabbs look at changing the constitution and SU structures, and I don’t want to erase the work that’s gone on in the past, but little seems to have changed and been retained.”

Following the latest UGM meeting, the anti-referendum motion passed without any votes against. It was decided that any reform to the SU will happen next year.

This is because any changes this year would modify the roles which those in office were expected to perform when they were voted in. Furthermore, there is simply no time for such a broad constitutional change to occur with only two days of term left after the proposed date of the new referendum vote on 18 March 2019.
SOAS Students Host Library Sleepovers to Show Solidarity Against Proposed Cuts

Elizabeth Shwe, BA Politics - Exchange Student From Princeton

On multiple nights between 15 January and 3 February, a group of SOAS students provided 24-hour library services, or "sleepovers", at the SOAS library to show solidarity with the library staff against the proposed cuts to the library and other services as part of the One Professional Services (OPS) restructuring. Over 60 students attended the first sleepover and new people joined regularly in the following weeks.

"Most of the senior managers have been at SOAS for less time than third-year undergraduates students."

"It is important to remember that as students, we are part of a wider community and sometimes we forget that the most important people in the institution are not just those who teach us, but every single person plays an important role in keeping the institution functioning," the organisers of the sleepovers said anonymously.

SOAS is currently restructuring all of its professional services departments and plans to make cuts of £650,000-£675,000 to the library alone, which would result in the loss of 25% of current library staff.

The organisers hoped to provide a collective organising space for students who felt strongly about the issue and wanted to get involved. They also wanted to address the "vacuous notion of 'student experience'" - a term that SOAS management has used to justify these cuts, as well as the vagueness on exactly how the restructuring would improve services to students.

"The school patronises students in saying that 'you do not understand,' but in reality, most of the senior managers have been at SOAS for less time than third-year undergraduates and some post-grad students. There is no scrutiny of the fact that some of them failed at their previous jobs and left their institutions in worse situations than when they joined and are doing the same at SOAS," organisers said. Furthermore, "there has been no communication with the students from any of the official channels on explaining why it was happening, what the rationale was, why the library was being slashed, what the reduction in teaching staff and administration would mean, how an idea of 'shrinking to get bigger' makes sense."

Thus, engaging with SOAS management on the issues of these cuts was also one of their goals, and this was achieved through the Ask SOAS Managers forum and will continue in forthcoming events scheduled to take place.

The organisers decided to hold these acts of solidarity only during the nighttime, hence the term "sleepover" so that students who needed to use the library during the day could do so without any disruptions. The cost was that it excluded people who were not able to stay on campus that late. However, the organisers also held planning sessions and other meetings during the day so that students who could not attend the sleepover could still participate.

Several activities took place during these sleepovers: film screenings, crafting sessions, impromptu music sessions, and discussions on how the current institutional issues are impacting both students and workers. Students either slept overnight or only stayed for part of the night before going home. And others simply used this provided space to continue studying past the formal 23:30 closing time.

To get the word out, they asked various societies and campaigns on campus to share the event via mailing lists and social media platforms. They also distributed a statement and invitation, which can be found on Save SOAS Library's Facebook page.

However, they received a limited amount of attention due to lack of available resources, specifically printing and gaining access to a mailing list for all of SOAS' student body. The organisers stated, "It would have been great if more people joined, but the fact that the accountability forum managed to pack out the LLT showed that it was somewhat successful in reaching out to students."

"Though they played no part in the organising, Save SOAS Library happily agreed to help by sending out messages about the details of the sleepover on their Facebook page. Members of the Save SOAS Library campaign appreciated the act of solidarity and commented that they "are very grateful for students' support for our campaign and the initiative that they took". Save SOAS Library also commented that they did not hear of any particular difficulties as a consequence of the sleepovers and as far as they knew, the sleepovers were peaceful.

It is difficult to say whether the sleepover was successful in its intended goals, especially because plans for the restructure have not been finalised. And it is challenging to evaluate the success of this one action in the context of many that have been organised against OPS restructuring. Nevertheless, the sentiments are still strong with organisers stating, "Regardless of the bullying, intimidation, lies, defamination, and other tactics used to scare activists on campus, there is still a strong and vibrant resistance against management should they cut the library and other key services in a way that those working those jobs feel will negatively impact the institution and students."

SOAS May Possess Another Looted Thai Artefact

Caren Holmes, MA Postcolonial Studies

A second Thai antiquity lacking documentation of its providential and transactional history has been identified in the SOAS collections, raising concerns that the university has potentially looted other items in its possession. The item in question is a 2000-year-old ceramic vessel from Ban Chiang, Thailand, one of the most historically looted regions in the country. The vessel, according to documents provided by SOAS in a Freedom of Information request (FOI), was allegedly purchased in either Bangkok or Singapore during the early 1970s at the height of illegal excavation in Ban Chiang. A 1961 Thai law requires that all antiquities exported from the state must have a license from the country’s Fine Arts Department. SOAS does not appear to have the documentation to prove the legal exportation of the item from Thailand. When asked about how the vessel was allowed to pass through the SOAS Due Diligence Policy of Philanthropic Gifts, the university explained in an FOI that such procedures were not followed as they do not apply for donations worth less than £1000.

Dr Angela Chiou, who has a PhD in Thai Art History, has expressed growing concern about the number of potentially looted items within the SOAS collection. While she has only submitted FOI requests for two items, both have raised red flags about the school's compliance with due diligence procedures, the decolonising SOAS vision, as well as international standards of art trading designed to prevent the continued circulation of looted artefacts. Chiou has published her ongoing investigations into these items on her blog SOASWatch.org.

In 2009, University College London (UCL) staff discovered 16 Ban Chiang antiquities within their university's collection. UCL subsequently gave all 16 items back to the Thai Department of Fine Arts, setting a precedent of identifying and returning potentially looted items within university possession. Chiou hopes that SOAS will follow suit, auditing their own collection and returning potentially looted items to their countries of origin. A SOAS spokesperson says that the university is reviewing procedures for the management and stewardship of the SOAS collection and that an audit of the collection is already underway, explaining that "the issue of the appropriateness of continuing to hold items – including this specific Ban Chiang pot – will be considered as part of that audit."
SOAS to get a Black Students’ Officer

Arooj Sultan, BA Economics & Politics

The role of a Black Students’ Officer is now in the process of being created, after the motion petitioning for it passed in the UGM on 27 February. The petitioners rationalise behind the motion was that at present there is a lack of recognition of the unique issues faced by black students at SOAS, thus there is a need for a representative who can both understand and deal, specifically, with those issues. The motion details the numerous ways Black students face racism and discrimination at SOAS, ranging from daily micro-aggressions committed by faculty and fellow students to being penalised for their incorporation of Black and non-European thinkers in their work. The petitioners state that Black students face a particular form of marginalisation. And this discrimination, they believe, combined with the accompanying lack of support forces Black students away from their studies and towards advocating for fair treatment. As a result, their academic career and their mental wellbeing are unfairly compromised. Hence, there is an urgent need for a Black Students’ Officer in the Students’ Union, or a Black Pastoral Coordinator, by 2020.

At the UGM, the petitioners explained the role in summary and clarified that the first point of contact for any issues that pertain only to the Black community at SOAS. SOAS presently has POC Officers and an Anti-Racism Officer, but the petitioners believe that Black students’ issues often get subsumed within other roles and movements and thus are not adequately addressed. During the course of the meeting there was some debate over which students are included within the definition of Black used within the motion. The petitioners clarified that if one is of Black African ancestry or the Black diaspora and self-identifies as Black, then they are covered under the umbrella of the role. However, an important distinction was made to state that the role is for those who identify as Black and not those that self-identify as politically Black. Furthermore, in the event the school chooses to not hire a Black Pastoral Coordinator and instead creates a position in the SU, an amendment was passed stating that those able to run and vote for the role would have to be from within the Black community. This is because the role will exist only to address the concerns of Black SOASians.

“There is a lack of recognition of the unique issues faced by black students at SOAS, thus there is a need for a representative who can both understand and deal, specifically, with those issues.”

UNISON Commits to Strike Action in the Case of Compulsory Redundancies

Yasmin Elsouda, BA International Relations

Once again the possibility of strike action, as a result of One Professional Services (OPS) restructuring, emerges. On 11 February, the SOAS branch of UNISON published the results of its consultative ballot on strike action “in the event of compulsory redundancies resulting from the One Professional Service Restructure process”. With a 77% turnout, over 97% voted in favour of the strike. The programme for restructuring SOAS’ OPS began in 2017 and aimed to improve services and create efficiency savings of £1 million by 2019-20. Since then, there has been growing concern amongst staff members about the increasing precariousness of their positions.

The initial response to management’s announcement of the restructuring was SOAS’ UNISON members requesting a formal commitment from SOAS that there were to be no compulsory redundancies as a result of the OPS restructuring. This was not met by management. The proposed cuts of 13 roles in the library have led to a huge backlash, with many hoping that management may reconsider the changes. There are also cuts being made elsewhere, like the SOAS IT specialist department where SOAS UNISON representative Alexander Nicholls works. Nicholls explains that this is concerning because the new structure does not offer secure employment for the highly specialist staff in that department or anywhere else in the school. The overwhelming majority that has voted in favour of industrial action reflects the significance of this feeling amongst UNISON members.

At present, SOAS UNISON has requested two meetings with SOAS management to further discuss a binding commitment to be made on the part of SOAS: that there will be no forced redundancies. This is in direct response to the result of the consultative ballot. The meetings are yet to happen and, based on earlier requests for a similar commitment, may not be fruitful. Nicholls emphasised that if the threat of forced redundancies continues, a formal ballot will be organised. Based on the existing support for the prospect of strike action, it is very likely union members will vote yes. If this is the case, the strikes “will probably take place around May/June” stated Nicholls. In further remarks, he said that if the OPS restructuring proceeds, the next target will be academics and those he identifies as most vulnerable: SOAS’ Graduate Teaching Assistants. This also helps to explain the resounding support for UNISON from academic staff and the UCU.

There has also been widespread support from the student body for SOAS UNISON’s threat of strike action. The concern of many is that the increasing marketisation of higher education across the UK is leading to higher fees but lower quality education. Many students have expressed concern over the new structure eliminating valuable staff members with specialist knowledge on specific regions and their role in the organisational structure of the university.
After a period of discussions and consultations, the One Professional Service (OPS) restructuring process will soon enter a new phase. SOAS management has now presented to the Executive Board the revised proposals addressing the fiscal deficit currently hitting SOAS.

The changes are due to take place by 3 June 2019, according to SOAS Registrar and Secretary Paula Sanderson. Each department will then establish their transitional periods based on their specificities. Sanderson also said, in an e-mail sent to all SOAS staff on 5 February, that voluntary severance will continue for ten days following the announcement of the final decisions taken by the Executive Board regarding the new structures. Students do not have representation in the EB.

SOAS management aims to reduce the total number of staff hours from the equivalent of 426 full-time staff down to 390. They have estimated that this will save £1.55 million which represents 6.9% of the entire staff costs.

UNISON and UCU strongly oppose the OPS Restructuring proposals because “it will lead to job losses and the deterioration of the services provided by SOAS”. They are particularly concerned about the impact of cuts on the library. In this regard, the position of library staff differs significantly from that of senior management. While SOAS Director Valerie Amos declared in an interview with The SOAS Spirit that the library would lose five staff, some members of the #SaveSOASLibrary campaign state that approximately 13 permanent positions will no longer exist by the end of July 2019.

“This discrepancy has to do with the fact that in the original Library restructure plan managers equated the total number of reduced Library staff hours worked across a calendar year as being equivalent to 5 full-time (35 hours per week) staff, whereas what we see in that restructuring diagram from late November is the total number of posts being reduced from 55 to 42, hence 13 people losing jobs”, said Bob Burns, Subject Librarian for Law and a member of UCU.

Union members and student reps also criticise the consultations for not being democratic and transparent enough. In their view, senior management did not provide adequate scope for discussion of the proposed structures within all branches of the SOAS community.

"There was no intention of consulting the student body in Management’s plans for the OPS restructurung," said Tam Hau-Yu, Student Union Co-President for Democracy & Education. According to Malena Batipsa, a 3rd-year Student Rep for Politics & IR, "We sat at the meetings as mere spectators, we were only allowed to ask questions and we did not get a chance to reply back." A large majority of SOAS UNISON members voted in favour of industrial action in the event of compulsory redundancies as a result of the OPS Restructure. "The SU stands with UCU and UNISON that there should be no compulsory redundancies in the restructuring process, and we are prepared to fight students’ corners where students’ expectations, standards and needs are not met”, Tam Hau-Yu stated.

The SOAS financial deficit is a worrying £7 million. High dropout rates, particularly in Finance & Management and Anthropology have contributed to the deficit, as have poor rates of donations from alumni. SOAS is not alone in its financial difficulties; several other universities have been dealing with plunging student recruitment, with many implementing voluntary severance packages in an attempt to return to sustainable spending levels.

The Labour Party has recently been faced with the long rumoured departure of numerous MPs from the party, who have styled themselves as ‘The Independent Group’. On 18 February, seven MPs announced the move as a protest against Jeremy Corbyn’s leadership of the party, including his stance on Brexit and the handling of the continuing anti-Semitism dispute which is plaguing the Labour Party.

Seven Labour MPs quit the party initially: Luciana Berger, Chuka Umunna, Chris Leslie, Angela Smith, Mike Gapes, Ann Coffey, and Gavin Shuker. The group encouraged others to follow suit and join them against the “machine politics” of the “hard left” and “hard right”. A further Labour MP, Joan Ryan, subsequently joined their ranks along with three Conservatives.

The Independent Group is initially operating as a separate group within parliament but is not a new party. As they say, they do not have major funding or a party infrastructure as of yet.

According to the group, Labour has failed “to provide a strong and coherent alternative to the Conservatives’ approach” to Brexit, which, they argue, “threatens to destabilise the British economy in pursuit of ideological objectives” and “would weaken our national security”.

Lucinda Berger, a Jewish MP, gave the reason that she could not remain in a party that had become “institutionally anti-Semitic”.

"A crisis for the soul of the Labour Party.”

Jeremy Corbyn responded that “now more than ever is the time to bring people together to build a better future for us all”, while Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell called on the defectors to do the “honourable thing” by standing down to allow for by-elections which would provide them with a refreshed mandate. The group, however, refuses to stand down, arguing that it would be inappropriate during the current moment of political disturbance as a result of Brexit.

Deputy Leader of Labour, Tom Watson, has warned that change is needed within the party for fear of more disgruntled MPs resigning. He said, “I love this party — but sometimes I no longer recognise it, as well as calling on Corbyn to engage in “a crisis for the soul of the Labour Party”. To counter this, he has created a centrist group within the party to provide a forum for debate for those who fall closer to the centre of the spectrum of British politics.

Watson also said that he would take personal charge of anti-Semitism and bullying cases within the party. Jon Lansman who is the founder of Momentum, the organisation that campaigns for Jeremy Corbyn, has said that anti-Semitism is a widespread problem in the Labour party and that many have “hard-core anti-Semitic opinions”.

Although the Independent Group was founded on anti-prejudice rhetoric, only hours after the group was founded, Angela Smith in a TV debate referred to people with BAME (black, Asian, minority ethnic) backgrounds as having a “fanny tinge”, referring to skin colour. Smith later apologised for having “misspoken” and stated that “it’s not what I am, I am committed to fighting racism wherever I find it in our society”. Time only will tell as to the future of the main parties, as defector Chuka Umunna argues that “the established parties are not up to this challenge...they have failed to fulfil their duties with the competence the public deserves.”
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NATIONAL NEWS

ISIS supporter Shamima Begum stripped of UK citizenship

Caroline Hilgers, BA International Relations and Social Anthropology

The last few weeks have stirred up big questions regarding nationality and citizenship in the UK, as the case of 19-year-old Shamima Begum has become national news. Shamima Begum was first reported on in 2015 when she left the UK with two other girls from London to go to Syria to support ISIS. This February, four years later, she reached out to her family in the UK through an interview with The Times to help her get home, as she was awaiting the birth of her third child. In several interviews with UK newspapers and TV channels, she spoke of her desire to come back to the UK. This is because the refugee camp in Syria where she is currently living “is really not a place to raise children”, and she has already lost her first two babies.

What followed these interviews was a wide split not only within UK media but also the whole nation, debating whether she should be allowed back into the country. Many argued that her media appearances showed her lack of remorse after she stated that the observation of the beheaded corpses of ISIS’ captives “did not faze [her] at all.”

Home Secretary Sajid Javid announced his decision on 20 February that he “will do everything in [his] power to prevent their return”, and consequently stripped Begum of her British citizenship. The complexity of Begum’s case does not end here, as international law experts question the legality of the Home Secretary’s decision. According to international law, an individual can only be stripped of their citizenship if they have a second citizenship. In the case of Shamima Begum, her parents’ Bangladeshi citizenship was referred to as an option for her, but this was rejected by Bangladeshi authorities stating that “there is no question of her being allowed to enter into Bangladesh.”

Beyond the complexity of her legal status, Shamima Begum’s story has been made a platform to discuss the wider issues of racism, counter-terrorism, agency, and gender. Some voices claim that it is Britain’s responsibility to investigate her role within ISIS and persecute her under British law accordingly, as she was radicalised in Britain. Others celebrated Javid’s decision, based on it being Begum’s own decision to leave the UK and seeing her case embedded within the wider fight against terrorism for national security. The language around not only Begum’s case but that of other young women leaving their home countries to support ISIS has further triggered a discourse on gender and agency. Azadeh Moaveni commented in the Guardian, “this inherited thinking [such as labelling Begum a jihadi bride] has outlived its use, especially in light of the way militant groups themselves play on gender to recruit and swell their ranks”.

