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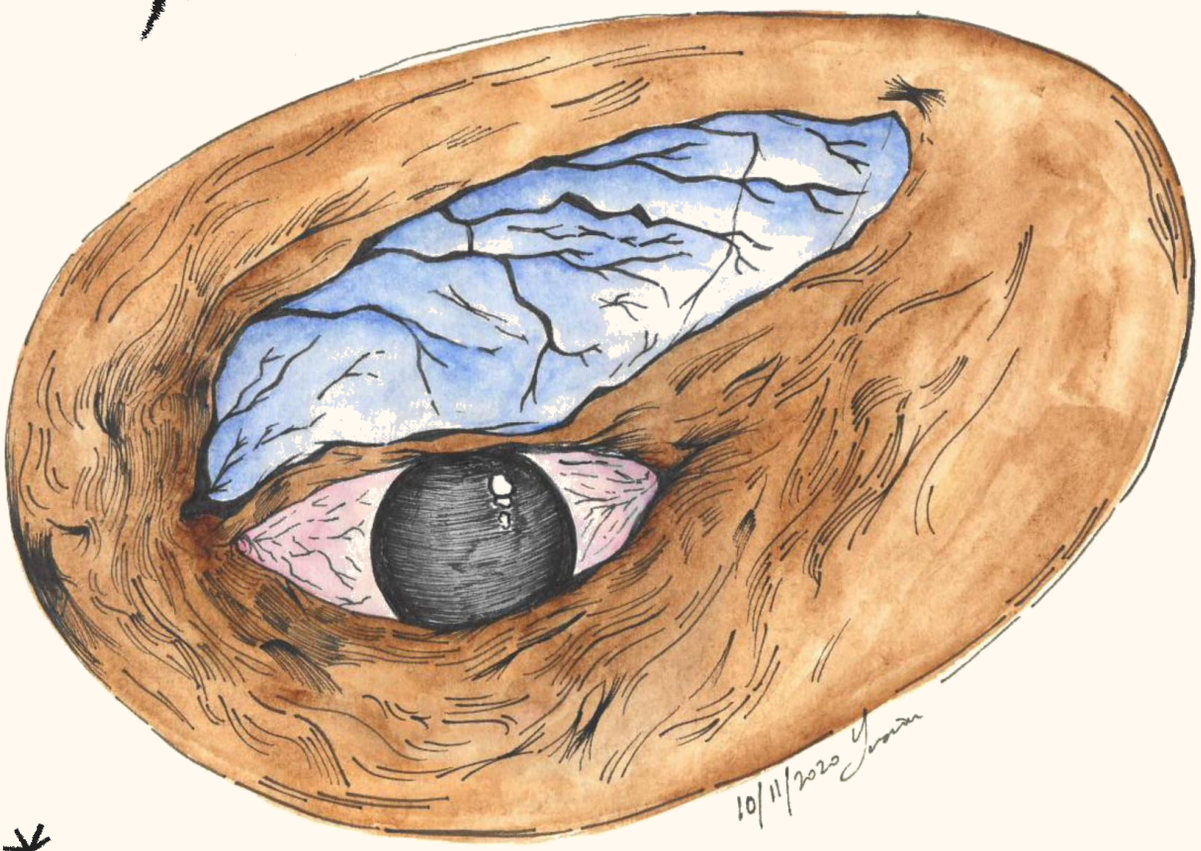
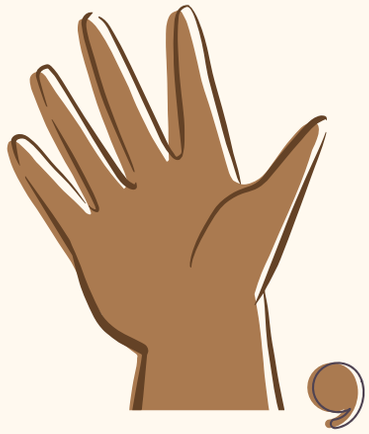


AN INVITATION TOWARDS REIMAGINING OUR SHARED FUTURE

A COLLABORATIVE ZINE BY YHU2280
OPPRESSION AND INJUSTICE CLASS OF 2020.



We are a group of 18 students from Yale-NUS College in Singapore. For the past 13 weeks, we have been learning about oppression — how to recognize it, analyze it, and dismantle it in its many shapes and sizes in our institutions as well as our everyday lives.

In reading all these theories about oppression and overcoming it, we struggled to see how these theoretical frameworks could be applied to society. What would the world look like if this oppression were eliminated? So, we sought to answer that ourselves

In this zine, you will find 9 different pieces of writing covering three broad themes of anti-dialogical education and action, decolonial aesthesis, and finally prison abolition and transformative justice,

If these seem like lofty jargon thrown recklessly into the already overwhelming melting pot of vocabulary, fear not - we have tried our very best to make each phrase in each section applicable to concrete situations that have happened all over the world, explaining things that might not be clear and focusing on important parts for each case study. In each of these pieces, we highlight and examine an oppressive system in society through a specific theoretical lens. Then, using what we learnt, we offer one solution for eliminating or overcoming it.

We hope that by reading our work, you understand the parts of yourself that may not belong to you, and see the world and all the people that fall in its many cracks and crevices.

We hope that by sharing our vision of the world, you become inspired to envision and realize your own better tomorrow.

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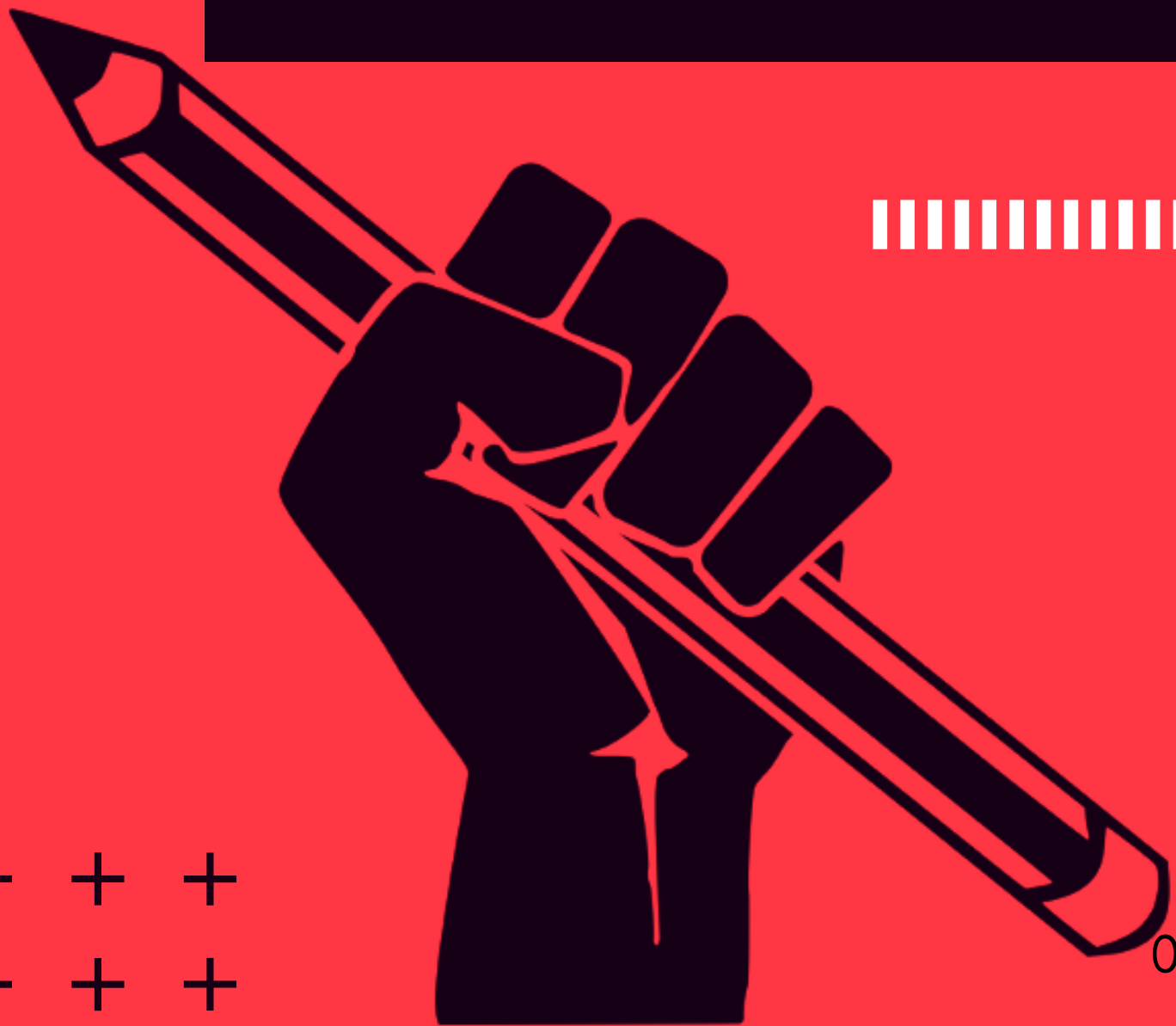
PEDAGOGY OF THE OPPRESSED

anti-dialogical education and action



In this section, we use the analytical frameworks in Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* to identify examples of oppression, and offer potential steps forward for a better world.