On social media, her story has generated amusement for some people, with memes circulating on Twitter that ridicule her appearance or her ethnicity and religion. This escalated on 27 February when a shooting range in Wallasey used images of Begum as targets based on customer requests, claiming it was “light-hearted fun”, to which many people responded to with shock on social media.

For now, it looks like it will take a long time for Begum’s family to appeal against Javid’s decision. They are currently trying to find a way to get her newborn son to the UK as his citizenship is legally unaffected by her status.

Honda Hits the Brakes on its Swindon Plant

Alice Milton, BA World Philosophies

On Tuesday, 19 February, the Japanese car company Honda announced it will be closing its plant in Swindon by 2021. This will result in the direct loss of at least 3,500 jobs in the area and in the wider supply chain. It also represents a significant blow to the UK economy. Honda’s bosses are saying that Brexit is not to blame for the move.

“Honda’s bosses are saying that Brexit is not to blame for the move.”

There is a global decline in the demand for diesel cars due to high levels of emissions, especially in large European cities. Since the Volkswagen scandal of 2015, the industry has seen a move towards electric vehicles instead. Many car companies are also following Tesla by starting production of autonomous cars. According to Honda, their Swindon plant lacks the space needed for these changes. This and the fact that the plant only produced 161,000 of the 5.3 million Honda cars last year, suggests this may be a logical move.

But many believe that Brexit must have been a factor in Honda’s decision. If anything, their comments back in 2016 with regards to the UK referendum prove this. In 2016, Honda Executive Vice President Seiji Koizumi said the Japanese automaker had “no intention” of withdrawing from the UK. However, this was before a no-deal Brexit had even been considered. The company’s use of the ‘just-in-time’ method of production relies heavily on the easy movement of goods between the UK and the continent. Currently, more than half of the parts used to make a Honda Civic travel to Swindon via the Eurotunnel. This is not unique to Honda. 25% of trade between the UK and the rest of Europe goes through the Eurotunnel. If new tariffs and checks have to be implemented at Calais and Dover, production efficiency will be massively impacted.

Honda may claim Brexit is not the reason for the closure of the plant, but it would be surprising if they had not considered the possible consequences of staying in the UK after Brexit. Honda’s announcement of the move comes only a few weeks after the implementation of a new Japan-EU trade deal. This lucrative deal is one the EU is likely to miss out on after 29 March if it leaves the EU.

Japanese car companies arrived in the UK in the 1980s, hoping that the UK would be a springboard into the European common market. Now, with uncertainty on the horizon, Honda could mark the beginning of a general move out of the UK for big businesses. Nissan has stated it will not be making its new X-Trail in Sunderland, despite being offered 661 million pounds by the UK government. The Japanese businesses that leave the UK will undoubtedly recover from the move. However, the workers in Swindon and other parts of the UK are having to look for new jobs. If the Honda move is a consequence of Brexit, it could signal an increasing number of businesses backing out of the UK. The British government needs to be prepared for the massive job losses that could follow.

Honda Dealership in West Swindon (Credit: Brian Robert Marshall, Wikimedia Commons)
International News
News Made Easy:
The Unfolding Crisis in Venezuela

Ludovica Longo, BA Politics and Geography

In an attempt to shed light upon the recent events and the current geopolitical situation in Venezuela, we provide a basic chronology and suggest some key questions to ask ourselves that the majority of mainstream news fails to answer. The mainstream media takes a narrow-angle and one-sided perspective, narrating an oversimplified story in which the sole culprit of the current situation in Venezuela is a socialist dictator, Nicolas Maduro, whose corrupt policies turned the country in a "failed state".

According to the New York Times, "The Venezuelan economy has collapsed under the policies by Mr. Maduro’s leftist, authoritarian government, and three million Venezuelans have fled their homeland," thus it is now the US’ role to exert "economic and political pressure to support the restoration of democracy in Venezuela".

The socialist president Nicolas Maduro, along with radical leftist voices, in contrast, put all the blame on neoliberal intervention in Latin America, in the form of structural adjustment programs and economic sanctions.. They argue the US is merely attempting to overthrow an authoritarian regime whose progressive stance would otherwise represent a threat for its resource interests in the continent. A so defined "humanitarian-crisis" justifies external intervention on the ground of principles of democracy and freedom whilst neglecting issues of national sovereignty and self-determination.

"In contact with the popular communities, we consider that one of the fundamental causes of the economic crisis in the country is the effect that the unilateral coercive sanctions that are applied in the economy, especially by the government of the United States," said Ms. Russian, president of Fundalatin – one of the oldest human rights NGOs in Venezuela.

Key dates
1985 – Crash in oil prices.
1998 – Oil prices crash once again with a huge impact on the oil-dependent Venezuelan economy.
1999 – Hugo Chavez took office. A referendum gets approved which will extend the president’s term to six years and reduces Congress to a unicameral national assembly.
2002 – US-backed attempt to oust Chavez through a brief failed coup.
2006 – Increased oil nationalisation. Foreign oil companies are asked to pay higher taxes and more than 1,000 companies are nationalised during Maduro’s time in office.
2012 – Chavez gets re-elected and dies of cancer shortly after. Maduro defeats Capriles and announces he will carry out Chavez’s socialist legacy in the 21st century.
2017 – Maduro calls for the rewriting of the constitution to reduce the powers of opposition-controlled National Assembly.
May 2018 – Maduro calls for early elections, wins another six-year term through opposition-boycotted presidential elections whose legitimacy is questioned by the United States as well as the Lima Group.
2018 – The number of Venezuelans leaving the country due to crime escalations, hyperinflation, and food shortages reaches 3 million.
August 2018 – The New York Times reports on secret meetings between US officials and Venezuelan military officials to organise a coup to overthrow Maduro.
January 2019 – Maduro is sworn in for a second term; the Organisation of American States does not recognise his legitimacy.
Juan Guaidó leader of the National Assembly, declares himself interim president through an informal oath of office. Maduro accuses Guaido of staging a coup and orders his arrest.
The United States, along with over 50 states recognise the new leader who presents himself as temporary president with the main goal of ensuring free and fair elections will take place.

Venezuelan security forces and paramilitary groups along the borders with Brazil and Colombia obstruct the entry, promised by the opposition, of US aid trucks. Tear gas and gunfire leave hundreds injured in clashes.

February 2019 – The US announces new sanctions on Venezuela as Lima Group opposes Military Intervention. It also calls on allies to freeze the assets of state-owned PDVSA after deadly violence blocked humanitarian aid from reaching the country last weekend.

Key Issues and Questions

What role does the military play?
Nicolas Maduro still relies on the loyalty of the military which runs the state oil company, PDVSA, and is involved in government-run drug-trafficking. Some military officers have also been appointed to high political offices, which is one reason why they have little interest in challenging the status quo.

Why does Maduro so firmly oppose humanitarian aid?
Maduro continues to deny the existence of a humanitarian crisis. Furthermore, letting the opposition distribute the aid would signify that Maduro is recognising the opposition’s credibility. Thirdly, Maduro accuses the US of smuggling weapons along with humanitarian aid to ultimately overthrow the regime.

What is behind US sanctions on state-owned PDVSA?
US sanctions, used to pressure Maduro to give up power, are expected to block $7 billion in assets and result in $11 billion in export losses over the next year for Venezuela’s government. This will deny the regime its most important source of revenue and foreign currency. Sanctions, however, have exacerbated the already serious political and economic crisis.

Who is Elliot Abrams?
Assistant secretary of state for human rights in the Reagan presidency, and current special envoy of the US to Venezuela. Elliot Abrams’ controversial past, such as his leading role in US-backed repressive massacres in El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua, and his recent statements make us think he will not hesitate to use violence to overthrow Maduro’s regime.
He has repeatedly and overtly lied about US propaganda and policies working towards the establishment of free and fair democratic elections by any means necessary. He is, therefore, deemed to be the perfect fit for the role of restructuring democracy in the country.

What about Russia and China?
Paraphrasing a statement released by Ma Zhaoxu, China’s permanent UN representative, China, appealing to principles of international law, strongly opposes foreign interference as well as military intervention in Venezuela and argues that the so-called humanitarian assistance has been deeply politicised to create turbulence inside of the country and the whole region.
Along those lines, Vassily A. Nebenzia, Russia’s ambassador to the United Nations, insists that the humanitarian emergency has been used as a mere pretext for US intervention, considering that the aid convoy was already expected to provoke clashes.
Unsurprisingly, both Russia and China have vetoed US resolution at the UN Security Council, calling for new free and fair elections paired with international observers.

What would Venezuela look like in a post-coup scenario?
Taking into account the record of US intervention in Latin America to overthrow Washington-declared dictators, most sceptical analysts can foresee the election of one of the so-called “puppets” of the United States, who would serve its interests above the stated intentions of installing a stable democracy.

Credit: Creative Commons
**13 MARCH 2019**

**Escalation of Tensions Between India and Pakistan**

Noor Mandviwalla, LLB Hon.

The Trigger – Attack on Pulwama: Tensions between India and Pakistan have reached a highpoint in February, with the trigger being the attack by a suicide bomber on a convoy of vehicles carrying security personnel at Lethpora in the Pulwama district, Jammu and Kashmir. This resulted in the deaths of at least 42 members of the Indian Central Reserve Police Force of the 76th Battalion and injured many others. A militant group based in Pakistan, Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), has taken responsibility for the attack. The Pakistani government has denied any involvement in the attack and has condemned the actions of these militants.

“It is undoubted that domestically, being tough on Pakistan helps Modi’s political standing.”

In response to the Pulwama incident, the diplomatic row between both countries continues to deepen as Narendra Modi stated that India would give a “fitting, jaw-breaking response to this attack”. Pakistan’s Foreign Minister, Shah Mehmood Qureshi stated that he was disappointed to see India’s “knee-jerk” reaction as they made an allegation without evidence against Pakistan. The danger of all-out conflict, however, only arose on 26 February, when Indian fighter jets crossed the ‘Line of Control’ into the Muzaffarabad sector at 3:30 a.m. According to the Indian foreign ministry in New Delhi, this was a “non-military, pre-emptive action” on what was believed to be the JeM training base. The facts on what exactly has occurred in this incident are extremely unclear, with both countries issuing differing information about the scenario. To decipher the complex web of facts, the facts displayed by either side’s media will be recounted separately.

India’s Perspective: Vijay Gokhale, the Indian Foreign Secretary stated that the jets sent in during the early hours on 26 February had, in fact, hit their target and that “a very large number of JeM terrorists, trainers, senior commanders and groups of jihadis...were eliminated”. New Delhi now lodges a strong protest on what it calls an “unprovoked act of aggression by Pakistan” in its response to sending jets to infiltrate India’s airspace a day after the Indian fighter jets carried out the alleged strike at the JeM camp.

According to Delhi-based Asian News International (ANI), the Pakistan Air Force sent an F-16 jet to infiltrate India’s airspace but was subsequently shot down by Indian retaliatory fire about 3 kilometres within Pakistani territory in Lam Valley, Nowshera sector. Earlier, the Indian government had said its pilot, Commander Abhinandan, was “missing in action” after shooting down the aircraft. In various videos circulated, the pilot was seen being interrogated, blindfolded and wounded, with his arms tied behind his back. In light of allegations against Pakistan having violated the Geneva Convention for the protection of prisoners, the videos were removed and another video surfaced claiming that the “officers of the Pakistan Air Force have treated me well.”

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has met with the chiefs of the three Indian Armed Forces at his residence, and the content of this meeting is yet to be disclosed. The most recent announcement by the Indian government is that it expects an “immediate and substantial” return of its pilot.

Pakistan’s Perspective: Pakistan’s Director General of the Inter-Services Public Relations (DG ISPR), Major General Asif Ghafoor, states that the Indian jets were “scrambling to respond, forcing them to utilise their payload in haste while escaping”. Pakistan Air Force (PAF) claims to have shot down two Indian aircrafts that infiltrated into Pakistani airspace on Wednesday, one of which fell within Pakistani territory. The pilot operating this jet was then taken into the custody of the Pakistan army. The DG ISPR reported that it had arrested an Indian media reports which suggested that a Pakistani F-16 jet was shot down in conflict, stating that “Pakistan did not use an F-16 in any activity today”. He went on to state that Pakistan does not want to “escalate, and [instead] follow a path which leads to peace”. Speaking on Pakistan’s response, the Foreign Office stated that they have “no intention of escalation, but are fully prepared to do so if forced into that paradigm”.

Pakistan’s Prime Minister, Imran Khan, in addressing the nation in wake of the PAF shooting down the Indian aircrafts stated that Pakistan was ready to cooperate with India in any kind of investigation following the Pulwama attack. He emphasised with the families of the pilots and the nation that “Pakistan is ready to share actionable evidence with the Pakistani government in their claims of Pakistan being behind the attack.”

Concluding Points: Flight services and airports were temporarily suspended on both sides of the border on Wednesday, in view of the escalating border tensions. Operations in airports including Srinagar, Jammu, and Leh were suspended, as well as airports in Lahore, Sialkot, and Karachi. As the day came to a close, flight operations on both sides began to be partially restored, however it remains unclear as to when operations will return to normal.

It is undoubted that domestically, being tough on Pakistan helps Modi’s political standing in view of the next general election dates to be announced within only a few weeks. With regards to whether tensions will escalate or thaw, it is worth noting that both countries possess nuclear arms, therefore it is in the best interests of both countries to engage in peaceful dialogue and achieve an agreement.

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**16 States take action against Trump’s wall and ‘national emergency’**

Noor Mandviwalla, LLB Hon.

On 15 February, Donald Trump seems to have taken his stance on his “build a wall” campaign to an extreme by declaring a national emergency under the National Emergencies Act (1976). Additionally, through an Executive Action, the Trump Administration announced that $6.7 billion in additional federal funding was set to be allocated for the construction of a wall along the southern border. After the government’s reopening after its 35-day partial shutdown considering the border wall dispute, Congress approved a $1.375 billion appropriation for the construction of fencing along the border. Throughout this, Congress made it clear that this funding was not to be utilised for the construction of Trump’s wall.

In defiance of Congress’ will, however, Trump has seemingly manufactured a “crisis” centred around the influx of unlawful immigration, drug trafficking, and increased crime rates all coming from beyond the southern border, as a basis to instigate a national emergency. However, concrete data and evidence indicates that there is no objective basis for Trump to do so. For example, the Customs and Border Protection reports show that unlawful entries from the southern border into the USA are at 45-year lows; these reports also indicate that drugs are more likely to be smuggled through, and not in-between, official ports of entry.

On Monday, 18 February, a coalition of 16 states (consisting of California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Maine, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, and Virginia) have filed a lawsuit against Donald J. Trump, in his official capacity as President of the United States of America.

The plaintiff states have filed this plea in the Federal District of San Francisco, and ask the Court to declare that Trump’s declaration of ‘national emergency’ and diversion of federal funds towards his construction of a wall along the southern border is unlawful and unconstitutional.

The Court has grounds to rule Trump’s actions as unlawful and unconstitutional under United States Code (USC) Section 1331, which gives the court jurisdiction of all civil actions arising under the Constitution laws, and Section 2201, which gives the Court the authority to grant declaratory and injunctive relief.

The action was brought forward by the states for various reasons. Firstly, because the redirection of federal funding means that the plaintiff states would collectively lose millions of dollars in funding that their national guard units receive for counter-drug activities. They would also lose millions of dollars that would have been received for law enforcement programs from the Treasury Forfeiture Funds, thus potentially harming public safety in the states. Secondly, the reallocation of this funding would divert money away from military construction projects located in the plaintiff states, inherently instigating damage to the economy as well as propriety interests. Thirdly, the construction of the wall along the States of California and New Mexico would cause irreversible environmental damage to those areas, and the States’ natural resources.

The House of Representatives voted 245-182 on Tuesday, 26 February, to block this declaration of emergency. However, the Democratic party did not win enough support from the Republican party to overcome Trump's threatened veto.

The resolution is then to be taken up to the Senate within 18 days. The majority of legislation that goes up to the Senate requires 60 votes to pass. However, because this specific resolution is “privileged”, it only requires 51 votes. Therefore, as of now, the future of whether Trump’s vision of completing the wall along the southern border will become a reality, or whether the United States’ legislative and judicial branches will halt this development, remains unclear.

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**WWW.SOASSPIRIT.CO.UK**
“Freedom... Peace... Justice...” – Sudan’s Ongoing Revolution

Hala M.E. Abushama, MSc Development Economics

On 19 December 2018, peaceful demonstrations broke out through the streets of Atbara, in the Republic of Sudan. Bread prices tripled in Atbara overnight, after months of struggle with long queues to purchase bread and petrol as well as to obtain cash. This sparked ignited a fire within Sudanese citizens to commence their fight for change.

Sudan's youth-led revolution, for the most part organised on social networking platforms, began in December 2018, starting in Atbara and spreading to all other states within the country. On December 25, Khartoum's streets flooded with peaceful protests and it became clear they appealed to many strata of the country's social fabric, including women, men, and children.

“Sudanese women’s participation in marches made an ostensible statement against sexism, patriarchy and discrimination.”

The movement rapidly shifted from protesting the alarming deterioration in economic conditions to a solid demand of Al Bashir's removal from office. “You arrogant racist, the whole nation is Darfur!” goes one of the many chants that filled the streets of Khartoum and several other big cities during the marches in solidarity with Darfurian and western Sudanese citizens. Darfurians have faced decades of suppression, racism, and discrimination. For example, Al Bashir’s forces coerced a handful of men from western Sudanese states into falsely admitting that they committed illegal acts on national television. Events such as this triggered anger within Sudanese citizens and inspired an incredible sense of inter-ethnic unity nationwide for the first time ever.

Al Bashir's National Security forces responded to peaceful demonstrators with violence. They used the intimidation tactics of lashing protestors, and firing tear-gas and live ammunition. Hundreds of detainees have been imprisoned for weeks, while many activists remain detained. Others, when bailed-out, returned to the streets the next morning. Dozens of young Sudanese men and women have died from gunshot to the head and chest, as reported by the Al Arabiya news agency. Such atrocities went a step further as martyrs' families were only given the corpses for burial if they signed a death report denying the true cause of death.

Amidst such escalating developments, the Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA), in the span of a few weeks became the leading power of the revolution. An informal opposition group whose members mostly remain anonymous for safety reasons, the SPA formed in 2013 but has only been active as of August 2018. It is a freedom and peace-driven entity focused on giving people hope to spur change by championing a single goal: to remove Al Bashir's repressive regime, which is guilty of crimes against humanity in both Sudan and South Sudan.

The SPA has been providing continuous announcements of demonstration locations and timings to which thousands of Sudanese people have responded by attending and chanting “Just Fall... That’s All...”, a statement that embodies the true meaning of unity within an ethnically and religiously diverse nation.

In Sudan, the Islamic Sharia Law is the legal code that the National Congress Party claims it rules by, which it uses as a means of justifying its degrading, racist, and sexist acts towards the people. Women have been the most oppressed group in society for the past six decades, but since December 2018, things took a turn. Sudanese women’s participation in marches has made an ostensible statement against sexism, patriarchy, and discrimination, and has proved how pivotal their role is within society. Women have become leading forces in peaceful marches across Sudan and unapologetically reject the norms that degrade women’s participation in any possible ‘hazardous’ act. Women in Sudan have finally unleashed their power by standing alongside male citizens, who are also beaten by the regime apparatus, detained, and abused.

After more than two months of growing, the movement has led to several forms of resistance emerging across the country; journalists’ resignations; strikes in private sector organisations, schools, and hospitals. Artists in Sudan have grasped the opportunity to express their resistance in creative forms: music, poetry, and graffiti are filling the streets of Khartoum and the hearts of millions of Sudanese people. Though it is still not clear if this will be enough to overthrow the government.

Congresswoman Ilhan Omar Subject to Controversy After Calling Out Pro-Israel Lobby Group

Streisand Neto, MSc International Politics

Ilhan Omar, a congresswoman from Minnesota, caused controversy after sharing her views on the American Israeli Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) on Twitter. She stated "It's all about the Benjamins baby", in reference to $100 bills and the money that lobbyists often bring in for supportive candidates. Her tweet caused a massive stir amongst both Democrats and Republicans. It has also received support and generated a debate on a topic that reveals the influence of the powerful lobby group in US politics.

AIPAC is a pro-Israel lobbying group that has strong ties with the US government as a result of huge yearly donations. In addition to giving money, it holds extravagantly conventions, bringing in notable faces such as former presidential candidate Hillary Clinton in order to discuss US-Israel cooperation. At the 2016 convention, Hillary Clinton emphasised the "unshakable commitment to our alliance and to Israel's future". Given the fact that America and Israel possess strong ties in a military and political sense, it comes as no surprise that Clinton emphasised the importance of maintaining the bond between both countries.

In response to her tweet, representatives from both parties have condemned Ilhan Omar. House Republican Leader Kevin McCarthy asserted her remark was anti-Semitic. According to Alex Kotch, a writer for The Guardian, "anti-Semitism incidents have risen drastically in the US". Additionally, two Jewish Democratic House Members, Josh Gottheimer of New Jersey and Elaine Luria of Virginia, organised a petition to notify the House Democratic leaders of their condemnation of hateful remarks against Jewish people. Meanwhile, Glenn Greenwald, a prominent lawyer and journalist, criticised the swift condemnation and suggested the implications of infringing upon the "free speech rights of Americans".

Greenwald, in discussion with Amy Goodman on the TV show Democracy Now, considered Omar's remarks as "uncontroversial", arguing that Omar's comment details the truth about AIPAC's financial capability in murky US politics. Lawyer and activist Ady Barkan also addressed the issue in his article "What Ilhan Omar said about AIPAC was right". He alludes to his previous ties with AIPAC and highlights the centrality of money in supporting individual members of both parties.

It is worth noting that Ilhan Omar endorses the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement. BDS, the global pressure group, write on their website that their cause is to challenge "international support for Israeli apartheid and settler-colonialism". Omar has criticised Israel previously, in 2012 tweeting, "Israel has hypnotized the world, may Allah awaken the people and help them", signifying her disapproval towards the Israeli state.

Earlier this month, Omar publicly apologised via her Twitter account by stating that her "intention is never to offend [her] constituents or Jewish Americans as a whole", although the second paragraph of her statement reaffirms the "problematic role of lobbyists in our politics". In spite of the backlash she has received, Ilhan Omar told CNN that she finds it “exciting” to be sparking discussion on an important matter.

Ilhan Omar (Credit: Wikimedia Commons)
Trials Start Against Guatemalan Officials Accused of Responsibility for Deaths of 40 Children

Zahra Banday, BA English

TRIGGER WARNING: This article contains graphic descriptions of sexual abuse and violence.

In February 2017, around one hundred children tried to escape Hogar Seguro Virgen de la Asuncion, a state-run orphanage in Guatemala, but officials soon found them, rounded them up and took them back to the shelter. They proceeded to lock up 56 of the girls who escaped into a small room, 26 of them for 10 hours. One of the girls lit a match to alert the officials to let them out, but instead a fire spread.

The New York Times reported that the police officers waited "nine minutes before stepping inside" despite the girls "panic-stricken shouts". By that time, it was too late as many had died as a result of the fire. Aljazeera reports that "nineteen girls died in the fire at the Virgen de la Asuncion youth shelter that day, and a further 21 later succumbed to their injuries in hospital". It is only now, two years after this horrifying event, that the five figures accused of being responsible for these deaths are being put on trial.

The shelter has had a tragic history of abuse and scandal, and unfortunately, the authorities have neglected to properly investigate the allegations made by the children for years. These are primarily reports of physical and sexual abuse, highlighting the dire need for more resources for vulnerable youth in Guatemala. Aljazeera reports that "teenage girls who were sent there have told various Guatemalan media outlets that strangers were brought in at night and allowed to single out the girls they wished to abuse, as well as being sexually abused and beaten by members of staff". The mother of a seventeen-year-old girl staying at the shelter told Guatemalan news outlet PlayGround that, "Girls are classified according to their physical appearance and the prettiest ones are placed in a special unit where they are abused".

Two teachers at the faculty were arrested in 2013, one of them accused of forcing young children to perform sexual acts on him. Another shocking case is of bricklayer José Roberto Arias Pérez who was given a 15-year prison sentence in 2014 for raping a mentally disabled 13-year-old girl whilst working on the property.

Norma Cruz, the director of group Survivors says of the girls living there that: "These are girls who had been abused, sometimes raped, by members of their own family. These girls were placed there for their protection." The children had been placed into the care of the government to escape the brutality they faced around them, yet they did not find any true refuge from the shelter.

The institution was reportedly "intended to house a maximum of 350 youths" but had around 700 girls and boys of different ages, thus children were forced together despite their individual needs. A rebellious teenage girl would be placed in the same place as a young offender and there was no extra care for disabled children leaving all of them desperately vulnerable. The announcement of a trial for the staff involved in deaths of the girls is a step in the right direction to finally get justice. However, the judge's decision to only prosecute five individuals when one can assume there were many more offenders shows how this abuse goes largely unpunished in a system where the cries of abused children fall on deaf ears.

Vatican Reveals Code for Priests Who Father Children

Zahra Banday, BA English

TRIGGER WARNING: This article discusses rape and child abuse.

It has recently come to light that the Vatican has a secret internal code for dealing with priests who break celibacy vows and father children. Vatican spokesperson Alessandro Gisotti talked with The New York Times saying, "I can confirm that these guidelines exist" and that "it is an internal document". Gisotti furthered that the "fundamental principle" of these guidelines is the "protection of the child". The guidelines "request" that the "father leave the priesthood to assume his responsibilities as a parent by devoting himself exclusively to the child". However, the issue does not always follow this course of action.

Cases vary and in some circumstances the priest acknowledging the child could mean his priesthood being stripped, which could cause financial hardship for the family he has to support. In other more sinister cases, there have been calls for priests to be excommunicated from the church for raping their victims and not recognising the subsequent child from their crime. The New York Times reports the case of Erik Zattoni whose mother was raped at age 14 by Rev. Pietro Tosi, who was 54 at the time. He refused to recognise Erik and "the family were evicted from their parish-owned home in a tiny town outside Ferrara, Italy". In 2010 Zattoni sued Father Tosi and took a DNA test to be recognised as his son. When this was finally proven the Vatican only reminded Tosi of his "responsibilities as a father but did not demand his removal from priesthood". In 2014 Father Tosi died "still a priest". The issues here regard the discrepancy between the church's guidelines calling for the child's wellbeing to come first and their failure to acknowledge different situations in which said wellbeing could suffer. In a New York Times article, Vincent Doyle, a man who later in life found out his real biological father was actually his Roman Catholic priest, says of the situation, "It's the next scandal". Mr Doyle states that his website "Coping International" has 50,000 users in 175 countries. These statistics present an extremely widespread and real issue that the Church is only partially willing to acknowledge. As Doyle states, "There are kids everywhere", and the problem is too wide to ignore anymore. This is part of an all-consuming narrative, within the Catholic Church, of secrecy and the aversion to scandals in relation to any crimes priests have committed. A question that several organisations have posed is, should the Catholic Church make celibacy vows optional like many other churches? But perhaps the question is not about celibacy but how the guidelines should be changed to protect the mothers and children when situations occur.

In the wake of all these scandals, the Pope assembled an "unprecedented summit" at the Vatican to discuss the abuse within the Church. The landmark meeting was held in February and was attended by 180 bishops and cardinals over four days. The victims of abuse at the hands of the priests as well as the children of priests were in attendance to plead their cases. The results that were produced at the end of this meeting have been widely criticised by many activists and publications. As reported by The Guardian, a list of 21 reflection points was produced by the Pope, the first proposal being a "practical handbook" to be given to dioceses indicating how they must proceed when abuse is reported. A spokesperson for 'Ending Clergy Abuse', Peter Isley, states: "There is all this vagueness – listing structures and criteria. But what counts is that zero-tolerance should be written into church law. If a priest has been determined [to have committed child abuse], they should be removed from the ministry. And if bishops have covered things up, they must be removed too." This is one of many calls to increase transparency and hold the Catholic Church to account.
Students’ Union Election Low-Down

Interviews With Your Elected Candidates: (Full interviews available online)

Interviewed by Jude Omidiran

What are your three greatest priorities for next year?

Yousra El-Maghboule, Co-President for Equality and Liberation

Making Activism Accessible: Having been in the office for 7 months now, I have been surprised at how many students want to get involved with campaigns and liberation movements at SOAS but feel that they don't have the knowledge or the language to do so. That’s why I want to create a 'Jargon Buster' which would be a centre of knowledge and terms. This is not to say that resources don’t already exist online but having a place where all students can go creates a culture of accountability as people cannot feign ignorance when being problematic but also inclusivity as everyone at least has the same base level of knowledge.

Complaints: Having introduced an anonymous reporting tool this year, I think it important to keep pushing on reforming the complaints system. I would like to see all instances of Gender Based Violence Complaints handled externally as well as a different mediation system for cases of bullying in SU Societies.

Freshers Workshops: Introduce Decolonising Workshops for freshers, as it is clear that is not just academics who are guilty for microaggressions in the classroom. Our 'Enough is Enough' workshops need a massive content review and overhaul as well as to finish the work we have become to make them genuinely mandatory.

Peadar Connolly-Davey, Co-President for Activities and Events

Increasing student participation in societies and SU events by working to make them more inclusive and by reorganising the SU website and notice boards to help societies distribute information about their meetings and other events.

Have bigger and better themed months like Black History Month, Queer History Month, Women’s history month etc. If elected, I will make sure to start working with the student body to organise these months/weeks as soon as possible so we can make some great events.

To ensure that all students voices are heard by listening to what the students body have to say, I will have an online suggestions box for events and activities.

Valeria Racu, Co-President for Welfare and Campaigns

First of all, to continue the work students in the Art and the African Mind society have started and fight hard for the creation of a black students support position in the SU and for mandatory unconscious bias workshops for all students and staff. Even if that means using SU money in the beginning and then making SOAS commit to investing in such essential services.

Second, finally acknowledging and tackling the SU’s and SOAS incompetence in dealing with gender-based violence, as the Account for This campaign has been calling out during the last months. This is part of a broader need to improve the way our institution deals with complaints and disciplines, as the protocols and available support for different scenarios are blurry and non-accessible, which ends up leaving student affairs unattended and coping by themselves most of the times.

Thirdly, to make the SU as accessible, approachable and representative as possible, being an actual union that supports its members and fights collectively for the improvement of our rights and conditions. In my opinion, this would be possible by increasing our visibility as representatives, and the access students have to our resources, information and support.

Head to our website for the full interviews with all questions and candidates.

Maxine Thomas-Asante, Co-President for Democracy and Education

One of my priorities is definitely going to be addressing the issue of how to balance protecting students while maintaining freedom of speech. I want to hold workshops and debates to formulate solid SU policy.

A second priority will be to challenge department heads and management on the evident stripping of courses on Africa from the LEP programme, core modules and modular choices.

Finally I would like to propose an alternative process to the UGM to encourage students to engage with the democratic process in a less confrontational way.

Top 4 Students’ Union Election Controversies

Amaani Master, BA International Relations

1. 2015 Co-President for Activities and Events Disqualification

One of the candidates (Juned Khan) running for this position overspent on the £30 allowance. He had submitted a receipt for £15 for 55 photographs, which turns out couldn't financially be done. After disqualification, he appealed to the Returning Officer, who, after visiting the shop claiming to have printed the photocopies, found out that the shop didn't offer photocopying at all.

2. Sports and Societies Co-President holding a society’s money?

Chuck, who was running again for the Co-President of Sports and Societies was found to have about £10,000 that had been kept in his personal bank account, money that was "kept hold of" for the Basketball Beyond Borders Society. After disqualification, Chuck did not come into work for a couple of weeks, with pictures surfacing of him in Rome with a Maserati. The Student Union took Chuck to court for theft and fraud, and the money was returned on the second day of the court trial.

3. The only successful re-open nomination campaign

Re-open nominations have only ever won once at SOAS, which was for the Black Officer role in 2008-2009. The candidate was initially going to run with his girlfriend, however, forgot to put her name down on the nomination form. Rather than win on his own, he decided to run a re-open nomination campaign with his girlfriend against himself. However, a third candidate ran against them, claiming that running a re-open nomination campaign was a waste of SU money, and the third candidate managed to win the election.

4. 2005 Campaign Elections

Previous rules for campaigns have stated that students should not spend "in excess" rather than an actual figure. This caused problems when a student spent £200, with one of the main things going towards printing a large number of clocks that said "Vote Mustafa" on them. The candidate was disqualified, after submitting receipts that were over £200.

See the full list on our Website and Youtube Channel.
### 2019 Election Results:

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<td>Co-President Democracy &amp; Education</td>
<td>Krish Aurora</td>
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<td>Maxine Lydia Thomas Asante</td>
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<td>Sophie Symmons</td>
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<td>Co-President Equality and Liberation</td>
<td>Archanaa Seker</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Youssra Elmagboul</td>
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<tr>
<td>Co-President Welfare &amp; Campaigns</td>
<td>Valeria Racu</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Hugh Bendor-Samuel</td>
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<tr>
<td>Co-President Activities &amp; Events</td>
<td>Anahita Ghanbari Parsa</td>
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<td>Giulio Grilli Cicilioni</td>
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<td>Lyndon Nana Yaw Opoku Appiah</td>
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<td>Peadar Connolly-Davey</td>
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<td>Re-Open Nominations</td>
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<tr>
<th>Part-time Posts</th>
<th>Names</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic Affairs Officer</td>
<td>Ciro Puig &amp; Malena Bastida</td>
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<tr>
<td>Accommodation Officer</td>
<td>Oscar Ward</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anti-Racism Officer</td>
<td>Hisham Pryce-Parchment &amp; Sohane Yahya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campaigns Officer</td>
<td>Imogen Kropf</td>
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<tr>
<td>Disabled Students and Carers Officer</td>
<td>Indigo Aying</td>
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<td>Environment Officer</td>
<td>Inaki Arrizabalage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports Officer</td>
<td>Miriam Amrani</td>
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<tr>
<td>LGBTQIA+ Officer</td>
<td>Hasan Zakria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainments Officer</td>
<td>Charli Keely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Officer</td>
<td>Serena Coulson &amp; Anirudh Srivathsan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People of Colour Officer</td>
<td>Talya Scott-Mason</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trans* and Gender Identity Officer</td>
<td>Rachel Lindfield &amp; NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Womxn’s Officer</td>
<td>Anabelle Jones &amp; Nare Hakobyan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working Class Students’ Officer</td>
<td>Katie Saunders</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Voter turnout:**
- This year: 1364
- Last year: 1207
- Record turnout: 1807 (2017)

**The JCR in election spirit (Credit: Khadija Kothia)**
Humans of SOAS: Security Guards

Interviewed by Uswa Ahmed, BA World Philosophies

What does the role involve?
Lee: The job is all about looking after people and making sure everyone at SOAS is safe as they go about their day to day things. Oh, and ID checking which is always fun as you can imagine.