Paulo Freire was a 20th century Brazilian educator who grew up amidst poverty that was rampant because of the Great Depression. After his education in 1961, he became a state director of the Department of Education and Culture. He was a firm believer that education was necessary to alleviate the lives of many Brazilians. In 1962, he started a nation-wide literacy program which taught many illiterate Brazilians how to read and write. However, the success of this program was short-lived. In 1964, a military coup installed a military dictatorship which repealed Freire's efforts and imprisoned him for 70 days. His experiences led him to publish *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in 1968.

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire identifies characteristics of the oppressor-oppressed distinction and the tools with which oppressors perpetuate their oppression. Freire argued that critical education was necessary to liberate the oppressed. Concurrently, the oppressed must take charge of their liberation and take an active role in constructing this 'new world' - one where systems of oppression no longer exist. In this process, dialogue plays a crucial role in ensuring that society is not merely constructed from the hegemony of the oppressor, and allowing oppressed groups to elucidate their experiences and struggles.

Using Freire's analysis, we critically examine the examples of education systems, models of freedom of speech, and activism that is disconnected from the people who are most affected by the issue. We consider how Freire might object to education systems that seem to adopt a 'banking model' which merely treats students as depositories, instead of a 'problem-posing' model which allows students to critically examine reality and incorporate their own experiences and perspectives into the learning process. We then examine how Freire might claim that current systems of regulating speech between racial and religious communities are not truly dialogical because they either do not allow oppressed groups the space to express themselves or allow speech to be weaponized against marginalized communities. Finally, we reflect on how activism fails to be liberating when well-meaning activists do not engage in dialogue with those who will be most affected by the changes for which they advocate, as this discounts their lived experiences and regards them as unimportant for societal change.

HEATHER & BENJY

Rethinking *Critical Thinking* in Singapore

THROUGH THE LENS OF PAULO FREIRE

With students consistently ranking well in global achievement tests like the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), Singapore's education system has often been lauded as one of the best in the world. Yet simultaneously, it has also received criticism for its emphasis on rote-learning. Students are drilled with problem sums from past-year exam papers in order for them perform well on standardized exams. But what exactly is so wrong with this rote learning method and why does it need to be changed? Here, we look at Freire's concept of the 'banking model of education' [3].

What is the "banking model" of education?

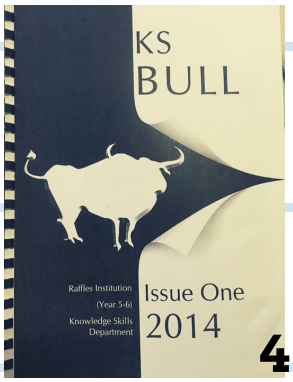
According to Freire, the traditional student-teacher relationship pretty much constitutes the banking model of education. In this relationship, the teacher is regarded as knowledgeable while the student is viewed as ignorant. The student is regarded as a "container" to be deposited with knowledge deemed useful by their teacher - like a bank. The student is expected to remain meek and unquestioning to the authoritative role of the teacher, accepting the knowledge provided without critiquing, filtering or interpreting it. Students become passive learners, regurgitating the information that they receive. Here are some examples in the Singaporean context that might be all too familiar to you.....

"The Science A levels practicals will be almost exactly the same as the actual one. Just follow it step by step"

" For your A level General Paper, just memorize some examples. Or you can buy the KSBull book produced by RJC, there is a bunch of GP model essays there"

But what is so bad about the banking model?

Freire argues its problem lies in that it reproduces existing power imbalances. The banking model encourages students to conform to the ways of society rather than questioning and changing it. Students learn to accept the status quo, eventually enter into adulthood as compliant workers. This benefits those in positions of power, the "oppressors", as Freire terms them, who do not want to see existing systems transformed because it benefits them. As the oppressed are conditioned to remain subservient, they remain unaware that they are being oppressed and do not take steps to end the cycle of oppression.



The alternative: *Problem-posing* Model

As the name suggests, the alternative that Freire has in mind involves asking a lot of questions. Under this model, teachers are not assumed to have "all-knowing authority" with regards to knowledge. Instead, teachers approach students as fellow learners, dialoguing extensively with them. Here, the teacher is required to keep an open mind, respecting that students have prior knowledge that might be useful in the classroom. Instead of forcing students to regurgitate information, the teacher encourages students to take ownership over their learning, helping them to develop critical thinking skills (of which Freire terms as ***conscientizacao***). With conscientizacao, students do not just learn how to tackle theoretical concepts, but also learn to think about phenomena that have relevance to their daily lives. They then become more aware about how they are being oppressed/ are contributing to the oppressive system and are able work towards ending the cycle of oppression.

But doesn't Singapore rank highly on critical thinking assessments?

Singapore Students Show Well-Developed Thinking and Reasoning Skills: OECD PISA 2018 Study **[4]**

1. Singapore's 15-year-olds have demonstrated competencies that would enable them to navigate the challenges of the future, according to the 2018 results of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), a triennial international benchmarking study co-ordinated by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

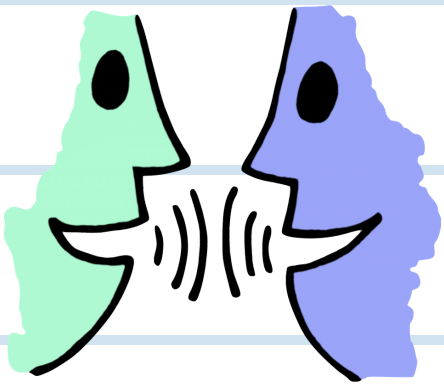
Looking at how Singaporean students perform on critical-thinking components in global achievement tests, some might argue that Singapore's education system has made significant progress in incorporating the problem-posing model. After all, the Singaporean government has adopted an increasing number of policies to develop critical thinking abilities amongst students...

For starters, the Ministry of Education (MOE) **allocated regular time periods to programmes that specifically develop the critical thinking abilities** of students.From kindergarten to secondary school, the "Philosophy for Children Programme" [5] is regularly conducted for students; while in Junior College, critical thinking is inoculated through subjects like Project Work. These programmes claim to provide students with the opportunity to "explore different suggestions, weigh different evidence sand question each others' assumptions". But do such compartmentalised forms of "critical thinking" really count as problem-solving?

In 2004, MOE also introduced the **Integrated Programme (IP)**, which allowed academically-stronger students to skip the GCE "O Levels" examinations and enter directly into the next phase of education [6]. By removing time previously allocated to exam preparation, it was intended that academically-stronger students would be able to spend more time on non-academic curriculum, developing critical thinking skills that would allow them to become "cosmopolitan leaders of tomorrow" [7]. Each of the Integrated Programme schools designed their own version of a "critical thinking programme", including elements like debating competitions, cross-cultural exchanges and so on. But is the Integrated Programme really the panacea?

Despite its focus on critical thinking, the rationale for MOE's emphasis on critical thinking has been primarily pragmatic in nature---its aim is to propagate **21st century core competencies** [8] in which critical thinking is a major component. The MOE observes that critical thinking is necessary to equip students with the ability to face the demands and opportunities brought about by globalisation. But is developing critical thinking for such aims really critical thinking according to Freire?

"Critical Thinking" in the Problem-posing Model



A key component in what Freire means by the problem-posing model is the aim to make everyone become more human in a broader path towards freedom. What he means by freedom is not just freedom from hunger and starvation, which all animals seek; to be free and fully human is "to create and to construct, to wonder and to venture" in active and responsible ways - constantly reflecting upon the world and acting on those reflections. This, of course, requires constant, authentic dialogue where the boundaries between teachers and students dissolve and everyone learns together from each other.