Tell us about yourselves. How long have you worked at SOAS and what has made you want to stay this long?
Lee: I’ve worked here for three years. I initially only came here for a month. It was the good people I was working with that made me stay this long. The supervisor looks after you. I was also very shocked with how well I got on with the students too. Now they come up to me and tell me “you’re like my big brother” and on their graduation they come back and get photographs with me.

Robert: I’ve been a security guard for ten years. I started as a door supervisor so I use to work at pubs and clubs but that was very dangerous as you can imagine. I use to work at the O2 in Greenwich. The day I decided I was going to give up, there was a brawl with security and the people at the nightclub which is now subsequently shut down. So I got out of there at the right time. Then I use to work three days a week at Birkbeck with a security company before coming to SOAS.

Ezekiel: I’ve worked here for three years now. I was born in the UK and moved to Nigeria when I was very young. Then I moved back here about fifteen years ago. My father was a sailor and engineer; so we travelled to many countries when I was young. For my undergraduate degree, I studied Sociology and Anthropology. And then I got an MBA in International Business. I came to SOAS three years ago. It was meant to be a means to an end when I was made redundant, but I enjoy it now because of the students. That’s the only reason I think I’ve stayed here so long. I feel there was a purpose for me to come here. I remember one incident when a girl was crying in the corner near the reception because she thought she wasn’t going to graduate but I reassured her that she was here in her final year for a reason and she put the hard work in to get this far and she could make it. I feel I helped her believe in herself. She was so intelligent but because of how stressful university life is, she felt isolated and anxious. She asked me to mentor her. And I helped her, in the end she got a first. I think that’s why I’m here. Because of the students.

What is your opinion on the ID checking system? Should the barriers be brought back? Why do you think they took the barriers away? Was it a cosmetic issue?
Lee: The ID checking situation is not ideal. People regularly argue about how they’ve been at SOAS for 27 years and ‘how do you still not recognise me?’ But considering the fact that thousands of people walk through those doors every day, we can’t know everybody. I would also strongly argue that the barriers be brought back. Taking into account the volume of people and the speed at which they race through, we can’t even check dates properly.

Robert: Generally, the students are good. But we do get unnecessary situations simply because of the lack of barriers. It’s tough being someone staff/students feel they can deposit their anger for the system on. We are simply doing our job. That’s also where it’s worth mentioning the superiority complex certain staff and students have, where they feel as though they can have a go at us. All we want is respect and you’ll get the same in return but it’s interesting because of the nature of SOAS and what students and staff claim to represent and then I see the ways some, not all, students treat us and there’s a level of hypocrisy there. I’m just trying to do my job. I’m a human being, treat me like one! If I could tell all those people to stand here for an hour and do what we do and they might understand the difficulty of our situation.

Robert: Lots of people including myself share that worry that considering the inefficient entry process is the first thing everyone sees, that in turn has a huge impact on what first impression people have of SOAS, it would be in the managements favour to make the entry process into the building more efficient, by bringing back the barriers.

Ezekiel: When we say that the barriers do the job of more than 3 people we mean it. We have complained that this is not going down well but they just haven’t bothered to listen.

What is your opinion on the students? Do you have any interesting stories from over the years? Any fights you’ve had to break up?
Lee: Most of the students are good. I’d say I get on with near enough all of them. And they somehow find me on Instagram. And that’s not even under my real name. There’s some detectives in here. That’s what they should really be studying.

Ezekiel: They are very respectful. They’re not like students from other universities. They are caring. I’ve been to other universities, but I don’t think they can match the culture we have at SOAS.

Lee: In terms of interesting stories, we’ve had students from other universities trying to start a fight downstairs in the bar. One time by the time we got down there, they’d run off because the staff are too late to alert us when something like this happens. They forget it’s our job. I’d say there isn’t much weird stuff in senate house anyway. The main building however is full of weird stuff.

Ezekiel: There are also students at SOAS who really want to talk sometime but they feel very isolated and they have nobody to talk to. As security, I feel you are knowledgeable about the culture around campus. For example, the mistake that I made as a student, like leaving coursework till last minute. I understand they get stressed. But once they can see they have someone to talk to and who understands their stress and believes in them, it gives them a boost. I am just very happy to mentor the students.

What is the one thing you want management to understand about the complexities of your job?
Daniel: Getting repairs done.
Lee: They just need to listen to us because we are the guys that are in the buildings, dealing with things first-hand. They should take our opinions on board instead of being dismissive about what we have to say. Don’t get me wrong, sometimes that’s their job and they know best, but they need to understand that we’re the ones who deal with the problems. Also, I would add not being stuck in a building for 12 hours would also help.

Daniel: In addition to that question, we need to be more proactive than reactive in terms of security by having cctv monitors on the front desk for example to stop things before they happen and access control readers to be fixed and to be used properly. The ones we currently have are flimsy and cheap.

Robert: I would add not enough pay for the hours we do. Because it’s an emotionally and physically demanding job. Our attention can’t be lax for even a minute.

Do you feel there is a difference in the way staff treat you and students?
Ezekiel: What is funny is that sometimes students are better than staff when it comes to the ID checking issue. Some say ‘I’ve been working here for 20+ years etc’. To those staff members, I would say that you are disrespecting my job. They need to remember that someone has to do the job. It’s especially interesting because most people at SOAS claim to be on top their moral obligation to stand up for others but the first thing they do is disrespect the security staff. Another thing people do to get on your nerves is put passes up to your face on purpose to annoy you. Imagine doing that job all day and getting people disrespect you, calling you names and walk past you. Or when students say that I’m paying a small amount of money to study here.

Robert (Credit: Uswa Ahmed)

What is your relationship like with other staff?
Lee: It’s literally like one big team. We always have a laugh with each other and are always inviting each other on events. Before the restructuring and bringing the cleaners in-house, everything was a very

Continued on page 15
How Cutting Meat and Dairy Can Help Tackle Climate Change

Diva Sinha, BA Religions

The increasing levels of global warming have been hailed as one of the greatest threats to humanity and the environment. For years, industrialization and urbanization are believed to be the culprits of climate change. While this is true, food production has been a very overlooked part when it comes to narrowing down the significant factors responsible for climate change.

Recent reports and studies have concluded that there is a link between the production of meat, dairy, consumption of animal-based foods and climate change. The production of pork, beef, chicken, and milk is one of the key factors causing environmental pollution, deforestation, and rising levels of methane gases — all of which contribute to an increase in global warming.

In order to be sustainable and conscious individuals of the modern world, it is essential to understand how the food we eat daily is causing a detrimental effect on our climate. So how does meat affect the climate?

This is the most common question that people ask and it is a crucial one. The consumption of certain foods and their adverse impact on climate change may sound absurd at first, but it is a genuine statement backed up by facts and research.

The animal agriculture industry uses factory farming as its primary method of rearing animals for meat. Factory farms require a vast expanse of land space to keep several thousands of pigs, chickens, turkeys, lambs, and dairy cows who are routinely killed using brutal methods. To house the animals in factory farms, acres of forested land is cleared, this is one of the leading causes of deforestation and raising warming levels. Livestock produces methane in substantial quantities through the digestion of food. Nitrous oxide, another greenhouse gas more potent than carbon dioxide, is produced from cow manure which contains significantly higher levels of nitrous oxide than most animals.

The wastes produced from the animals are also responsible for the pollution of soil, water, and air. Nitrogen and ammonia are the significant contributors to water pollution through the wastes of farmed animals.

The nature of meat production is highly energy intensive as it requires several stages. From keeping the animals fed, slaughtered, the processing, transportation, and storage of the meat — all of these activities require intense energy and extensive use of water. Loss of biodiversity, increasing greenhouse gases, damage to forests, excessive use of fossil fuels, excess wastes and water pollution are all major problems associated with the use of animal-based products.

Why should we reduce the consumption of meat and dairy?

Reduction of meat and dairy products is one of the significant ways to fight climate change. Studies conducted by researchers have shown that an individual who consumes animal-based products has a higher carbon footprint than someone who consumes vegan foods. Following a vegan diet can help lower the levels of greenhouse gas emissions significantly.

Plant-based milk such as almond, oat, soy, cashew, hemp, and rice require lesser amounts of water than cow's milk and have a smaller carbon footprint than the latter. In a research study conducted by Martin Heller of the University of Michigan in 2014, the findings revealed almond and soy milk to have 174 and 200 grams per C02 of carbon footprint while the cow's milk had 400 grams per C02.

The reduction of meat consumption would lead to less supply, which would automatically mean that fewer areas of forested land would be cleared to create space for farming. Less use of meat and dairy products will lead to the restoration of forests, cause less pollution and will reduce the amount of greenhouse gases responsible for the increase in global warming.

Reducing animal products will also help millions of animals who suffer severe torture and atrocities at the hands of humans. Animals are sentient beings like humans who form friendships, relationships, have families, can think and feel pain. By choosing to leave animal flesh off the table, we can help reduce the devastating impacts on the climate and environment, spare innocent beings from unnecessary suffering and live a much healthier life.
Let’s set the record straight – I’m no exchange student. I’m just a Londoner remembering SOAS while away and sending my thoughts back home. My time in Andalusia, Spain was not long but so packed with culture that I left feeling I knew the place, like I know London – which is to say lovingly, but not well. Andalusia is a southern region in Spain widely known for its flamenco dancers, bull fighting rings, and orange trees (which you should, and I write from experience, not eat from out of season). What might surprise you is the presence of Muslims, and Islamic history in an otherwise Catholic state. Muslim dynasties in Europe are often glossed over (*cough* buried) under various narratives, mentioned briefly as “The Classical Age” but the Islamic influence I saw was undeniable. As a British Pakistani (Pakistani British?) Muslim I’m quick to love any culture that resembles my own.

Our first two days in Seville and Cordoba were nothing if not mesmerizing. Gothic and Islamic architecture combined, transported me to the eras they were created. Sharp spires against rounded arches had my eyes wandering. Truthfully, the first few days of the trip were mostly spent adjusting my focus, practicing taking in my surroundings. When I got back to London, I remember finding my eyes soaking up little details I never thought to notice. Nevertheless, we traile

from sight to sight. From Plaza de España, to the Cordoba Mosque (now a cathedral on the inside), each stop captured our interest as much as the last. Our tour guide Abu Bakr, a Granada native, delved deeper. He told us, the defining characteristic of the Ottoman Empire was the co-existence of different belief systems. The empires following, unfortunately, had less tolerance. Cathedrals next to mosques, and minarets next to bell towers only existed in Abu Bakr’s descriptions, while the erasure of mosques and Muslim spaces was the reality we saw. Although the Arabian influence kufic calligraphy and geometric designs were clearly displayed at Mezquita-Catedral de Cordoba, Muslims were not allowed to pray inside. Tour guides, like Abu Bakr, were not allowed to offer commentary inside the monument. The hidden history had us all leaving a little sadness behind in Cordoba.

The remaining days were spent in Granada (meaning pomegranate!). If quaint could ever be used for a city so alive I might use it now. Although most of the focus was on the Alhambra Palace (definitely worth the hype) my newfound friends and I found beauty in more than that. A street artist named Ahmed, by a fountain in Granada shuffled through four languages before beginning a conversation with me. My friend, Firdowsa, exchanged compliments with a beautiful woman sitting on her balcony. A vendor invited us into his store, ignoring his sales in lieu of discussing the importance of women in Islam. These small encounters showed me what travelling is really about — the people.

There’s really nothing like learning history in the place that it happened. As my imagination played catch up with my surroundings, filling in the gaps that Abu Bakr left in his little stories and anecdotes, the world continued around us. I felt trapped in a moment that had long passed and left me behind. What I didn’t expect to leave Andalusia with was a feeling of bittersweet familiarity. As with any break from reality, I wanted to stay, but more so I wished to be a part of that place. I left with a longing for a time where iconography didn’t bombard you so that when you saw it, you really saw it; a space to unapologetically exist. I know I’ll be back someday, but next time I won’t try the oranges.
Bloody Tomatoes in Brexit Times

Camilla Macciani, MA Migration and Diaspora Studies

Walking through Tesco’s corridors, as the day of Brexit gets closer, many might think of what will be left on the shelves after the UK leaves the European Union. With still uncertain trade arrangements, supermarkets such as Tesco and Sainsbury’s do not yet know which supplies will be available in the case of a no-deal Brexit. The issue of food supplies has emerged as one of the most pragmatic and tangible concerns, to such an extent that retailers and even hundreds of people have started stockpiling food in the event of a no-deal scenario. While the UK government has reassured people that there wouldn’t be any food shortage, a no-deal Brexit will have dramatic consequences on food supplies: at least one third of the food on British tables comes from the EU, with shares that reach 80-90% for fresh vegetables and fruits. If free trade is not achieved at the last stages of the negotiation process, the price of food imported from EU will considerably increase, partly falling on consumers’ backs.

As suggested by the National Farmers’ Unions (NFU) President, Mrs. Min Batters, it is a vital moment to talk about food supplies’ sustainability and home-grown food. However, while acknowledging the importance of preserving EU high-quality standards after Brexit, no mention has been made about the ethics of EU food production.

This does not come as a great surprise since concerns regarding labour exploitation within the agricultural sector have not yet received any level of public attention comparable to that attained by organic food and its environmental sustainability. Nevertheless, this should.

Going back to our Tesco’s corridors and stopping in front of tomato sauce shelves, we find different brands sponsoring the unique Italian taste of their products, evoking romanticized ideas of Sunday lunches with old grannies cooking pasta for the whole family, under the shiny hot sun. Some of their labels state: “hand selected at their sweetness”.

No doubt this is true, but at what cost?

During the last year, at least 21 migrant workers died in Southern Italy, due to precarious living and working conditions and institutional neglect. The last victim was Moussa Ba, 28 years-old from Senegal, who died in the night between the 15th and the 16th of February, after another fire spread in the shanty town near San Ferdinando (Calabria), where around 800 seasonal workers live. Last summer, two different car crashes near Foggia (Puglia) resulted in the death of 16 day-workers who were going back “home” after a day working in the fields. While these episodes might seem like more accidents, they are indicators of a rotten system of production which is spread all around Italy.

The Italian agricultural sector is dominated by a system of recruitment and exploitation named “caporalato” (illegal gang-master trade) within which workers are usually paid daily and at piece rates. According to the latest report “Agromafie e Caporalato” published by Flai-Cgil (2018), of the 1.2 million workers employed within Italian agriculture, at least 700,000 are suffering severe exploitation. Of them, almost 400,000 are employed through “caporalato” and 80 percent of them are migrants – largely from Eastern-Europe, India (Punjabi region) and many different African countries. The "caporalato", who is sometimes a previous worker himself, manages and controls the workforce, transports workers to the field and charges them for any service, such as food, water and shelters. Workers often get paid little more than what they need for survival (from 20 to 30 euros for 12 hours long working days) and, in certain instances, working conditions have been close to slavery, with workers not getting paid at all.

The last decade, Italian media coverage and public attention around this issue has grown exponentially, especially after two major strikes took place in 2011 and 2016, which resulted in the approval of two laws aimed at fighting the phenomenon. Furthermore, in response to a petition launched by The World Trade Unions, European institutions have recently condemned the neglect of the Italian government in effectively tackling the degrading working and living conditions faced by thousands of migrant workers in the province of Foggia — where most of the tomatoes used for Italian tomato sauce are harvested.

While these are all important steps forward, it must be highlighted that they often tend to frame the issue only in terms of the misconduct and criminal behaviour of the “employers”, somehow detracting attention from the responsibility of the entire supply chain. Indeed, by looking closer at the prices of Italian tomato sauce on our Tesco’s shelves, it can be noticed that they all range from 30p to 1€ per tin.

If the chance of a no-deal Brexit compels us to think how food prices might increase, we’d better reflect upon why some were so low in the first place.

Story of Orientalism

Metaz Mostafa, MA in Anthropology of Development

There is a thought loop that I can’t get out of my head: If I were to graftify the word “oriental” on the walls of SOAS, would it be considered a hate crime?

Well, okay, I’d probably just get into trouble for spraying paint on walls, submarginalizing a much more interesting conversation about not only about the school’s history but its name. Let’s say, for argument’s sake then, I started using the word on campus to describe people.

Not everyone, obviously — just folks vaga from North Africa, the Middle East, Central Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia and East Asia.

I mean, it would put the university in a glorious Catch-22 position: to punish me would be to admit its own racist name; and not to punish me would be outright awful.

It’s this awkward fact that most of us are aware of but somehow choose to ignore (which seems to be a very British style of racism #slaveryexistedhere00). Although, I guess I technically herald from the “orient” and perhaps get in-crowd privileges? Then again, it’s not very hard to be part of the “orient” given that more than half the human population is.

And, sure, “oriental” is not exactly in the same category as other such racial slurs like the n-word too. I was not going to say it) and the p-word (is that how it’s referred to here?). As far as I am aware, people don’t actually shvette the word “oriental” in moments of White fragility and misdirected frustration. But that’s because it’s more of a conceptual term of racism: People have a hard time imagining diversity of the billions of people living in North Africa, the Middle East, Central Asia, Southeast Asia and East Asia (and even those categories feel reductive).

As we know, this sadly has laid the ideological foundation for wars, anti-immigrant legislation and probably the so-called ‘European migration crisis.

Maybe it’s a petty thing to be worrying about in 2019 given that fascism is somehow once again on the rise (okay, okay, “neo-Fascism” — Is this what the new Star Wars trilogy is about?); and white supremacists are apparently drinking milk as a symbol of racial dominance. But given that the university is celebrating its 103rd birthday this year, one would have assumed somebody somewhere in the institution would have bothered to change the name by now.