With this in mind, Freire would likely see Singapore's efforts in promoting "critical thinking" in Singapore as important first steps in turning away from the banking model of education, but still not quite "critical" enough for it to be a problem-posing model yet.

First, while activities like debating and Model United Nations encouraged in the Integrated Programme do prompt us to communicate with each other in rational, diplomatic manners and compel us to engage with various perspectives, they may be lacking in the acting and reflecting aspects that are crucial in achieving conscientizacao. Similar to the allocation of specific timelots in students' schedules to promote critical thinking, the exercise of these skills are compartmentalised and thus limited to particular periods in a student's time in school. The topics on which students get to engage in dialogues are also limited to the learning objectives of the particular courses and activities. For Freire, though, not only does the problem-posing mentality need to extend across all subjects, it also needs to be applied beyond the school setting. How we can ensure that students actually reflect on these experiences and dialogues, and act on the intended "lessons" of respectful communication and compassion - beyond striving for grades and awards - is rather unclear.

The fact that these critical thinking-related programmes are mainly promoted through the Integrated Programme, and thus almost exclusively to the students atop the streaming system, also implies that some Singapore youth are seen as more human, or more deserving to be fully human, than their peers. While some are trained to become future pinnacles of society, others are taught to be compliant and passive workers. However, Freire argues that the pursuit of full humanity is universal and cannot be done individualistically; one's becoming human should never be an obstacle to others' becoming human.

The intention to cultivate "cosmopolitan leaders of tomorrow" behind these critical thinking programmes suggests that there is a very specific list of pragmatic skills that educators want students to take away. Students most likely have no say in what activities they want to engage in and/or what topics they would like to cover in class. This signals a distrust in students' abilities as full humans to think and reflect for themselves. Their thinking is instead limited within a narrow, pre-decided set of boundaries that reflect the government's vision of an ideal, model citizen in the 21st century best fit for its economic development.

Skills like "problem-solving" that add up to these "21st century competencies" very much overlap with the measures PISA uses to evaluate critical thinking skills in reading, science, and math. This is perhaps why Singaporean students seem to be world-leading critical thinkers despite the limitations we have just mentioned. What Freire would argue for, then, is to rethink our current definitions of critical thinking altogether - to apply the critical lens to all aspects of life beyond the compartmentalised subjects in school and to trust students and educators alike as full human beings capable of learning together.

Montessori Education, which emphasises on creative, self-directed, and participatory learning, is a good example of what the problem-posing model may look like in practice.

montessori NORTHWEST

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What is Montessori Education? [9]

Montessori is a method of education that is based on self-directed activity, hands-on learning and collaborative play. In Montessori classrooms children make creative choices in their learning, while the classroom and the highly trained teacher offer age-appropriate activities to guide the process. Children work in groups and individually to discover and explore knowledge of the world and to develop their maximum potential.

Montessori classrooms are beautifully crafted environments designed to meet the needs of children in a specific age range. Dr. Maria Montessori discovered that experiential learning in this type of classroom led to a deeper understanding of language, mathematics, science, music, social interactions and much more. Most Montessori classrooms are secular in nature, although the Montessori educational method can be integrated successfully into a faith-based program.

Every material in a Montessori classroom supports an aspect of child development, creating a match between the child's natural interests and the available activities. Children can learn through their own experience and at their own pace. They can respond at any moment to the natural curiosities that exist in all humans and build a solid foundation for life-long learning.

The Association Montessori Internationale (AMI) was established by Maria Montessori in 1929 to protect the integrity of her work and to support high standards for both teacher training and schools. Today, AMI continues to uphold Maria Montessori's vision while collaborating with contemporary research in neuroscience and child development. Montessori Northwest is proud to be an official teacher training center of AMI, training teachers to work with children from birth to age twelve.

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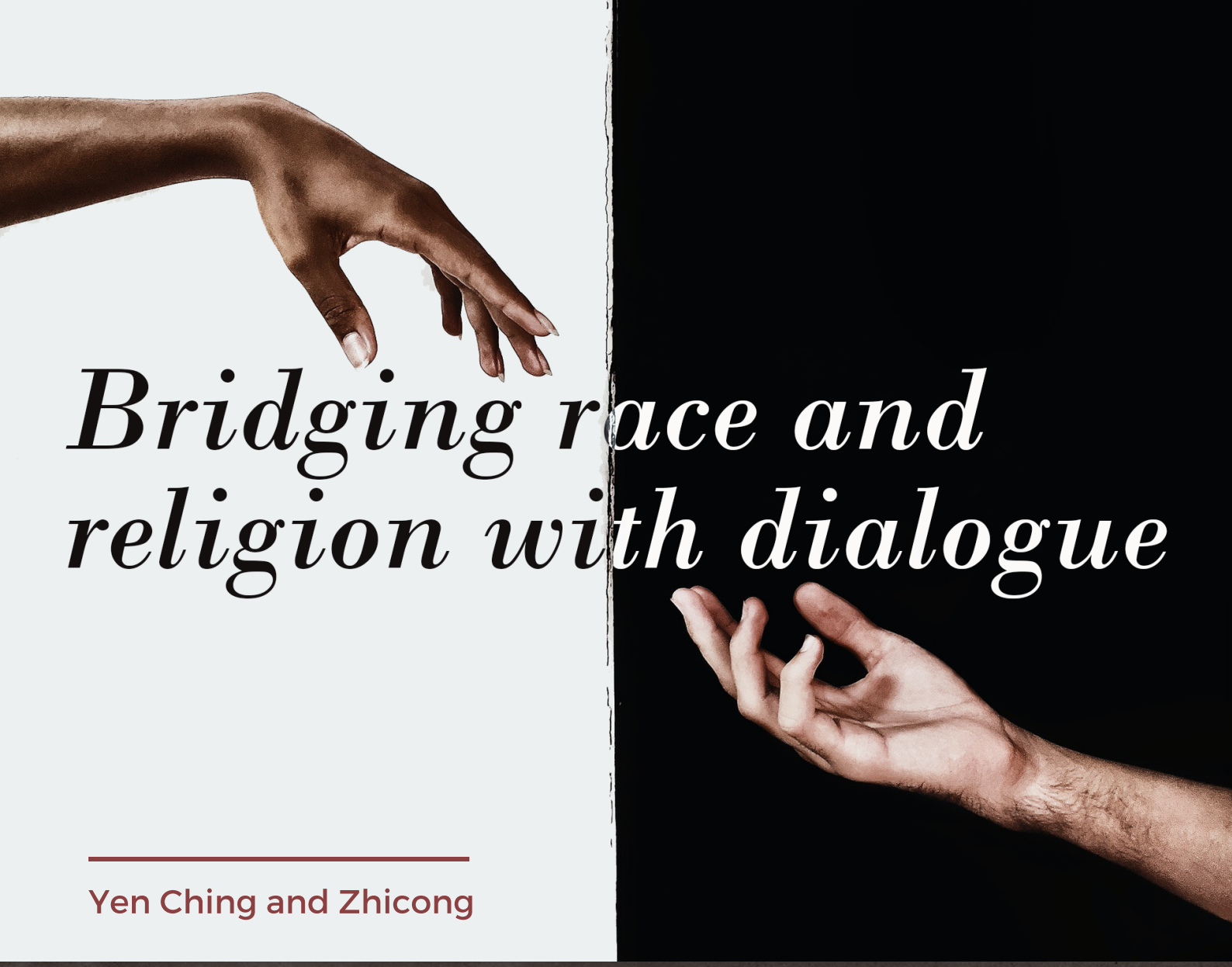


Bridging race and religion with dialogue

Yen Ching and Zhicong

Across the world, many people practice, and derive a sense of meaning from, a diverse range of religions. However, this diversity also creates tensions between groups when differences in opinion or practices arise. Therefore, it is important to critically consider how relations between interfaith groups are managed. In this piece, we critique how Singapore and France manage interfaith dialogue and freedom of speech using Freire's framework in Pedagogy of the Oppressed. We argue that Singapore's model suppresses dialogue between groups such that it prevents proper intergroup understanding. We further argue France's principle of laicite offers an overly broad latitude for free speech such that speech is weaponized to denigrate certain communities.