Perhaps the School of Orientalism and African Studies, in honor of Edward Said’s foundational text for postcolonial studies though I suppose the book mainly focuses on Europe’s relationship with the ‘Middle East’ (an imaginary in-itself). Or more simply, the School of Asian and African Studies.

Now I imagine there’s a group of people losing their hair reading this (provided they’ve made it this far, which is unlikely given the average attention span these days; and provided they have hair). The same people who trembled with fear when students across the UK demanded their universities be ‘safe spaces’ for young people with historically marginalized identities, because they felt this was censorship (the same people who apparently have no qualms about the Prevent program that actually targets students for expressing certain ideas #Islam).

Well, not that the actions of any head of state are ethical standards to go by, but the last United States president (Obama, not Trump) did ban the use of the word in official government documents.

Anyway, it’s kind funny given SOAS’s history that we all ended up here; an institution that was literally charged to train British administrators on how to effectively manage the colonies; countries that many of us are from. LSE, on the other hand, began with a bequest from a socialist organization. Hilarious, how history plays out.

I realize more than an opinion piece worthy of any newspaper, this is more of a glorified Facebook post, I doubt anybody reading this, especially at SOAS, would strongly disagree about the institution’s uncouth past (then again, the Oxford recently did have a not-so-secret conference on the positive aspects of colonialism). But I guess my point is — would it be a hate crime?

After all, it is always already written on the walls.
One Day Seyoum: #FreeEritrea

Anonymous Student.

In Eritrea, people are being imprisoned for years without trial.

Isaias Afwerki has been the country's sole president since independence in 1993. Since then, he has been imposing constraints on both political activity and media coverage. Voices of democracy have been silenced. Although the Eritrean constitution welcomes multiple political parties, the ruling People's Front for Democracy and Justice is currently the only one. Elections were scheduled for 2001, the first since the country's independence from Ethiopia in 1991, however they are yet to take place.

The struggle for democracy has affected other aspects of society in Eritrea.

This Civilisation is Finished

Anna Gretton, World Philosophies and Politics

We have just 12 years left to do anything about climate breakdown. If we don't change, we will have to sit back and watch it happen. We as SOAS students, will all still be so young. What will 2031 look like? The title of this article was the name of Dr Rupert Read's lecture he delivered last December. He said there are three paths that our future can take:

1. Civilisation completely changes and most species (including humans) survive
2. 'Natural' disasters and resource wars will kill most humans, but there will be a small percentage of the population that would survive and begin a new successor civilisation.
3. The total collapse of humans and most other species.

Dr Read claims that our most plausible future is scenario two because unless an upheaval of this socio-economic model happens very soon, it will be too late to change it before climate breakdown.

So what will this world look like? Most species will go extinct. Even now, 200 species are being forced into extinction every single day. There are no words to describe just how awful that is. Then there is the human cost of climate change.

Billions, if not billions of people will be murdered, and in fact hundreds are already being killed every day from starvation, floods and heat-stroke. Climate change may not seem as deadly as a machine-gun, but if we don't stop it, it will be the biggest genocide in human history. The 100 companies that have emitted 71 percent of emissions and the governments that still refuse to change need to be called murderers, because that is what they are.

Most victims will be from the Global South. The predicted melting of the Himalayan glacier endangers two billion people in south-east Asia — already, 27 percent of all humans have been locked into an uncertain future. Much of Africa and the Middle East will become uninhabitable. Millions of people will be sacrificed for the continuation of greed.

Although climate breakdown will affect people on different scales, we should all think of how it will affect us personally, because it will affect us all. Parts of the UK including some of London will be underwater and scientists predict that the last harvest in the UK will be in 2050 due to the eroded fertility of the soil. What will happen then? The UK will not be able to import food because other countries would naturally keep all of their food to themselves. And this is assuming nation-states are still functioning. Also, consider how badly Europe has reacted to the migrant crisis — imagine what will happen when whole countries, and perhaps even whole continents have to flee for their lives. In short, none of us will be safe. Personally, my partner and I have decided that we cannot have children with a future as grave as this. If you feel the same way, join the support group #BirthStrike today.

I have deeply involved myself in Extinction Rebellion, which is a grassroots organisation that is revolting against extinction through nonviolent direct action. We demand that each country goes carbon zero by 2025 and form a citizens' assembly to oversee changes to enable a democratic transformation of society. Although results are important, the act of participating in protest is cathartic independent of the results — there is nothing worse than the thought of people who have never been born turning around and asking what we did when we knew.

"To this I say: tackling climate breakdown is tackling social justice, for there will be no social justice on a dead planet."

One cannot independently own a radio or television media company — in 2001 all independent newspapers and print media companies were shut down. Freedom of expression is completely banned and the people have no voice in the decision making of their country and their lives. Over 5,000 people flee every month. Many of the journalists and politicians calling for democracy or reforms have been locked up, many without trial.

One of the journalists is Seyoum Tsehaye, an award winning photojournalist. Tsehaye was a photojournalist during the armed campaign against Ethiopia which lasted 30 years. During the time of his arrest, he had been planning to hold a photography exhibition in France, in efforts to showcase the armed struggle. The shutdown of the press in September 2001, and the imprisonment of Seyoum and his colleagues that followed, were a part of a wider plan to silence the Eritrean people and remove their power.

Vanessa Tsehaye, his niece and a student at SOAS, continues the fight for those who have been silenced for merely practicing their own human rights. In the summer of 2013, Vanessa founded the organisation "One Day Seyoum" to fight for the freedom of her uncle and others who have been subjected as prisoners of conscience-those who have not used or advocated violence but are imprisoned because of who they are or what they believe. She states, "Our belief is that when the voices of democracy have been silenced, we need to use ours."

The organisation uses legal and political mechanisms, raises awareness and mobilises people all over the world to put pressure on the Eritrean government. Next week, for example, she has been invited by the United Nations Human High Commissioner for Human Rights to speak about the human rights abuses committed by the Eritrean government and urge other countries to increase their pressure.

To get involved or support the cause, please check out the social media pages of One Day Seyoum:

Instagram: @OneDaySeyoum
Twitter: @OneDaySeyoum
Facebook: OneDaySeyoum

Photo caption: [Credit: medium.com]
On the Prospects of Boundlessness

Gaia Tan, BA Development Studies and Social Anthropology

Regular Column: Auntie Po

Dear Agony Aunt,

What should you do when looking at the news feels overwhelming? Most times, the news stories are bad enough, but it’s the replies, and the rampant hypocrisy that makes it unbearable. Twitter is the worst, and humans can be really despicable creatures behind screens. You grow up learning the values of treating people right, that racism doesn’t exist in the UK, and that people shouldn’t be targeted for how they look. Yet, you scroll through and see every moral out the window and grown adults at their worst. Analysing government actions spews the same kind of hypocrisy, and you feel even more helpless. It really makes you lose hope in humanity, and when you feel like it targets personal parts of yourself, it’s really derailing.

Firstly, I think that you have to remember that social media is just an echo chamber and it isn’t the right place to look at the news. What I would do is to start looking for alternative news sites which are delivering viable content. Ask around, ask your tutors and get some advice about where you can go to for your daily news. There are many sites which have better representation than the mainstream sites. Secondly, if you are finding Twitter to be a negative space, try and get some space from it, have a digital detox and spend some time speaking about these issues to you friends or colleagues. Thirdly, you have to learn that while it is targeted at certain groups of people, it is not personal. Try and be critical of what you are reading, see the issues with it and in turn follow people who are thinking the same. Surround yourself with activists who are trying to change things and remember that there is positive news around, you just have to actively find it.

Auntie Po, Pauline Blanchet
(Credit: Khadija Kothia)
My Father

Today I was told, I crossed my legs and glanced like my father.
But this did not stall my spirit's climb.
My hard aches were witnessed
I am growing as a man
I am becoming wiser
My hair grows like him and my face talks in his youthful voice.
Because my father isn't just an ordinary man.
To blossom as the child of the Dervish Askari, is to lose it all and eat again for the fight.
Because my father isn't just an ordinary man.
To adapt in surroundings built on your ancestors' pulled teeth, and still raise names from dark damp allies.
Come, sit with me as I shed my skin,
unfold hidden secrets and regrets,
unlock doors never opened,
flap and fly with my new wings
and dine on my first pray as Niin.
It's chapter that has no cliffhangers.

A Mark

Your palm was in my gaze from a road full of fingerprints
The tension of your thighs and walk
I felt you
You felt me too
I saw you take your deep breathe as you made your mark on
my heart with those deep brown night eyes
I saw you
You saw me too
I want to know how your mother assembles your name with
the alphabets and
how your father taught you the words of love
I on you
Made a mark
You have marked
On me too
My roads are shaky and my breaths are irregular
Already apart hence this momentum a stressor
I met you before
And you met me
Time ago
Thus I know my feet will lead to your path
Salam to you
You, Salam me too

Untitled, ca. 1493

Sit with me as I give waterfalls of what it is be a black man
A man, who is not the norm
In a room full tables
But you, the chair
As pillows swings your way
Bricks comes mine, because my aura anger them
I am the clothes displayed, when sales come to visit your town
I am defined as the penny you scrutinise to give the poor man
I am the black man

By Samantar Osman Gurey
Visible Muslim Women in the Public Eye

Yasmin Elsouda
BA International Relations

A couple of weeks ago Nour Tagouri, a Libyan-American journalist, activist and documentary producer was invited to speak at a New York Fashion Week (NYFW) panel on diversity and inclusion. Sounds great, progressive one might say. But here’s the thing: Tagouri is a visible Muslim woman, she wears a headscarf and her achievements as an activist and journalist not least of which her investigation of sex work in America — in a field that was not designed to include people like her — are remarkable. However, as a visible Muslim woman of colour myself, I am tired of witnessing discussions of inclusion within the limits of the beauty industrial complex. I want to be perfectly clear, this is not a criticism of the veiled women in that arena and not of Tagouri, but rather a provocation that our representation in its current limited form cannot and should not be epitomized and celebrated as structural progress.

If you are wondering why I am so angry, that’s a fair question. I mean we are seeing more veiled women on our screens, billboards and on the cover of Paper magazine with Halima looking absolutely dapper. But seeing Muslim women in headscarves in ads that seek to extract the wealth we represent as a market is not a real representation. Gigi Hadid’s cover for Vogue Arabia is a reminder of that: any woman can wear a headscarf for a photo to encourage our purchasing power. Real representation alters the structures of not only the fashion industry but all public life so that we can participate in the executive decision making that decrees what goes on a magazine cover. There is something deeply marginalising about seeing yourself on a billboard as you are walking down the street and then getting looks of contempt and disdain from a passer-by a few seconds later.

The contradiction between increasing market representation and the lack of structural change is a wider issue in the contemporary dominant understanding of gender issues. It stems from the corporate co-optation of the discourse surrounding women’s progress. A really stark example of this is the belief that by teaching young girls in impoverished villages in the Global South how to code, Karlie Kloss will allow them to overcome all the barriers of structural poverty. There is a reason why Hijab wearing women in the public eye tend to be young, conventionally attractive and fashion forward and that is because it is an image you can sell. The visible Muslim woman is hollowed out till she is nothing more than that product with a head scarf over her hair. Again I emphasise that this is no way meant to undermine the work of these women in the beauty industrial complex, it is one thing to criticise the existing state of affairs but it is completely unacceptable to bring them down. Rather, it is useful to think of the progress made as a stepping stone from which future gains can emerge. If anything we are beginning to see visible Muslim women breaking through in politics with Ilhan Omar as the first Hijab wearing woman in US congress and activist Linda Sarsour mobilising the annual Women’s March.

For discussions of diversity and inclusion to be complete, they must include the complexities of Muslim communities in how they treat visible Muslim women in the public eye. I would like to clarify that this cannot be generalised so that one behavioural trait is applied to the entire community. However, it is necessary to point to the level of scrutiny visible Muslim women are subjected to by their own communities. My personal experience as the victim of a hate crime where I was kicked out of a restaurant for my choice of clothing had sparked some people to question my choice of restaurant as they do not serve halal food rather than focusing on the crime that had taken place. More shockingly, when Aman Al-Khatatbeh one of the CEOs of Muslim Girl made it onto the 30 under 30 Forbes list, the community was more concerned with the fact that her forearms were showing rather than the monumental breakthrough her achievement represented. The obsession of religious policing surrounding Muslim women is undeniably gender biased harassment and should be called out for no less than that.

The irony is that both the general public and the Muslim community end up dehumanising visible Muslim women to nothing more than the headscarf. That is the exact opposite of what the Hijab represents and part of that is because we often essentialise the Hijab, which is a way of life that includes wearing a headscarf to just the material covering of the hair. In order to create the social inclusion of visible Muslim women we need to look beyond the headscarf and conceive of them beyond the corporate context. The prominent solidarity between these women alone demonstrates their capability of authenticity in every field of public life.
The Dignity of Having a Job?
Head of Oxfam Points to a New Way of Thinking About Employment

Jacob Loose
MA International Studies and Diplomacy

The viral clip from Davos 2019 featured members of a panel talking about tax evasion. The panelists pointed out the hypocrisy of aiming to end inequality but not being willing to talk about those dodging their taxes. It is certainly powerful to hear tax evasion being discussed in the rarefied environment of the World Economic Forum, and the audience reacts first in shock and then with applause.

However, when watched in the context of the whole panel, these comments are obviously pre-prepared statements and are therefore less authentic. It was the comments that Winnie Byanyima (one of the panelists and executive director of Oxfam International) made in response to a later question, that was the more effective critique of the whole system we live in.

Byanyima was responding to a question from Ken Goldman, who introduced himself as “from Silicon Valley”. Goldman called the panel biased and argued that in their discussion of tax evasion, they had ignored the fact that the US has its lowest employment rate ever and has helped reduce unemployment around the world. Goldman said that this put everyone closer to what we really want, the dignity of having a job.

Byanyima then invoked Goldman’s word “dignity” to tear down his argument. She challenged Goldman’s claims about the dignity of employment in the US, when she described the humiliation of chicken plant workers who were forced to work wearing diapers as they were not allowed toilet breaks. Byanyima throws doubt on Goldman’s claim about rising employment around the world being a sure sign of progress.

She told a story of a cab ride in Nairobi that had cost her only $2. When she asked the driver whether this was enough money for him to live on, he said that he gives most of it back to the company and he only has enough to rent a single room shared with two other drivers. She questioned whether sleeping in 5 hour shifts can be considered the “dignity of having a job”.

What Goldman’s question ignored is the potential of this huge divide between the rich and poor in the US, and around the world being harmful in itself. Goldman’s focus on the inherent dignity of employment means that the system of widening inequality we live in today is viewed as acceptable, as long as people at the bottom have some kind of job. Byanyima has exposed to Goldman the uncomfortable truth that “the quality of the jobs matter” and the “correlation between inequality and efficiency has been disproved”. In other words, we need to do better than forcing someone to work in diapers while making the false claim that this kind of labour exploitation is required in order to have “efficient markets”. As Byanyima argues, to only talk about unemployment levels misses the point, the quality of the job matters.

I was lucky enough to attend the launch of Oxfam’s latest report on Inequality as part of my role of Co-President at the Oxfam society here at SOAS. The campaign that we are promoting is Behind the Barcodes, which shines the spotlight on this very issue, specifically the mistreatment of those in the supply chains of big supermarkets. Goldman telling these food producers that they at least have the dignity of a job is not what is required. Instead, a radical change is needed in the way we conceptualise our relationship with the distant suppliers of our food.

Shamima Begum: Victim or Threat?

Zahra Banday
BA English

In February 2015, fifteen year olds Amira Abase, Kadiza Sultana and Shamima Begum left their homes in Bethnal Green to fly to Syria and join ISIS. Out of the Bethnal Green Trio, as they became known, Begum is the only one known to be alive, the others were reportedly killed in air strikes and bombings. Now 19-year-old, Shamima who fled to a camp in Syria when Raqa fell is being held with her new-born baby, hoping to get back to the UK. Recently, Home Secretary Sajid Javid announced that Begum was to be stripped of her British citizenship, a decision which her family are currently seeking to appeal. Subsequently she is trying to gain citizenship in her husband’s native Netherlands. This story has received considerable news coverage around the world. However, it seems that Begum’s story has become a vehicle for people to express their specific agendas, essentially giving them carte blanche to push Islamophobic and anti-immigration rhetoric. The BBC even reported a shooting range in Merseyside, Liverpool using Begum’s face as a target, after “record numbers” of customers requested it.

Within the Muslim community opinions are divided. Boxer Amir Khan notably tweeted, “They gunna let this isis bride ShamimaBegum back in the UK, I think that’s ridiculous, you left to support terrorism, now live with it. After watching her video she doesn’t seem one bit upset and comes across so arrogant. UK isn’t your home, stop giving us all a bad name please”.

Khan is referring to interviews Begum has given to news outlets such as Sky News where, when asked if she regretted her decisions, she responded quite clearly that she did not, stating, “I had my kids. I did have a good time there, it’s just at the end things got harder and I couldn’t take it anymore”.

Conversely, there is the argument that she was only fifteen when she left the UK and was by all accounts a child who was brainwashed into the Caliphate. She has suffered enough watching her two children die of malnourishment and having had to give birth in a Syrian camp. She has also claimed in her BBC interviews that she was simply a “housewife” during her time with ISIS, she stayed at home to look after her husband and children and did not commit any acts of violence. However, her unfazed nature at once seeing a “beheaded head in the bin” arguably shows that she was not disturbed by the regime she was surrounded by. This coupled with the lack of remorse and sense of entitlement from Begum was one of the most jarring aspects of that interview. When asked about what she had to say to her family, who for the most part had been campaigning furiously for her return, she stated, "You know, just keep trying to get me back. I really don’t want to stay here", The idea that she expects help from her family and the UK government after what she has done shows a complete lack of awareness.

Many people, including myself to an extent, look upon cases like Shamima and want to see some remorse in order for her to be pardoned. Perhaps this is Western conditioning that she must be appearing to conform to traditional aspects of victimhood in order to be forgiven. If Raqa had not fallen then Begum would not be asking for a way back and that is something that should be taken into consideration. Begum’s narrative creates a racial tension that spills out into everyday life. Visible Muslim women in particular may suffer just a bit more because when tension arises Muslim women are famously easy targets. Begum is not the one inciting violence against Muslim women but they will surely suffer as a result. A platform has been given to racists to be racist. I do see what Amir Khan is saying when he writes, “stop giving us all a bad name”! The collective will very often suffer as a result of the individual. The danger of dealing with a case like this is an oversimplification of the issue.
SOAS Ranks First in ‘Extreme Events & Speakers League Table’; Third Year in a Row

Sabrina Shah, BA International Relations

In January, the Henry Jackson Society Student Rights Project published their annual report on “Extreme Events and Speakers” taking place on university campuses. For the third consecutive year, SOAS has been ranked first. According to the report, SOAS hosted “42 events” with either “extreme” views or with “extreme” speakers. This is four times more events than the University of Birmingham, who came in second. The report included a league table of the results found by the project as well as a list of 204 events taking place across the UK, “featuring speakers with a history of extreme or intolerant views, or representatives of extremist-linked organisations.”

The catalogue of events had a less than convincing series of justifications to legitimise the use of the label “extreme.” The report foregrounded links to people that speakers had previously been associated with, rather than the speaker themselves as holding extreme views. This brings into question the legitimacy of the categorisation of “extreme” throughout the report.

There are several things to unpack from the report. The most striking finding was that 93 percent of the events listed were focused on Islam or Muslims. Another significant issue that emerges, is that the events listed were not attended by the author or contributors to the report. Therefore, what was said at these events cannot be regarded as “extreme” or “not extreme” by speakers or the organisations involved. There is no evidence of extreme views being shared or encouraged at any of the events. Instead, they are merely assumptions based on the past of particular speakers, or those associated with individuals and organisations considered to be “extreme” by the Henry Jackson Society.

In addition, many of the events that were listed in the report had unspecified speakers but were still regarded as “extreme” enough to be published in the list because of the organisations they represented.

Simon Perfect, an academic at SOAS, argued that people may have “controversial” views, but this “doesn’t mean that it legally cannot be said.” The report tends to regard socially conservative views as evidence of a speaker’s extremism; however, Mr Perfect problematises this labelling and its specific relation to Muslim communities and events, as listed in the report. Mr Perfect also brings attention to the stickiness of the label “extreme” on both institutions and individuals. The report from the Henry Jackson Society attaches this label of extreme to certain speakers and organisations as a warning for universities not to host them, and that if you do, you become complicit with supporting extremism. Mr Perfect argued that there was “no evidence of these speakers posing a risk of leading people into terrorism” and that the role of universities is to protect students from “terrorism” and “not extremism” under the Prevent Duty.

EXTRA SPEAKERS AND EVENTS: IN THE 2017/18 ACADEMIC YEAR INCLUDES THE UNIVERSITY EXTREME SPEAKERS LEAGUE TABLE

While universities have a legal duty to implement Prevent policies, they also have the responsibility to uphold freedom of speech. The details of events as highlighted by the report, tread the line of infringing and suppressing the freedom of speech of university students.

It is pertinent to explore the effects of the report on the students of SOAS and students thinking of applying to study here. Dr Sai Englert, an academic in the Politics Department, discussed the potential implications of the report. Dr Englert said that the report “assumes that there is a problem at SOAS” in what the report argues is the result of an “industrial-scale failure by universities to apply their Prevent duties”. He also argued that this report “highlights the problems within the Prevent strategy”; in that “by criminalising ideas that are considered radical or dangerous, what the strategy actually does is drive them underground and makes it impossible for them to be challenged in collective environments like universities”. He suggested that we should think differently about how we challenge these issues, rather than “vilifying progressive political movements and Muslim communities”.

FAKE NEWS: Read All About It!

Tamara Harvey, BA Politics and International Relations

Last December SOAS Unicef on Campus Society was targeted by international media. They were inundated by requests for articles, radio and television appearances. A comedian’s tweet about an event the society was planning, and which he had agreed to perform at, re-ignited a national debate on perceived threats to freedom of speech.

Front-page articles on every major UK news outlet featured the story and the alleged backlash the society faced. High-profile comedians such as John Cleese were quick to defend the comedian the society allegedly tried to oppress. Newspapers as far as China, Australia and the US ran the story, with CNN and even Breitbart News devoting a sizeable part of their home pages to the society. In a lengthy disjointed rant on his “Good Morning Britain” show, Piers Morgan labelled the society ”Student Special Snowflakes of the Year”, and invited the society to explain and debate their stance on the show.

Despite the persistent and invasive requests of journalists, the society declined to engage in this “freedom of speech” debate, and have felt no need to justify their stance. What was most interesting about this story was not how their cautions — designed to prevent hate-speech violating our University’s safe space policy — caused great offense to those who labelled them “snowflakes”. Nor in the irony that SOAS and its students are on the frontline of fighting real state-led restrictions to freedom of speech, such as the Home Office’s racist Prevent programme. Instead, the most confounding element was how innocuous actions by the society became a viral news sensation. It is apparent that SOAS is a popular target of UK tabloid scrutiny and complaints against “PC culture”, but the international element of this story meant it required both sustained media effort to connect our private charity comedy event to a narrative in which it did not belong, and a complete disregard for the facts involved.

The pressure to produce click-bait news forces journalists to search and report stories before they can unfold. In this case, the “view” tweet only had hundreds of retweets when it was first picked up by the press. Aside from a few unpleasant replies on Twitter, we experienced none of the public outcry, backlash, or criticism that was referred to in the press. Their stories were not backed up by relevant evidence. Journalists have always carried the responsibility, and power, of determining what events are newsworthy. However, the implication here is that journalists are no longer just reporting and educating, but creating the events.

In this case it was clear that a comedian was able to claim that students’ efforts to ensure a safe environment, were “ideological oppression”, frequently comparing our requirements to conditions in his birth place — the Soviet Union.

But it’s not the cancellist politicalising on this moment of attention that created the story — interestingly, since his first press exposure, his Twitter page has increasingly re-oriented towards a right-wing audience. The question-able link between the journalist and freedom of speech issues was made by the first journalist to pick up the story “a reporter for a small US conservative news site. Later articles maintained this, with parallels drawn to stories of comedians being no-platformed in the US. Despite a clear bias here, these were presented as authoritative news without acknowledging it was an opinion.

Additionally, the instant proliferation of this story, which was copy and pasted across media platforms, lead to an increasingly inaccurate image. Even trusted sources ended up with articles no longer an even passing resemblance to original facts. We are often warned of the danger of fake news, said to be created and disseminated by malicious actors with a determined agenda to exert control over political landscapes. The creation of this story did not have these features, yet it was certainly a deliberate distortion of facts in order to facilitate a particular, politically-charged narrative.

The lesson here is that media consumers need to think carefully about the news we digest, and the purpose it serves. Journalists have a disguised power, not just in selecting what is newsworthy, but in interpreting it on the consumer’s behalf. Journalists tell us not just what to think about, but how we should think about it.
There’s an Important Conversation to be Had About Decolonizing the Curriculum
Shame the BBC isn’t Willing to Have it

Kitty Walsh, BA History and World Philosophies

“Ideological propaganda”. Apparently, that’s all the movement to decolonize the curriculum really amounts to, or so says journalist Melanie Phillips in her column for The Times. That or "Marxist gibberish"; that is itself "sinister and wrong". But on what basis exactly? Well, on a recent episode of BBC Radio 4’s Moral Maze, she and panel members debated the issue with academics with some surprising and, to put it lightly, less than convincing arguments.

Dr. Priyamvada Gopal of the University of Cambridge, who has been outspoken in her support of the movement, revealed on Twitter that she was invited to speak on the show, but "decided against legitimizing its dodgy format and tenor with my presence". With an all-white panel ranging from "soft centrists to rabid racists/xenophobes", she argues, the show could hardly be trusted to facilitate a balanced debate. Always controversial, the programme really outdid itself this time.

Here’s where they clashed:

Firstly, learning history through the prism of race (or gender) is reductive. Using the Enlightenment as an example, detractors claim that the movement does not do justice to seminal events and historical figures. But surely a curriculum that gives a select, overly-simplistic account of history that leaves so much out is, as Professor Keinide Andrews put it on the show, "narrow, limited and leads to a bucketload of ignorance". Well said. Learning is enriched, not impoverished, when we acknowledge the global context of historical events and have the tools to respond to them critically.

Secondly, it’s wrong to change the curriculum because to do so would be to judge the past by the values of the present. The decision to include aspects of history that, while true, are nevertheless disagreeable by today’s standards is not to moralize history but rather to widen its scope. These things really did happen. It is this same attitude that sparked public outrage when shadow chancellor, John McDonnell called Winston Churchill a villain and not a hero. The GOVUK entry for Churchill is a case in point, crediting him as "an inspirational statesman, writer, orator and leader who led Britain to victory in the Second World War", while saying nothing about his racist and white supremacist views on Islam, Judaism and pretty much anyone who wasn’t white. His opinions were not hidden. In fact, he was all too willing to express them. By all means, teach about his role in WWII, but include the bits that modern audiences find uncomfortable. By not doing so, we’re pandering to those who want to censor the past. Hypocrisy at its best.

Lastly, curriculums should not replace great Western thinkers with others just because they’re white men. This argument was a particular favourite of author Dr. Joanna Williams, who fears that the move to change syllabuses would necessarily lead to a "tickbox curriculum". Changes, she maintains, should be made on the basis of ideological merit, not skin colour, sexuality or gender. Well if that’s the case, let’s make those changes — they certainly deserve a place on the curriculum. Her continued resistance implies that the non-white, non-male and non-European literature that they seek to implement is inferior, and that any revision is nothing more than an expression of PC tokenism. Absurdity aside, it’s also alarmist. No-one’s arguing for the outing of Plato or Shakespeare, but only for the curriculum to be more critical and intellectually rigorous.

In all honesty, I’m not even sure if the episode merits comment. Gopal’s suspicions were confirmed when Melanie Phillips felt confident enough, after Dr. Andrews had pointed out that black people have historically suffered oppression at the hands of white people, that "isn’t it also the case that black people have oppressed black people?" She goes on: "you see the power relations in colonialism as being entirely white-on-black. I’m suggesting to you that that’s a very narrow way of interpreting history, that we are all capable of oppressing others". Gopal was right—this was a pitiful excuse for an intelligent, balanced debate.

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UK entry for Churchill is a case in point, crediting him as "an inspirational statesman, writer, orator and leader who led Britain to victory in the Second World War", while saying nothing about his racist and white supremacist views on Islam, Judaism and pretty much anyone who wasn’t white. His opinions were not hidden. In fact, he was all too willing to express them. By all means, teach about his role in WWII, but include the bits that modern audiences find uncomfortable. By not doing so, we’re pandering to those who want to censor the past. Hypocrisy at its best.

Lastly, curriculums should not replace great Western thinkers with others just because they’re white men. This argument was a particular favourite of author Dr. Joanna Williams, who fears that the move to change syllabuses would necessarily lead to a "tickbox curriculum". Changes, she maintains, should be made on the basis of ideological merit, not skin colour, sexuality or gender. Well if that’s the case, let’s make those changes — they certainly deserve a place on the curriculum. Her continued resistance implies that the non-white, non-male and non-European literature that they seek to implement is inferior, and that any revision is nothing more than an expression of PC tokenism. Absurdity aside, it’s also alarmist. No-one’s arguing for the outing of Plato or Shakespeare, but only for the curriculum to be more critical and intellectually rigorous.

In all honesty, I’m not even sure if the episode merits comment. Gopal’s suspicions were confirmed when Melanie Phillips felt confident enough, after Dr. Andrews had pointed out that black people have historically suffered oppression at the hands of white people, that "isn’t it also the case that black people have oppressed black people?" She goes on: "you see the power relations in colonialism as being entirely white-on-black. I’m suggesting to you that that’s a very narrow way of interpreting history, that we are all capable of oppressing others". Gopal was right—this was a pitiful excuse for an intelligent, balanced debate.
Taken
by
Hate

Silas Ojo
BSc Development Studies

Who would have thought that your favourite revenge-obsessed movie dad – well perhaps not anymore – would’ve been parading the streets of Northern Ireland forty years ago, waiting for some random, unsuspecting “black bastard” that would, in his own words, “have a go about me about something” so that he could unleash his hate and kill an innocent man, all because that man shared the skin colour of his friend’s rapist.

John Barnes would have liked, Neeson’s admission reminds us that certain members of society are robbed of the same individualism that he enjoys. When he comes out as having these racist thoughts and pursuing such a course of action, he does so without being laden with the responsibility of representing his entire race. His unsuspecting victim, however – who we thankfully only have to speak of hypothetically – would’ve had to bear the punishment for the sins of his own race, all for having the same skin colour as a rapist.

As I’ve already mentioned, whether Neeson’s actions were racist should not be up for debate. But to suggest that he be extended some sort of sympathy for being overtaken by hate because of the violence that was visited upon his friend, or to give credence to the fact that he would have still behaved like this if the attacker were not black, is even more mind-numbing. Upon inquiring of the individual’s race, based on some tacit presumption he thought it would be a non-white man, and the rage was fomented upon this admission being confirmed. What is worse is that even in successive interviews post-admission, he failed to recognise that his behaviour back then was racist.

What fell very short of an actual apology or perhaps even a confronted of his racial bias was nothing more than an admission of a violent, primal need for revenge. After all, the only reason we are even privy to these events of yonder year is because Neeson on the press junket for yet another revenge thriller, Cold Pursuit – thought he might offer up this anecdote of a time when he was so overcome by the desire for revenge, as a way of empathising with his character, Nelson Coxman. This is all well and good; it must have been frightening for Neeson to see himself taken by the same sorts of hate and rage that he at the time might have tried to stave off, but it appears that Neeson still hasn’t entirely understood the most critical element of his misdoing and the twisted thinking he once harboured.

Through this story we’re reminded of the ubiquity of the stereotype, but also the presuppositions of violence and the danger this places black men and other minority members of our society. We also ought to remind ourselves of the efforts to oppose these biases with the truth. The 56 Black Men project is one such effort. It works to challenge the negative representations of black men, and more specifically how these representations and perceptions are reproduced in the media.

Two Worlds
Inside One

Shah Mohammad Abdul Basit
BA International Relations and Economics

There are a lot of works that have been devoted to searching for the recipe of making a revolution. From Marx to Trotsky, Lenin and beyond — everyone wants to know, how to tame this wild, unpredictable beast. The Iranian Revolution of 1979 fit all of these categories. It took by surprise those who were looking and those who were not. It appeared as though almost overnight the complete socio-political strata of an entire nation had been overturned. A people that had been friendly turned bitter, their leaders even more so. But such is the nature of revolutions: sudden and drastic.

This particular upheaval took its roots in the unlikeliest of places. Surely, morbid things like chaos must originate from the ninth ring of hell? In this case, everything began from a quaint town just outside of Paris called Neuapule-le-Chateau. This village hosted the Ayatollah for four months after he was expelled from Iraq by Saddam. It is here that he was given a platform and gained international recognition through its flurry of media activities. Then, the Shah fled, and the Ayatollah left this quiet village and took to his old home, Tehran. From afar it did seem like all of this happened within a few days. However, upon closer observation it became obvious that the seeds had been sown long ago. To sum up, an earlier democratic government was toppled exogenously to make way for monarchy. This new government took steps which served the interests of outsiders more than it helped the country. Predictably, the people quickly grew disillusioned with their rulers and took matters into their own hands. The rest is history.

The timeline of these events is easily comprehensible and accessible for anyone to read and understand. However, the impact of this revolution is still being felt across the globe and that is the main concern here. First of all, it created a very clear dichotomy right across the Middle East. In essence, this created two ideological powerhouses in the Islamic world – Shia and Sunni. This was a rivalry that was almost as old as Islam itself. Although punctuated by time periods of relative unity, when the dust settled this animosity always stood. The most recent bout of unity had come in the shape of Arab nationalism. It did not last long and the result of Shia Islam in Iran once again made clear that there were indeed two worlds inside the Arab world.

On a wider scale, the presence of a West-hating country right in the heart of the Middle East was bound to create some problems. Its proximity to the strait of Hormuz—the world’s artery of oil, gives it a very strong trump card. Iran’s role as a regional counter-weight to the Western backed Sunni block became even clearer as the Soviet Union imploded and Iran came to be seen as the last bastion against Western liberalism.

From an ideological point of view, post-revolution Iran represents something unique as well. It is a living testimony to the fact that democracy is capable of adaptation. Liberalism, capitalism etc. are not pre-requisites for democracy to take hold. Even the structure of governance in the Islamic Republic is unprecedented. The idea that there can be an unselected and lifelong executive position is unique. The entire political system is driven by religion and yet the democratic processes exist and are well-oiled. Iran has come about to represent a strange concoction of Islam and democracy.