Drawing on ideas from Fanon, Marcos, and Stahler-Sholk, we offer a new model of interfaith relations and dialogue – one that allows a respectful and frank exchange of ideas to cultivate deeper intergroup understanding and a true recognition and respect of the similarities and differences that may exist.

How does Singapore handle race and religion?

Singapore is a highly pluralistic society made out of many races and religions. Historically, disagreements between groups have led to racial tensions and conflict. This has allowed the Singapore state to perpetuate a hegemony that Singapore's 'accomplishments are substantial yet fragile'. [1] This hegemony of fragility has allowed the state to frame issues of race and religion as 'divisive issues' which should be avoided - in a study, 66% of Singaporeans felt that 'talking about racial issues causes unnecessary tension.' [2]

Structurally, legal institutions and the media constrain speech on race and religion. Legal scholars have critiqued that the laws in Singapore are too restrictive such that the State 'controls the horizontal relationship between individuals or groups within the State, with deleterious impact on the scope of free speech and inter-communal interactions. [3] Conversely, the largely state-controlled Singapore media commonly emphasizes the fragility of racial and religious relations in Singapore and avoids publication of racially sensitive issues. [4]

This model arguably avoids direct conflict between groups but creates the formation of unchallenged, deeply entrenched prejudices and views of other groups. For instance, a study found that 15% of Singaporeans found Muslims threatening [5] while negative stereotypes of certain races persist. [6] Without dialogue, these commonsense ideas continue within the various communities. The prevailing hegemony that race and religion are sensitive issues prevent the articulation and discussion of everyday discrimination.

How would Freire respond to Singapore's censorship?

Freire would identify this mode of managing racial and religious groups as dividing and ruling. He explains that the ruling class does this to prevent a “serious threat to their own hegemony”. [7] In the context of Singapore, the state perpetuates this racial and religious divide to entrench its authority as a neutral arbiter between groups which entrenches its political legitimacy. [8] This divide is also utilized by the state to meet its political goals - such as when a Chinese political leader widely seen as the next Prime Minister of Singapore states that Singaporeans are generally ‘not ready’ for a non-Chinese Prime Minister. [9]

This results in issues being seen in a ‘**focalized**’ view, instead of seeing them as facets of a ‘totality’. [10] This means that problems are often seen in isolation within the respective communities, rather than as a reflection of the larger society. For instance, socio-economic issues in the Malay community in Singapore are often seen to be a result of causes inherent within the Malay community [11], instead of an issue that is caused by historical and social issues that present within the larger Singapore society. [12] Freire explains that this isolates each group and their problems and prevents the oppressed from critically considering reality. [13]

How does France handle race and religion?

In contrast to Singapore's controlled narrative and attitude towards race and religion, France presents another model of state-mediated public attitude towards race and religion by granting great latitude to speech about other racial and religious communities. In French society, the principle of laicite (loosely translated as "secularism") is given great prominence.

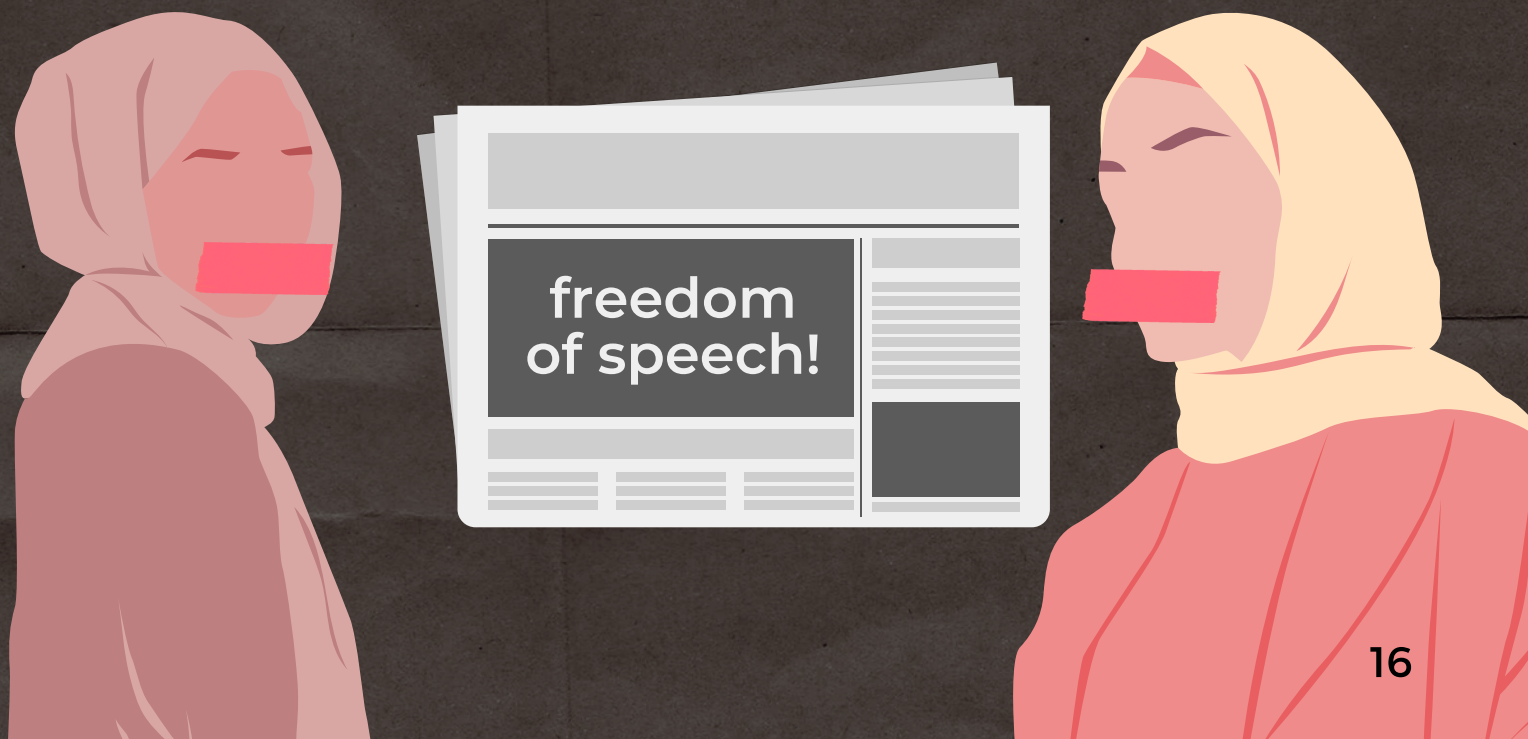
This principle purports to separate religion from the state and relegate faith to the private sphere. However, this principle has also been criticized for discriminating against certain religious groups by forming the constitutional backdrop for France's sacrosanct protection of the right to freedom of speech. In recent times, this freedom of speech has led to the denigration of certain religious communities.

Despite the French government claiming a neutral regime towards all religions with the institution of laicite, the state generally portrays and perceives Islam as overly political and patriarchal [14]. Muslims' practices were also perceived to be in conflict with France's secular tradition. [15] For example, the right to wear headscarves in school is a key issue around which national conflicts have crystallized. [16] The French government perceives the headscarf to be the main symbol of Islamic oppression on young Muslim women. [17] Thereby, in 2004, they passed a controversial law banning religious symbols such as headscarves in school, sparking a widespread debate.

In line with laicite, France also prides itself of freedom of expression, calling it an "essential freedom". [18] It is protected by the French Constitution, which incorporates the Declaration of Human and Civic Rights of 1789. However, this is often unregulated in France and comes at the cost of insulting and discriminating against religious groups. For instance, the French satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo regularly published cartoons which deliberately ridiculed religions and prominent religious figures. However, it was mainly their cartoons regarding Prophet Muhammed and radical Islam which incited widespread backlash from Muslims globally. Islam explicitly forbids the representation of the Prophet, in part because of strong warnings in the Qur'an and other religious texts against idolatry or anything that could be seen as leading towards it. [19]

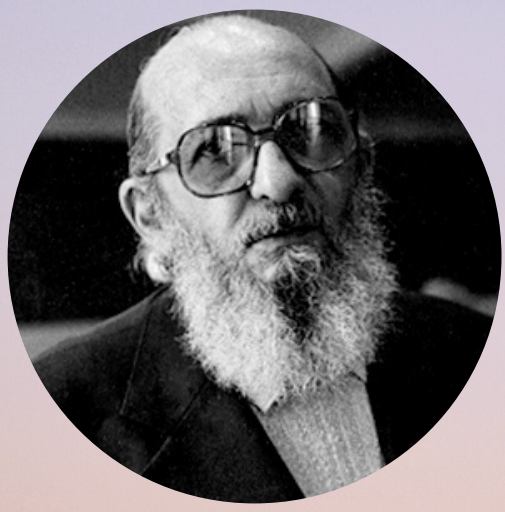
How would Freire respond to France's freedom of expression?