The current geopolitical climate provides a clear case study on the prevalence of Iran in the Middle East. The role of Hezbollah and other Iran backed Shiite groups in Syria have helped change the balance of power in the Syrian Civil War. The establishment of Revolutionary Guard bases mark a tangible entry of Iranian influence in the social and political section of Syrian society. The similarity that the current Iranian operation in Syria bears to the Lebanese episode is stark. Iran’s role in Yemen has also become a flashpoint through which Iran looks to establish a Shiite outpost right at the doorstep of the Sunni rival. These manifestations of Arab rivalry are a direct consequence of the revolution and show no sign of going away.

Group of people holding up the Ayatollah’s portrait in Azadi Square, Tehran 1979 (Credit: AP)
The British Museum (BM) partnered with British Petroleum (BP) to present "I am Ashurbanipal: King of the World, King of Assyria". The exhibition began late last year and has just ended. This brings forward multiple questions: How did BP get hold of the items on display? What was the underlying interest of this exhibition on ancient Iraqi history? What narrative does it promote and what has been erased? In response, on the 16th anniversary of the global protests against the Iraq war, a rival exhibition "I am British Petroleum: King of Exploitation, King of Injustice" was showing in the P21 Gallery. It was put together by artists in Iraq and the diaspora to uncover "the realities and consequences of BP's intervention in Iraq".

It is no secret that BP lobbied the UK Foreign Office in the lead up to the 2003 invasion of Iraq to gain access to Iraq's oil wells. A 2002 UK Foreign Office memo entails "Iraq is the big oil prospect. BP is desperate to get in there." Sure enough, in 2009 BP was the first Western company to enter and the "Chilcot Inquiry" (2016) showed that BP had started technical reviews of oil fields in southern Iraq as early as 2003. This is not a post-modern phenomenon, in 1915 the British invaded southern Iraq (then part of the Ottoman empire), after the government bought stocks in the Anglo-Persian Oil Company. Unsurprisingly, the Iraqi community at home and in the diaspora were outraged by BP's sponsoring of the BM exhibition.

"The P21 Gallery's exhibition brings together native voices focusing on Iraq's contemporary history, and injects them into the discourse."

BP's presence in Iraq is secured for another 15 years after their 2014 contract renewal with the Iraqi government. This comes after the initial illegal 2009 contract, made in opposition to a popular Iraqi campaign countered with extreme violence. In the most recent burst of resistance, Iraq's High Commission for Human Rights found that 20 people were killed, 492 injured and 425 arrested. All this while BP rakes in a staggering $660 million a year which is predicted to continue for another 20 years. The exploitation does not end there, oil money that gets to the Iraqi government is not being invested into the country as they are charged with BP's operational costs. Combined with their perpetuation of the water crises in southern Iraq, the region's water-borne diseases and cancer rates have skyrocketed. This is the same historically lush region surrounding the Tigris and Euphrates rivers that birthed early Assyria.

The Ashurbanipal exhibition is quite self-explanatory about how the relics and artefacts ended up in London: colonial conquest in the mid 19th century when British and French imperial explorers started digging around Mosul. The BM website explicitly outlines this process and then skips to the effects of bringing these Assyrian relics on British culture and the imperial cultural rivalry between Britain and France. The Iraqi narrative is erased. This is quite literally visible in how at this very moment the National Museum of Iraq is full of replicas. BP's twisted masterfulness combined British colonial legacy with its own contemporary exploitation of Iraqi resources to produce a monumental example of cultural diplomacy.

The P21 Gallery's exhibition brings together native voices focusing on Iraq's contemporary history, and injects them into the discourse. Visiting the gallery emphasised not only the role of arts in war and resistance but that the products of war are all around us. The 2003 invasion gave BP the means to slap their logo all over Assyria and disperse it into London. In the words of the rival exhibition's curator: "The objects displayed in museums are not obsolete relics; they are symbols of an ever evolving history, one through which people can trace their modern day identities and experiences". It is important to remember this as BP's exploitation of Iraq's resources and people continues to unfold.

Dior: Deification of a Luxury Fashion Brand

Hyunkyung Lee, BA International Studies

The Dior Exhibition at London's V&A Museum is the largest Dior exhibition to hit the UK. Titled "Christian Dior: Designer of Dreams", it begins with the personal history of Christian Dior, followed by the origin of the House of Dior and the chronology of how the fashion brand expanded. The overall flow of the exhibition was logical, and its content was abundant enough to peep into the history of Dior and its designs. "Each exhibition room is like the closet full of splendid costumes", said an anonymous viewer.

However, the exhibition only elaborated on the designers, and there was a lack of explanation on the designs themselves. Although more than half of the exhibition rooms are full of dazzling dresses, the written explanation on the designers are more specific and lengthy than the description of the fashion pieces. "What I saw was a variety of dresses, but what I learned was the history of the fashion brand", said another anonymous visitor.

The exhibition deified the designers as artists by focusing more on the background of the designers themselves. This deification constructed the image that fashion brand products are not the subject of consumption, rather a noble artwork. The exhibition facilitates the fashion brand's ability to captivate consumers by making them adhere to luxury brands.

When it comes to the quality of exhibition itself, it is worth the expensive admission fee. The exhibition provides such a feast for the eyes with gorgeous dresses and glittering exhibition rooms. Still, the audience should not be blinded by the visual beauty and have a critical eye on the exhibition while enjoying it.

The show's popularity has already been proven by high sales of ticket reservations. The reserved tickets were already sold out until mid-June and tickets are buyable on site with limited availability.


Hyunkyung Lee
If Beale Street Could Talk

Ines Rodier
BA Development Studies and Politics

After seeing this movie, I first felt frustration and dissatisfaction. I had just seen another remake of Romeo and Juliet, with the two heroes being in love and the world trying to separate them. The rare dialogues and the abundant visual shots did not appeal to me so much and I wondered why the director would have lost the complex political potential of such a story. That was before I gave more thought about the whole project this movie was. I realised how the director Barry Jenkins had managed to keep the virtuosity of the romance while never giving up on denouncing the ugly truth of the racist system in the USA.

Set in early-1970s Harlem, the movie is about two young African-Americans, Tish and Fonny, who have to fight against the established order to be together. Their love story is threatened by Tish's mother who sees their union reluctantly, the estate agents who appear very hostile to let a place to the black couple, and the police who arrest Fonny on a trumped-up charge of rape despite having Tish as an alibi. The fear and despair felt as a consequence is nevertheless secondary compared to the feelings of love and hope that inhabit the characters. The movie begins with Tish asking Fonny “You ready for this?”, to which he replies: “I've never been more ready for anything in my whole life.” Jenkins inserts several breaks into the movie, during which time stops and the spectator can look at the lovers silently and passionately gazing at each other. Additionally, the support shown by Tish's mother, sister and father are great illustrations of what Kiki Layne, playing Tish, calls “black love”.

With a context that is extremely relevant today, Jenkins’ decision not to centre his movie on denouncing race issues in the United States could be questioned. Yet, by choosing to be faithful to the author of the book, the acclaimed James Baldwin, and making the topic of love its first focus, the director offers a deeply humanist discourse. While this movie is clearly a political statement against current issues of racism, this never overshadows the tale of the black couple and their families. Finally, the main message of the movie is that anger and injustice will never defeat love and compassion.

Credit: Tatum Mangus, Annapurna Pictures

#OscarsSTILLSoWhite

Emma Louise Loffler, LLM Human Rights Law, Conflict and Justice

"Green Book" is exactly how white, the Oscars still are. Four years after the hashtag and efforts by the academy at diversity, we have a "Black Panther" nomination, and two black people winning in supporting roles; all whilst white stars take the leads. This should not be ignored.

And at the forefront, of the great Oscars showcasing of great black talent is "Green Book". A film about exactly that — how white people used, showcased, and even celebrated black talent, whilst still allowing structural racism to continue whilst not on the stage. We are not so different, is the message we’re supposed to take from "Green Book", except we still are. Black people are still only winning in the supporting roles, and "Green Book" is basically still a win for white people, showcasing black talent, and trying to say "we’re not so racist after all". It is the great black win, for four white men, where Mahershala Ali is their talent, and stories of racism fuel and enable their win.

"You can’t just expect to throw some color in and be done."

It is not so far to say they have appropriated a struggle and used it for their own means and power (Oscar win), abusing and disinherit their very portrait of a man’s family. I don’t know what to say, other than #OscarsSTILLSoWhite you can’t just expect to throw some color in and be done.

Credit: Dimitris Lambridis, Guardian Documentary

Black Sheep

Sumayyah Daisy Lane, BA History

Guardian commissioned documentary Black Sheep follows the story of Cornelius Walker, a boy whose entire life was marred by one of the UK’s most high-profile deaths in 2000 – Damilola Taylor. The same age as Taylor, Cornelius lived a stone’s throw from the victim and he too was of Nigerian descent. It was all too familiar. "It could have been one of us," he tells us. Determined to protect her two sons, Walker’s mum made the decision to move the family from London to a housing estate in Essex. The family soon find themselves living on an estate filled with white racist gangs and we discover that for Cornelius, likening himself to them was the only possible avenue to fitting in.

Blurring the lines between documentary and movie, the 27 minute short features adult Cornelius telling his story alongside dramatized scenes of his teenage life. This narration style makes the story even more authentic as Walker appears to directly address the viewer, making it a genuinely uncomfortable and immersive experience which no doubt was the intention of director Ed Perkins. This is furthered by the use of non-actors placed in life like situations at the exact location they happened.

The story is one of heartbreak and frustration, both for Cornelius and the viewer. Older Walker comes to terms with his father’s aggression which in turn led him to turn to violence and gang-related crime as an outlet and place to feel love and belonging. Meanwhile, the viewer quickly becomes frustrated watching a young black boy’s desire to emulate white trash reach the extent of bleaching his skin, straightening his hair, putting on a fake cockney accent and wearing bright blue contact lenses. He says simply, “I wanted love. I wanted to feel love. So yeah, just made friends with monster.”

Despite being based on a story that is almost two decades old, Black Sheep is highly topical, shedding light on issues of racism, privilege, toxic masculinity and identity that remain important. It begs the questions, what lengths would we go to in order to fit in and why are we prepared to compromise who we are?

The film picked up numerous awards, including Best Screenplay at the Aesthetica Short Film Festival and was nominated for an Academy Award last month. Although it did not win an Oscar, the film stays with the viewer and gives a unique perspective on a young man’s struggle and quest for the sense of belonging and self-love.

Black Sheep is available to watch free on: theguardian.com.

Credit: Dimitris Lambridis, Guardian Documentary

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4 Brown Girls Who Write

Sara Aslam, BA Anthropology of Gender

In London 2017, four girls of South Asian ethnicity got together and shared their poetry. A year later, FEMZINE, aiming to support intersectionality and under-represented talent published their poetry in "4 Brown Girls Who Write."

The vivid rage encompassed by the phrase "Why, Not." invites the reader to break gender norms and inequality to empower oneself as a brown woman. Without a question mark, it demands to be a statement with no satisfactory answer ever, which powerfully encapsulates the message of the book.

The authors beautifully manage to problematize social issues of colourism, gender inequality, cultural re-appropriation and lack of body positivity, to lead up to their main purpose which is to empower brown women.

However, with recent developments in India where gay sex was legalised in 2018, and in Pakistan where transgender rights were increased in 2009, the brown queer community begs a literary discourse which goes unaddressed by the authors. Nevertheless, their ability to cover such a wide range of material in such little space is commendable. While comprehensively addressing imperative themes of sexual objectification and female sexuality, the authors are simultaneously careful not to criminalise men.

Conservative Backlash Forces DC to Cancel New Comic Featuring Jesus as Superhero

Sumayyah Daisy Lane, BA History

There’s a new superhero on the block and his name is Jesus.

"Second Coming", DC’s new comic series featuring Jesus Christ as the superhero has been cancelled following huge backlash. Written by Mark Russel and illustrated by Richard Pace, the comic had been commissioned for six issues and was set to hit shelves March 6th, 2019.

"Second Coming" was scheduled to release under DC Vertigo, an imprint of the publisher responsible for publishing mostly adult and graphic content.

The comic’s storyline revolves around Jesus’ non-biblical return to Earth. Upon returning, he is outraged by modern Christians and how much the religion has changed in 2000 years. Jesus shares the limelight with second hero and roommate, Sun-Man, who teaches him how to be a real messiah of mankind as God had intended for him. In an interview with “Bleeding Cool”, Russel revealed that the two heroes learn from each other to set “the gospel straight” and please God. In the series, Jesus is void of any superhuman powers. After the show’s announcement, DC faced a huge wave of criticism from conservative Christians.

An online petition was started to see to the show’s cancellation, branding it as "outrageous and blasphemous". The petition gained 235,000 signatures and was sent directly to DC Comics’ Executive Vice President Amit Desai, Publisher Dan Didio, and Chief Creative Officer Jim Lee.

"Would DC Comics publish similar content about other religious leaders, such as Muhammad or Buddha?" the petition read. "This blasphemous content should not be tolerated. Jesus Christ is the Son of God. His story should not be ridiculed for the sake of selling comic books."

Following the backlash and warnings from DC of major changes to follow, the comic’s creators requested the rights back. They currently remain on the lookout for a new publisher.

Russel took to Twitter to say that DC relinquished the rights to the comic series "gracefully". He also stated that the comic "will still be released, albeit with a different publisher". Russel emphasised that the decision to split from DC was amicable, defending them saying, "publishers have goals of their own. Sometimes our goals complement each other’s, sometimes they don’t. It’s okay to admit it when they don’t and go separate ways."

Pace echoed this sentiment on Twitter, "We’re looking forward to announcing a new home for Sun-Man, Jesus and their family soon."

The decision by DC Comics was no doubt a smart move. Having struggled in competing with Marvel Comics, their latest movie Aquaman was a massive success as DC’s second-biggest film grosser in North America. The release of "Second Coming" could have been a step backwards by estranging a sizeable proportion of their audience.
Tour

The Miraculous Art Bus

Sumaya Hassan, BSc Economics

If you've ever been a fan of Ms. Frizzle and her Magical School Bus, chances are you have wondered what it would be like to relish an exclusive and educational ride in her colorful grocery bus.

Fortunately, you can! The Muse Gallery situated on Portobello Road offers the delightful experience of riding a groovy vintage bus to tour the contemporary galleries of West London. The tour takes approximately 2 hours, and the journey is packed full of the smoothest tracks hosted by Portobello's and world-renowned DJ Piero Thompson. The ride is an impressive drive through a historically timeless portal filled with sounds and colours.

The tour begins at the Muse Gallery itself, where works of Corinne Chariton's uncanny and curiously disjointed figures on paper are displayed, and those of Sam Hodgson's smooth wave-like patterns, almost like a thousand river veins on viscous plasma.

Weld then grooved our way surrounded by delightful music and the rocking of the vintage bus to the Serena Williams library, a super minimalist two-floor Georgian gallery. Barka's colourful works "From Salvador" were displayed, a cheery contrast to the chilly February day. They depicted scenes of travel, sensuality and quiet contemplation all in warm and lively colours.

At SOAS, we love the renegade republics and free-spirited nations! How many of you knew that parts of Kensington had declared itself an independent republic? There is a relatively unknown and intriguing history involved at Freston Road. Historically, the road was inhabited by squatters who had moved into the derelict and empty houses during the 70s. The 'Republic of Freston' ran as an independent body until the mid 80s.

It attracted writers, artists, musicians and activists. They had adopted a motto, anthem and had collectively voted to be part of the European Economic community talk about independent and well structured!

Currently the Frestonia Gallery is hosting the works of Luke Elwes, a series of ethereal abstract canvases documenting the artists travel across the Ganges. Ending the series where the Ganges meets the sea. With watercolours, he captured the quality of the light.

We continued on the tour bus to various galleries. The bus drops off riders at the Design Museum and at the Japan House, but I'd opted to stay to catch as much as I can of this educational art tour.

Weld seen the exclusive studios of AfterNyne, the international art magazine which has been publishing for 6 years now and has a London studio for 6 months. They featured the abstract works of Agnes Pezeu such as a grand, dazzling paint scene of a woman reclining, as well as a table full of how Agnes created her magnificent works and the creative processes behind it.

"Is this a tiger?" one of the visitors had asked, to which the studio caretaker replied, "Yes, Agnes works with zoos, and annually when the animals require medical attention and are sedated, she packs up her tools and shows up at the zoo to create her outlines" To see such dedication and creativity poured into the creation of an art piece is baffling and astounding for an outsider from the arts like me.

The bus whisked us to Maddox Gallery afterwards, where an Andy Warhol piece was on display, as well as various other pieces, giving a snapshot from the 'elite's' lifestyle. This is a stark distinction from prior exhibitions.

Lastly, if you're a fan of street art and graffiti, the Graffik gallery hosts a plethora of exhibitions and has even hosted Banksy art in the past. It now hosts politically avant-garde artists like Rightfulrula (we had a good conversation on Brexit), Joy Miessi, Mia Giacome, Brooke, and Blu Diamond.

A big shout-out to the friendly bus stewards and crew who made the bus journey full of fun and exciting.

Music

Social media is great, but you missed the gig

Chloé Cochran, BA Global Popular Music

I go to a lot of gigs. I study music, have a radio show, and believe seeing live music is one of the most cathartic experiences. For an atheist, I think this is the closest thing to spirituality I will find. But something has been different since the dawn of the century when attending gigs. When I watch old footage of my favourite bands from before the millennium performing live, I notice one thing is missing: phones. Where the audience used to be an integral part of the performance, enthralled in an equal exchange of socially understood interactions between performer and audience member, I now see a disconnect. With the invention of social media platforms such as Instagram and Snapchat, and the desire to share each experience, I find myself wondering: do people go to gigs to see the music, or simply to share it with their 300 followers so they can put some form of worth on an experience which has always been priceless?