Freire would identify the France model of secularism and unregulated freedom of expression as mythicization. Despite the French state projecting this image of being a supposedly secular and neutral government that values individual autonomy and articulation, their attitude and laws harbor anti-Muslim sentiments and targeted discrimination with the 2004 headscarf ban and unregulated freedom of speech. As Freire explains, these myths are meant to shield the true reality of the society and show it as a fixed entity that the people must adapt to. [20] Myths ultimately act to preserve the status quo. We can understand the status quo in France to be one which prioritizes the freedom of expression of dominant groups over the freedom of expression of oppressed minority groups (such as the right for young Muslim women to wear headscarves in school).



Imagining a better world: how should we engage in dialogue about race and religion?

Both the Singapore and French model ultimately fail to encourage true dialogue between groups. In the Singapore model, dialogue is stifled such that the various groups are unable to perceive their issues as being part of the larger reality and are unable to truly understand the struggles of other groups. In the French model, speech is weaponized to attack oppressed groups in society instead of being a dialogical tool. Neither model fosters true dialogical action.



Paulo Freire
Brazilian philosopher

Freire explains that dialogue is 'the encounter between men, mediated by the world, in order to name the world.' [21] This process of naming 'transforms' the world and allows the person to 'achieve significance as human beings'. [22] Dialogue therefore has two main purposes. It allows people to fulfill their 'ontological vocation' of humanization [23] by critically examining the world around them and their experiences. Concurrently, it also allows for a more complete image of reality to emerge, instead of one created by the dominant class. The combined effect of dialogue therefore allows different groups to interact and share their lived experiences which results in a deeper understanding, and erodes the divide between oppressor and the oppressed.

In crafting a new model of racial and religious harmony, we argue that it is important to (1) **recognize the differences between various groups**; and (2) **approach dialogue with humility to understand these differences**.

Subcomandante Marcos
Former military leader and spokesman for the Zapatista Army of National Liberation

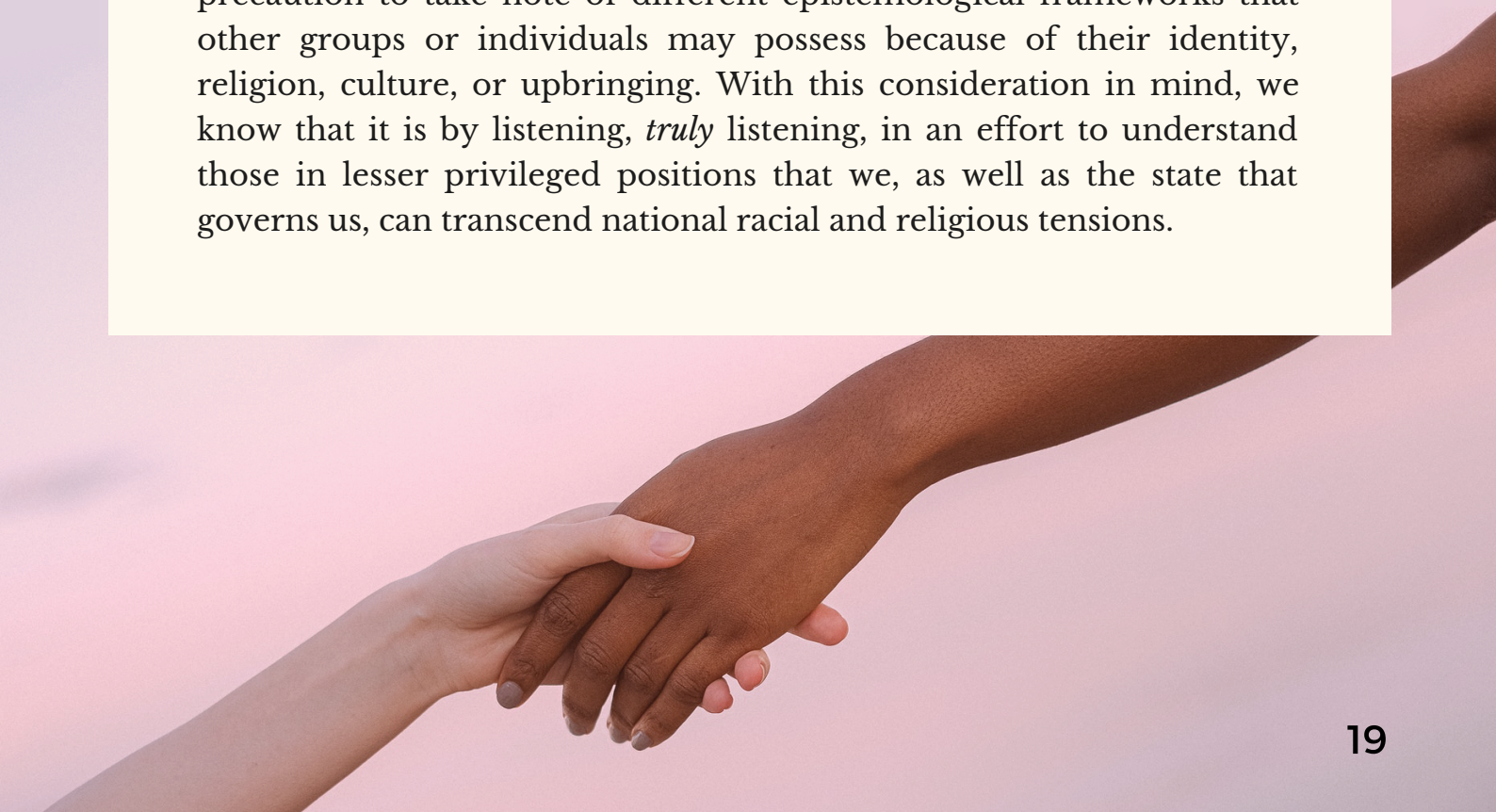
Subcommandante Marcos aptly points out that the world comprises “different kinds of people, and the relations between them have to be founded on respect and tolerance.”[24] Society should not be constructed by a single dominant group which imposes its hegemony onto others. [25] The recognition of this diversity is crucial because it emphasizes the importance of each group to speak for themselves. This also allows society to be constructed in line with reality and the multiplicity of perspectives and issues they face.

The Zapatista model of community participation possesses some traits for a participatory model of dialogue. Spaces for dialogue ought to be horizontal and not be based on a hierarchy. [26] Efforts should be made to link up marginalized groups to allow for a collective mobilization that recognizes the “multiple relevant identities that make up social agency.” [27] Dialogue between groups should be free-flowing to allow the actualization of individual groups, and a deeper understanding across groups.

Richard Stahler-Sholk
Political Science Professor at Eastern Michigan University

However, dialogue must not be uninhibited. Freire rightly observes that “dialogue cannot exist without humility. The naming of the world, through which people constantly re-create that world, cannot be an act of arrogance.” [28] Dialogue is ‘broken’ if one party lacks humility and projects its ignorance onto others. [29] It should not be used as a ‘crafty instrument for the domination of one person by another’. [30] Therefore, true dialogue should involve an acceptance that the lived experiences of other groups are vastly different from our own and it is entirely possible that we may not even fathom what we do not know. Concurrently, hate or manipulative speech that is aimed at suppressing certain racial or religious groups is not true dialogue because it perpetuates oppression without allowing the multiple oppressed groups from engaging in dialogue and having a stake in constructing reality.

In conclusion, despite the Singaporean model of race and religion being oppressive with its suppressive and divided nature, its antithesis – the open-natured French model of freedom of expression surrounding race and religion – is also oppressive given its unbalanced and unregulated public sentiments from its citizens which often harms oppressed minority groups. Moving forward, we must try to strike that delicate balance between free expression and empathy. Although it is important to encourage and engage in dialogue to achieve critical consciousness and shape reality as Freire has mentioned, we must take precaution to take note of different epistemological frameworks that other groups or individuals may possess because of their identity, religion, culture, or upbringing. With this consideration in mind, we know that it is by listening, *truly* listening, in an effort to understand those in lesser privileged positions that we, as well as the state that governs us, can transcend national racial and religious tensions.