Now I'm not saying I don't understand. I'm a photographer and I can appreciate that a photograph can act as a memory. Why take a camera when you have a very decent, portable one on your phone, and why not share what you are doing with your friends? But when I last went to a gig, I looked around me and everyone was filming... for the whole gig. One woman, who was standing slightly in front of me, spent 10 minutes making sure she had tagged the band, the venue, and gotten all the hashtags right, picked the right filter, and cropped the video so it was the best part. While this was happening, the band were performing a great set.

So, I started looking around more. Realising that the majority of the people at every live music event I have ever been to have been watching through their phones. According to an article on HuffPost, 47 percent of the audience text others while at a gig, and 32 percent engage in social media during the show. I'm not disputing that memories aren't important, I understand that this means visual evidence as much as cognitive, but you are there to see the band/artist, not to film it. Will you really look at the hundreds of videos and pictures you took when you spend your time filming? Probably not, but if you're lucky you'll remember how great it sounded, how the music made you feel, or how you felt like for a second everyone in the room were all connected.

In a world where everything is at our fingertips, including our friends, our desire to share every experience with the world is robbing us of intimacy. In response to this, more and more musicians are challenging this idea, encouraging fans to put down their phones in favour of experiencing the event. The Guardian reports that Jack White has banned the use of phones at his gigs in order to create a "100 percent human experience" and following this, American rapper Kendrick Lamar also jumped on the bandwagon. Other artists such as Roger Waters, the late Prince, Jarvis Cocker and Alicia Keys have also spoken out against the use of cell phones at gigs. With artists of this calibre urging fans to put down their phones and enjoy the experience, will the audience abandon technology? Or will they simply ignore the preaching of the "temperamental artist" and continue to embrace technology over human interaction.

In response to this, more and more musicians are challenging this idea, encouraging fans to put down their phones in favour of experiencing the event. The Guardian reports that Jack White has banned the use of phones at his gigs in order to create a "100 percent human experience" and following this, American rapper Kendrick Lamar also jumped on the bandwagon. Other artists such as Roger Waters, the late Prince, Jarvis Cocker and Alicia Keys have also spoken out against the use of cell phones at gigs. With artists of this calibre urging fans to put down their phones and enjoy the experience, will the audience abandon technology? Or will they simply ignore the preaching of the "temperamental artist" and continue to embrace technology over human interaction.

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SOAS Goes To Calais (Again)

Amy Thomson, BA Social Anthropology

During the February reading week, six SOAS students travelled to the Calais to volunteer with grassroots charities, in solidarity with refugees and migrants in the north of France. This is a small diary report from one of the members.

This is my seventh time in Calais. I have been coming here since 2015, before the jungle was demolished. As every time before I travel, I wonder how the situation has changed since last year, will there be less police? Are people still trying to make it across from Calais? Do the charities still need people like me volunteering? Then, every time I return, I realise just how little has changed; there are still countless CRS police in the small town, existing families and individuals from tents every morning, people – of course – are still attempting to make it across the border, and yes, charities are still there and are continuously relying on donations and fresh spirits.

The only thing that has changed in Calais since the demolishing of the jungle is the faces and lack of media coverage.

Seeing Theresa May’s ‘Great wall of Calais’ when you arrive from the port is enough to remind you that Calais is still a hostile border. It’s strange to think that the UK questions Trump’s absurdities for building his wall yet happily hands over their tax to foot a 130 high structure on their border.

Since 2003, when Blair and Chirac signed the Le Touquet agreement, the British border force have been allowed to securnize the UK border in this small French town.

Little has changed regarding our duties in Calais too – the grassroots charities, although now run by different people, had not yet burnt out on their efforts to help those long term and newly arrived migrants. Most of our time in the warehouse was spent chopping vegetables for Refugee Community Kitchens, sorting and distributing material donations with Utopia56, and – due to the cold weather – chopping and bagging firewood in the woodyard.

Many of us didn’t stay long enough in Calais to be able to go on distribution and speak to those trying to cross the border however, just chatting to some of the long-term volunteers on our tea breaks was enough to recognise the racist discriminations and violence that still persist from the French state. ‘We distribute tents, blankets, food and firewood daily, but every morning the police evict them and take away their shelters. Even from the families and children’. This long-term volunteer I was speaking to showed me pictures of tents and sleeping bags that the police had dumped into the river.

Since I have been coming to Calais, I have heard stories like these, and worse, concerning brutal and nasty police violence. They never fail to scare me. How can the French state create and permit such mindsets as those of the CRS police?

Some long term and legally trained volunteers are attempting to mobilise more political and sustainable change in Calais. Besides, there are only so many tents and blankets in the warehouse to distribute! Each morning, for more than seven months, a group of volunteers have been going to the sites of eviction and observing the process. The volunteers themselves have been intimidated by the police, however from their observations they have now produced two reports regarding the violent and unlawful actions of the police. One of them concerning the abuse towards migrants and refugees and the other harassment of volunteers. Together they have concluded the illegal practices by the French government and described the violence’s within the eviction processes. A friend, now the HRO (Human Rights Observation) coordinator in Calais, mentioned that these reports have recently been shared with lawyers in Paris. They are hoping that, with these connections, these reports will be able to bring some official scrutiny onto the police and French state.

On the last day of our trip, a familiar feeling returned. The feeling I always get when leaving Calais – a simultaneous sense of hope and hopelessness; a knowing that I will return again but a dream that things would have changed, for the better. Calais, is an ugly place for many people but there’s a hope for a better future; a land without borders, a state without hostility, a freedom of movement without racism. It’s this hope that keeps me and many others returning.

If you would like to join the next trip to Calais or you would like to help to run the society please email soas2calais@gmail.com.

Memorial 2007 Society

Britain’s Historical Amnesia
why we need a memorial commemorating the souls lost to slavery.

Michelle Ezeuko, IJB Law

Britain has a longstanding habit of selective history; anyone who went to school in this country, like myself, will be aware of the glaring omission within our education system of anything that paints Britain in a bad light. Our education system never really went into detail about the horrors of Empire or Britain’s role in the transatlantic slave trade and this has resulted in a complete disregard and lack in awareness of black British history. Studying at SOAS university has been the first time in my life that I have had a glimpse at this horrific history. However, it shouldn’t be like this, this knowledge should be available to all.

With this in mind, it is therefore not surprising that in the UK there is no national memorial commemorating the souls lost to slavery. There are several for the Holocaust and even one for animals who died in the war but nothing for the 30–40 million souls lost to slavery and this is a national disgrace.

History is destined to repeat itself unless we actively learn from it and, in order to move forward, we need make peace with the past so we can go forward together. We must resolve our understanding of the past in order to illuminate the longstanding issues of the present. Any meaningful reconciliation of history must first begin with a sound and fair acknowledgement of the past and we don’t see how this can happen without a National Memorial.

Memorial 2007 is a charity working towards erecting the first permanent memorial to remember the enslaved Africans and their descendants. We met Oku, one of the founders, in a chance encounter on the tube where Pauline, one of our members, gave up her seat for Oku. They began talking and when Oku told Pauline about her work she was outraged and this outrage led us to start a student campaign to raise money for the memorial. Oku had this idea in 2002, her and co-founders, Paul and Audrey, called it Memorial 2007 because they thought by 2007 the memorial would be erected. However, her story has made me realise the lengths that people will go to to have this history swept under the rug. It is now 2019 and there is still no memorial. There have been some wins, however, for example Memorial 2007 have been given a space in Hyde Park and we have been given planning permission. The only problem is that we have to raise 4 million pounds in order for the memorial to be built. The government has refused to pay for anything despite recently spending 50 million on another Holocaust memorial; suddenly, when it comes to black history, there is no money. What’s worse is that if we haven’t raised at least 1 million pounds by November, Memorial 2007 will lose its planning permission and its space in Hyde Park.

Memorials play a significant role in remembering and celebrating history, furthermore the act of remembering is very powerful and can be healing as well as educational. Furthermore, we remember what matters, we remember what is important to us and the lack of a memorial commemorating the victims of slavery speaks volumes about our society and Britain’s relationship with history. Did you know that there are several colonial statues and memorials in the UK commemorating imperialists like Cecil Rhodes and Admiral Horatio Nelson. They have memorials because we remember those who we deem important and worthy of remembering. Now, what does this say about the lack of a memorial for the victims of the slave trade? Why are their lives not important enough to be remembered?

SOAS is where I have learnt the truth about Britain’s past, it’s where I have had access to the knowledge that has not only changed me for the better but enabled me to help others. Knowledge is important and historical knowledge is of the utmost importance. I believe the SOAS student body is the best place to mobilise active knowledge seekers, who want to change the world and who want to fight for the truth. The transatlantic slave trade is not only black history but it is British history, it is world history, and we should all be actively fighting against its erasure. At the end of the day, Memorial 2007 is an educational project. We want to use this memorial to educate people not only on slavery but on what was before slavery and what came afterwards. We want to give light to all the truth that has been hidden from us. If you feel passionate about education, if you feel passionate about truth, if you feel passionate about history, story-telling, campaigning, writing, protesting, mobilising, informing and all the other things we are doing to make this memorial a reality then, please join us.

Follow us on social media @memorial2007 on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, and email memorial2007@soas.ac.uk to actively get involved.

www.soasspirit.co.uk
SOAS Sports Wins Varsity 2019!

Holly Sampson
BA Middle Eastern Studies and World Philosophies

For the second year running, SOAS have defended their title as Varsity Champions against their rival London Met. In a highly competitive 3 days, SOAS competed against London Met in a multitude of different sports and came out on top with a 12-5 win. The first day saw both the women’s and mens teams winning finals as well as the Mixed Volleyball Team coming away with a 3-0 win. Anna Fumagalli commented on their win, following last year’s loss, saying that ‘every single player gave their best to work together towards victory’. At the end of day one, SOAS had a solid lead, 3-1, with the only loss being a narrow defeat in Men’s Basketball.

SOAS continued their winning streak into the second day with wins from Men’s Rugby, Women’s Rugby and Netball 2s. Following a fantastic season for Men’s Rugby, their Captain, Red, expressed his pride saying, ‘the rugby boys have done it again, I’m so proud! We showed a lot of grit and determination to scrape past a very scrappy team’. However, before this, the Women’s team competed against the London Met team and gained another point for SOAS in the Varsity Competition. That evening also saw Netballs 2s defend last year’s Varsity win with another amazing performance. Whilst the match was close, they came away with an incredible 28-22 win in an exciting match. Rebecca Brahde commented on the incredible atmosphere that Varsity had this year, ‘there was so much love and support for all the teams, a great sense of community and generally, great vibes at varsity this year. We greatly appreciated the support for our match and thoroughly enjoyed giving support to other teams and watching some amazing sportsmanship’. SOAS closed out the second day with a 4 point lead, 7-3, with only 8 sports left to win on the final day.

The final day did not disappoint. SOAS secured their win of Varsity with wins from both Men’s and Women’s Football. Men’s Football 1s and 2s both won their matches 4-3 in the sun and Women’s Football secured an epic 4-0 win. Lois Idley, Women’s Football Co-Captain, stated that ‘despite a quiet and even first half, SOAS came out with a bang second half. Sophie Bennett kicked off the scoring with an outstanding top bins goal which was followed by Lara Dhimis’ second hat-trick of the season, securing a 4-0 win for SOAS. Our solid defensive line, fluid passing and positive attitude left London Met with no way through’. To round up North London Varsity 2019, SOAS and London Met gathered in their masses in the Science Centre to watch Women’s Basketball and Netball 1s close out 3 days of fierce competition. Women’s Basketball was a hugely entertaining match and, despite the loss, was a great show of SOAS’ talent. The final match of the evening was Netball 1s and following a painfully close loss last year, the team was eager to get back out there and prove once and for all that they are champions. Emily Hobhouse, Netball Captain, spoke about the nerve-wracking game, ‘Our 30-29 win was motivated by the epic SOAS support on the sidelines and followed the 28-22 victory of our amazing second team. Varsity is one of those events where support for the SOAS sports teams really shines through and as captain, it was such a joy to see how so many people came to support us regardless of their prior knowledge of the game. Thanks to all of you and to all my talented teammate mates. Arguably, this sums up Varsity amazingly. Even though winning is always great, it is the atmosphere, the comradeship and the array of talent that is showcased at Varsity that makes it so special. Not only did SOAS Sports prove their skill and sporting excellence, but they demonstrated what SOAS Sports is all about, being part of one big supportive team. It was an awesome way to end a brilliant year for SOAS Sports.

SOAS Men’s Rugby

A Letter from Red Freeman

Redvers Freeman, BA Global Liberal Arts

What a year it has been! Winning the league and promotion with a game to spare, winning Varsity and narrowly going out in the semi-final of the cup, all whilst becoming a very tight-knit squad. After a dismal 2017/18 season and the promise of losing half of the team, I was less than optimistic for what was to come this year. Yet, it has been amazing. More than anything, the team has bonded as a stunningly dysfunctional family with baby Schmidy and Grandad Gouthy born 3 decades apart yet they still fight together, like Warriors, on the pitch.

Massive credit needs to go to Mr. Mike Zakko who made a huge effort to recruit new players, without which this season wouldn’t have been possible at all. Testament to the work of ‘Mikey is that we have always been able to field a full team; in fact, there was a very unusual situation wherein we couldn’t fit everyone on the bench due to the squad being too big! I also have to thank the coaching of Jim (or daddy to me), who I think has done an incredible job at developing the new players on the team, who have all improved in leaps and bounds. We have moved from a mixed ability side to a fully-abled squad of mates with every player being able to play a number of positions. One of the key reasons for our success this season has been Juan. Juan has been an absolute class act, going slightly under the radar because of his understated personality. He pulled off stings in every match and I am particularly grateful as I got the plaudits for putting away a share of the many chances he created. This paired with immense tackling and a willingness to dive head first and at full tilt into the biggest man in every game makes me smile just thinking about it.

In reality, this season wouldn’t have been possible without the new fellos who have integrated seamlessly into the squad. This is particularly impressive as most had never played before, however, by the end of the year all of them were doing bits on the pitch and being genuinely great guys. One of my favourite quotes of the year came from a little freshers, who on the morning of a match sent me the message, ‘babe I’m still coming today but the shits are going to have to come too so if I suddenly need one in the middle of something what should I do?’. This really shows the dedication and gorgeousness of my team which I would be outersading if I said anything other than I have pure love for.

I cannot wait for next year, in which we will really be tested in the league and cup above, with the youngsters needing to fill the very big boots left by the departing third years. Unlike at the beginning of this year, they should all feel very confident and ambitious because they are fantastic blokes who will continue to do SOAS proud. Finally, I would just like to reiterate that I really love all you guys and thank you so much for making my year so brilliant I hope you have loved the ride too.

Love from Red Freeman

credit: SOAS Sport

SOAS Men’s Rugby Win the League

Varsity Results

Mens Football 1s 4-3 (W)
Mens Football 2s 4-3 (W)
Womens Football 4-0 (W)
Men’s Rugby 19-7 (W)
Men’s Basketball 65-61 (L)
Womens Rugby (W) don’t know score

Mixed Volleyball 3-0 (W)
Futsal Men 12-0 (W)
Futsal Women 6-2 (W)
Women’s Basketball (L) don’t know score
Netball 2s 28-22 (W)
Badminton 6-3 (W)
Netball 1s 30-29 (W)

credit: SOAS Sport

13 MARCH 2019

www.soasspirit.co.uk
Rohan Mapara, LLB Law

I have one straightforward question for you, which has a simple, factual answer: what is the fastest sport in the world? Surely, it's Formula One, the Red Bull Air Race, or tennis, right? Surprisingly, none of these is the right answer, the world's fastest sport is Badminton! I know, I know, it's hard to believe, and even as an avid player myself since I was six years old I found that statement really difficult to believe at first. But, think about this: the world record for the fastest smash during a badminton match is 426 km/h (Mads Pieler Kolding - Denmark), and the shuttle regularly reaches speeds of 350km/h and upwards at a professional level. As a contrast, the fastest speed recorded in F1 is 372.6 km/h.

“Badminton is a back-garden sport”, “badminton is slow and easy”, “badminton is a relaxing sport”.

These are the kind of things people say to me when I tell them I am the Men's Badminton Captain. The vast majority of us don’t know about the sheer athleticism, coordination, and technique required in badminton. During every game of singles to 21 points you will run approximately 3 km, and so you need a strong combination of explosive leg power and stamina to be a good player. Badminton is often written off as a high-level sport by much of the public because of simple misconceptions about its physicality and also because of a lack of media coverage. Professional badminton offers less money than sports like tennis and football, but it has so much to offer when considered as part of a healthy, happy lifestyle (fun fact, a recent study confirmed that badminton is the happiest sport in the world).

At SOAS we run a very open badminton society! If you want to train and play, then you are absolutely welcome. No matter what your level is, you can train and have a chance of making the team. We are one of the only societies at SOAS that goes to the BUCs Individual Championships in Sheffield, which is an incredible trip filled with high level badminton, a great night out, and provides the opportunity to have fun in a new city! Playing badminton at the Individual Championships is a fantastic opportunity to compete at a high level against other students just like you. We attempt to make the trip as inclusive as possible so even if you start out as a beginner you have the chance to come along too! There is space for everyone in SOAS badminton to grow as a social player or a performance player. It doesn't matter if you have never picked up a racket before; if you want to train, have fun, and make new friends, then this is the sport for you!

So, the next time you're sitting in the JCR thinking about what new sport to try, give badminton a shot. Hopefully, this article has convinced you that we're pretty cool!

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