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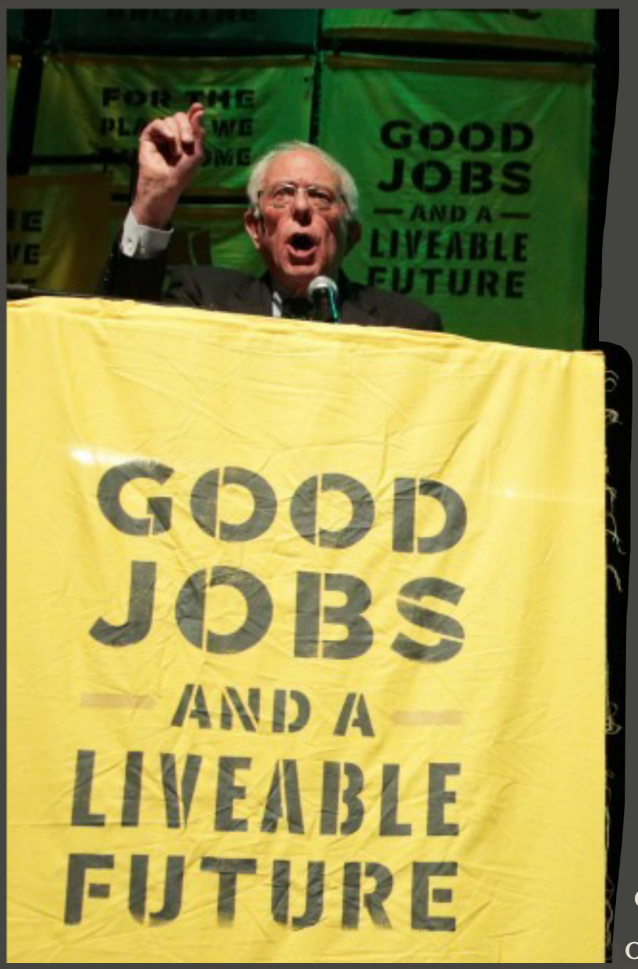
Reimagining climate politics to centre the working class

Beverley & Min Jie

The climate movement has been calling for a "just transition", which is a process by which a fossil fuel-based economy transitions into a renewable energy-based economy in a way that centres people's well-being and rights. This means that workers, especially workers in affected industries like the fossil fuel industry, should not be negatively affected in this transition. Rather, they should be assisted in transitioning to "high-quality jobs" in the new economy that matches their skill sets and provides fair pay, security, and good prospects [1][2]. Yet, it appears that the climate movement has not been able to move past mere theory and rhetoric to convince workers that a just transition is realistic and possible. This is clear in the demographic composition of mainstream climate movements. Since the early 1980s, mainstream climate movements in rich nations like the United States have been criticised for being too "middle-class" [3]. Singapore's climate movement is not immune to this criticism either. In 2019, local news platform Rice Media published a piece titled "Is Environmentalism just for 'woke' and privileged Singaporean youth?" [4]. In this piece, we will dig deeper into the classism that pervades the climate movement and attempt to reimagine how a working class-centred climate politics could look using concepts from Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

Freire argues that any human activity that seeks a “transformation of the world” cannot be “reduced to either verbalism or activism” [5]. He adds, “If (leaders) are truly committed to liberation, their action and reflection cannot proceed without the action and reflection of others.” [6]. Yet, the climate movement does not appear to have heeded these warnings. The chant “What do we want? Climate justice! When do we want it? Now!” has become a defining slogan of the movement [7]. And, the talk of the possibility of a just transition has also been at the forefront of electoral politics in the recent 2020 United States’ elections. During an election debate for instance, Bernie Sanders proclaimed that his policies would create “20 million good-paying jobs” in the new green economy[7]. However, despite this strong rhetoric from protest chants and political leaders, or “verbalism” as Freire would call it, the climate movement remains unable to draw the support of workers who would be central to this transition. In an interview, Jane McAlevey, a senior policy fellow at the University of California Berkeley’s Labour Center, pinpoints the problem as being that the climate movement does not know how to talk with union members about green jobs [8]. She cites the New York Wind Deal as an example, where workers’ unions organised and won a climate agreement to convert half of the state’s energy source to wind power by 2035 without the involvement of the climate movement. The workers started organising for the wind deal after Hurricane Sandy when many of them were called in to do infrastructural rebuilding and repair work. While doing the work, they started thinking about how industries contribute to climate change and how they could be transformed to tackle it. So, the workers decided to engage in a dialogue with members of New York State's climate movement... but they eventually stopped inviting the climate movement organisers to these dialogues. The workers felt that communicating was difficult as the climate community spoke to them as if they “(did) not understand that something



(was) wrong when their homes (were) flooded" [8]. But they did understand — their own homes were flooded and destroyed! What they needed help figuring out was a legitimate plan for an industrial transformation that would not mean great losses for them (e.g. massive job cuts). Ultimately, after three years of educating themselves on green economies and dialoguing amongst themselves to figure out how the transition could work without compromising their needs, the workers successfully mobilised and negotiated the wind deal by themselves.

This case study exposes the climate movement's baseless assumption that workers, especially those in extractive industries, do not support the climate movement because they are not aware of the severity of the climate crisis. They failed to consider that it is not ignorance, but rather a very real fear of losing their jobs, right to unionise, and more, that leaves workers unsure of or opposed to the transition towards a green economy. As Freire would explain, the climate community has this blindspot because they are acting and reflecting on their own — they are thinking about and advocating for a just transition without talking to the very workers who will be affected by it. In contrast, the workers' union succeeded because they were actively dialoguing with one another, reflecting on their role in this transition and collectively developing and advocating for a transition plan that addresses their needs.

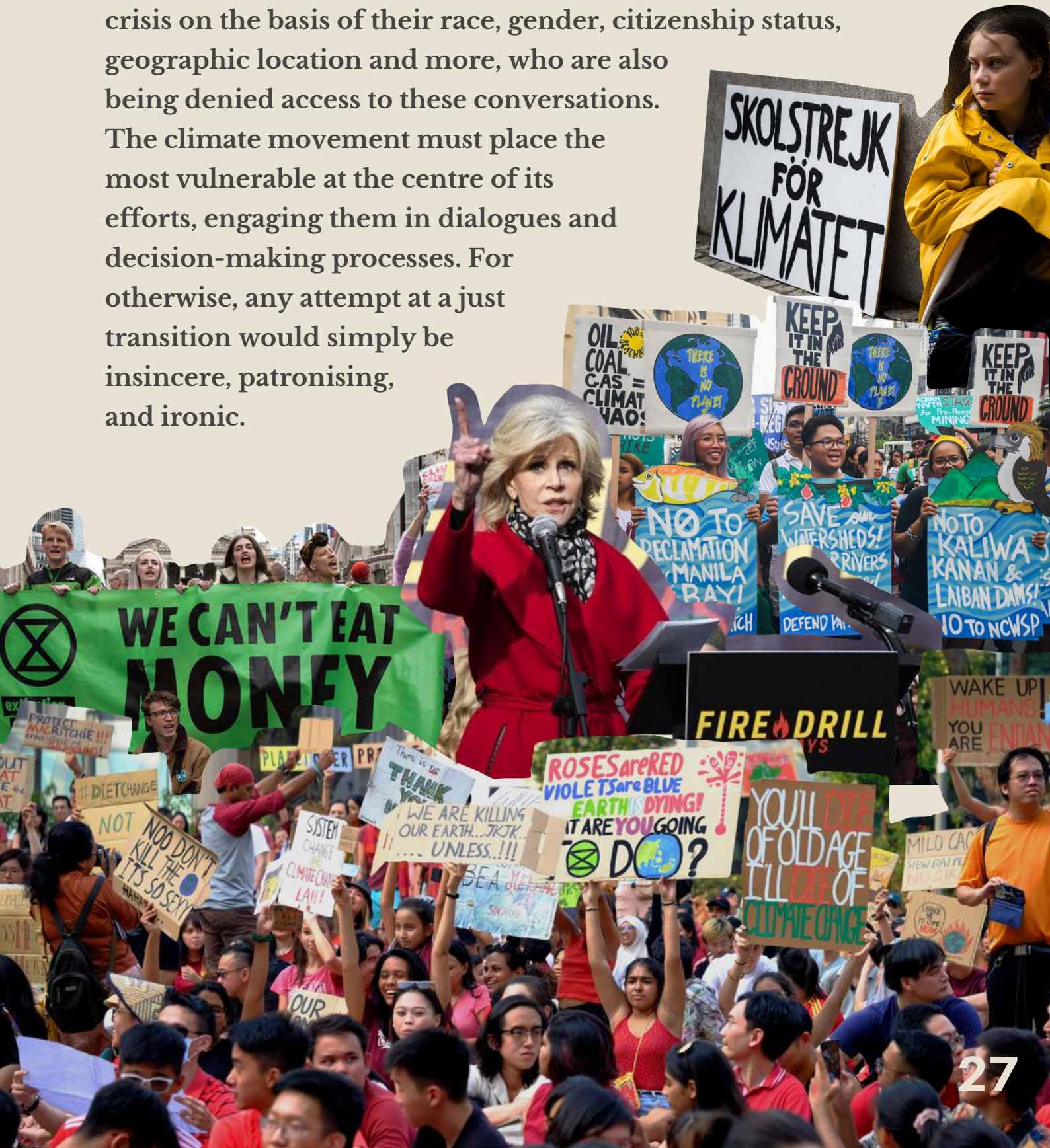
To create a just transition that is truly just, we need to put those most affected at the centre of our efforts. That is, we ought to move past mere rhetoric to co-create a reality in which we listen to and meet the needs of the working class collaboratively. **To achieve this, we may turn to Freire's ideas of dialogical and antidialogical action for some inspiration**. When we neglect the voices from the ground and listen only to those of scientists and academics, we fall prey to practising what Freire calls "antidialogical action". Antidialogical actions are those which perpetuate oppression by aiming to conquer others, manipulate them into subjugation, and/or inhibit their ability to organise and form an independently-shaped shared culture and imagination [9].

Conversely, what Freire refers to as "dialogical action" does not aim to conquer, but rather puts people into conversation with one another and pushes us in the right direction to achieve justice [9]. He believed that real and just change can only come about by practising dialogical action and listening to the needs of the oppressed: "a true revolution must initiate a courageous dialogue with the people. Its very legitimacy lies in that dialogue… The revolution is made neither by the leaders for the people, nor by the people for the leaders, but by both acting together in unshakable solidarity." [10]. He adds that the dialogue is necessary "so that the peoples' empirical knowledge of reality, nourished by the leader's critical knowledge, gradually becomes transformed into knowledge of the causes of reality" [11].

To illustrate what this means within the environmental movement, it might be useful to turn to learn from the organisers of the first union climate strike against pollutive companies in the United States that was successful in winning most of their demands [12].

In contrast to the New York Wind Deal situation where the collaboration between the workers' union and climate movement fell through, the organisers here consist of members from both groups. While planning for the strike, the organisers held long debates to reach a "deep agreement" with one another on how to combine labour demands with climate ones. The organisers surveyed union members about their personal experiences (or "empirical knowledge of reality", as Freire would say) with climate change. In their reflections, the organisers explained that they learnt, through the survey, that "more than 40 percent of (their) members (said) they or their families (had) been impacted by climate change" [12]. For instance, many of the members had to leave their farms as the land there was no longer fertile. Thus, the organisers adapted their language accordingly and "made educational flyers and videos to connect climate change with members' experiences of emigrating from their countries of origin" so that members can see how they have a stake in the climate strike [13]. Beyond that, climate organisers also participated in the workers' bargaining sessions with their companies to show solidarity. As such, deep communication and therefore, trust, was built between labour and climate organisers, which enabled them to build a list of demands that integrated the concerns of both groups. This coherent narrative enabled the movement to generate mass support, and this ultimately led to the strike's success.

The climate movement desperately needs to reevaluate the way it interacts with the groups it claims to be helping. In this piece, we explored how the working class continues to be excluded from important conversations on climate action and just transitions. But, it is also worth noting that there are several other marginalised groups that are vulnerable to the climate crisis on the basis of their race, gender, citizenship status, geographic location and more, who are also being denied access to these conversations. The climate movement must place the most vulnerable at the centre of its efforts, engaging them in dialogues and decision-making processes. For otherwise, any attempt at a just transition would simply be insincere, patronising, and ironic.



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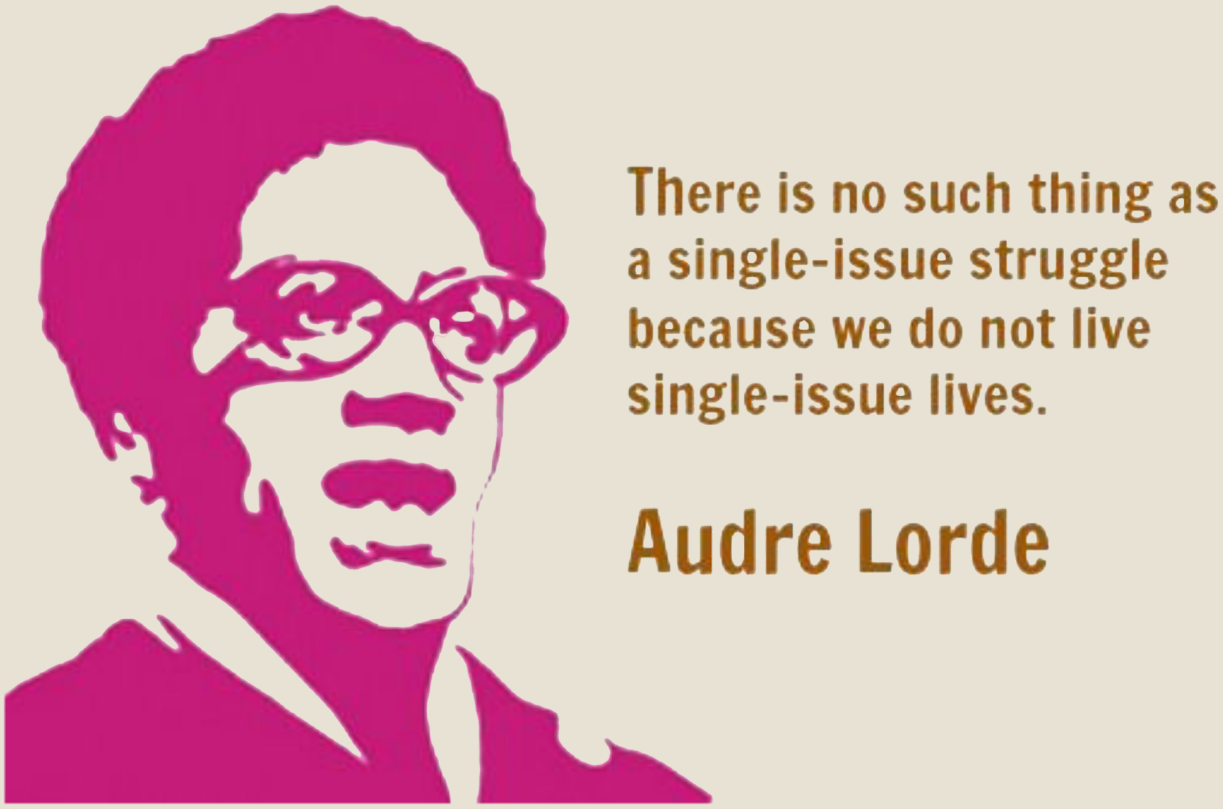
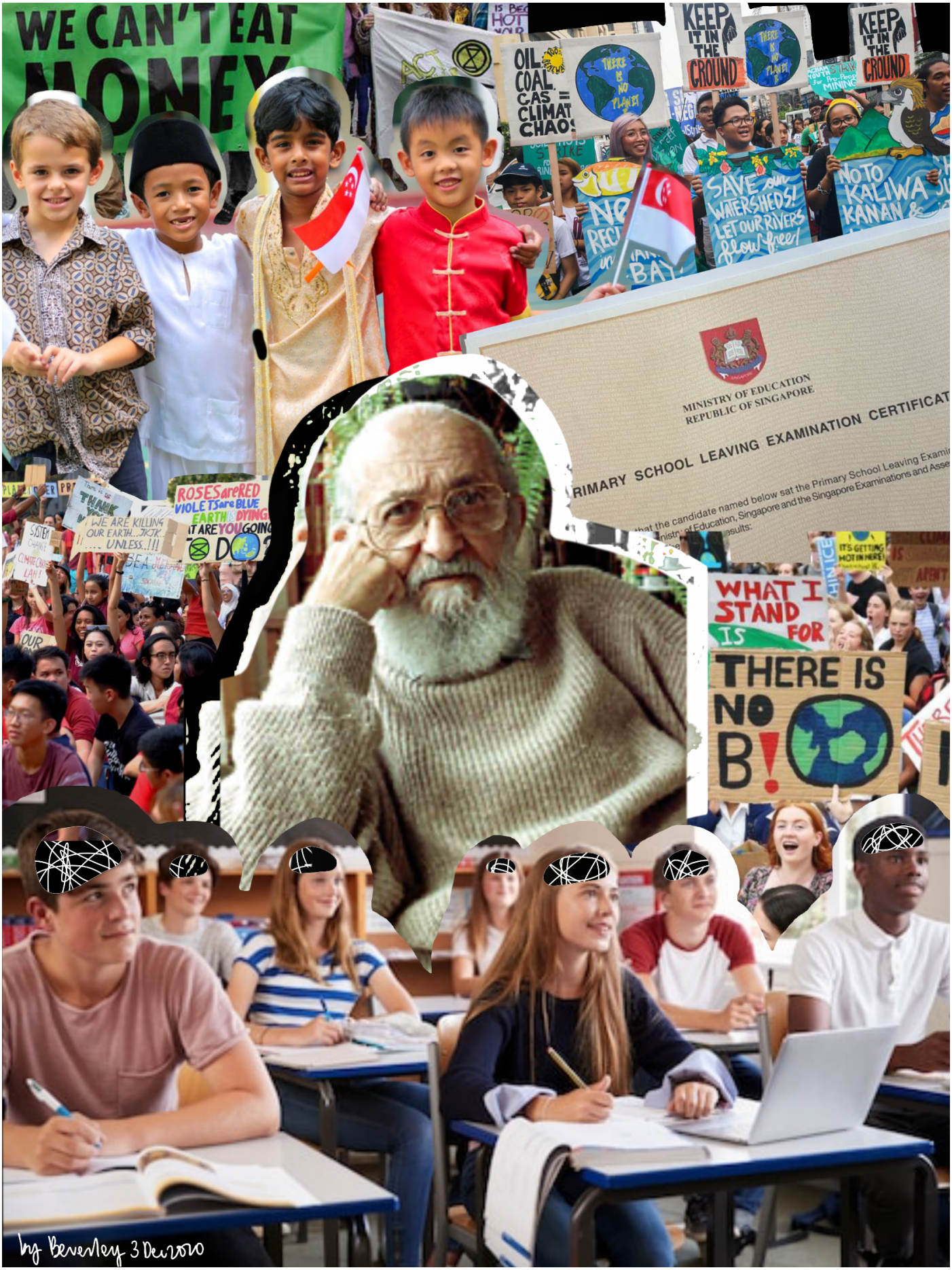
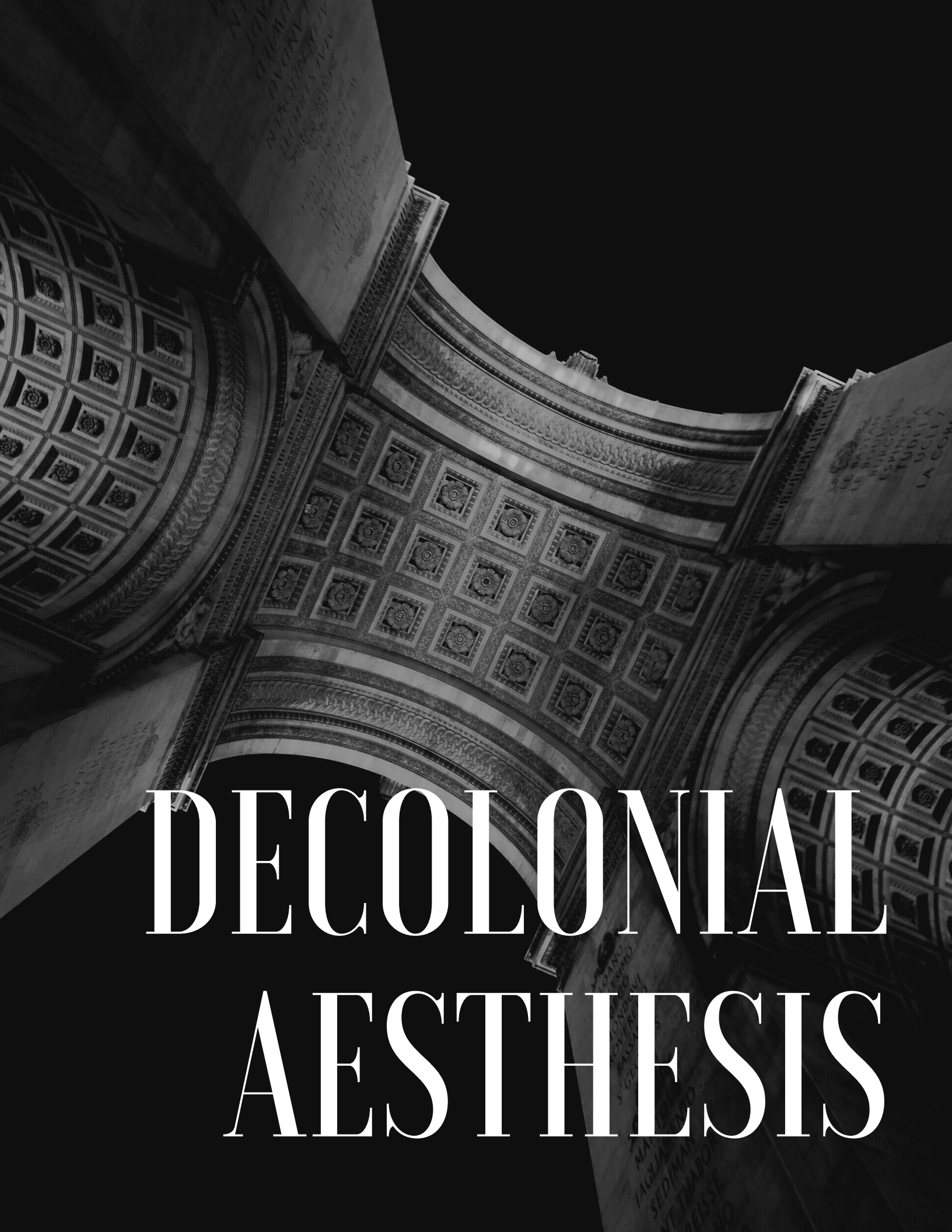



WE CAN'T EAT MONEY
KEEP IT IN THE GROUND
SAVE our WATERSHEDS! LET OUR RIVERS flow free!
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
REPUBLIC OF SINGAPORE
PRIMARY SCHOOL LEAVING EXAMINATION CERTIFICAT
ROSES are RED VIOLETS are BLUE EARTH is DYING
WHAT I STAND FOR IS
THERE IS NO B!
by Beverley 3 Dec 2020



DECOLONIAL AESTHESIS

In this segment, we explore Walter Mignolo's concept of decolonial aesthesis. Aesthesis should be contrasted with aesthetics: Aesthesis is Greek for sensibility and refers to every kind of sensing, belief and perception [1], while aesthetics refers to the Eurocentric branch of philosophy that deals primarily with conceptions of beauty in art [2]. Thus, part of Mignolo's decolonial project comes from the conceptualisation of "aesthesis" as a counter-paradigm of Western aesthetics, which is seen as a part of the colonial matrix of power. Importantly, decolonial aesthesis is not just confined to art. It seeks to validate the pluralistic sensings and perceptions that we have of the world by detaching it from the Western canon [3]. As Michelle K. argues, the West has colonised certain forms of aesthesis and coloniality today lives on through "the captivation of the eyes, the training of the taste, by unwritten rules of thumb" [4]. She highlights how even our perceptions of the most innocuous things such as art, language and nature have been tainted by Western ideas of what is good, valuable and beautiful in the world [5]. Everything Western and Modern seems to be imbued with more history, meaning, and value than the Local and Indigenous. Compared to Western flowers that have had poems written about them, "no one writes about the ixoras that grew in your old neighbourhood", she writes [6]. On that note, this segment will explore how decolonial aesthesis can play out in three very basic aspects of our lives: art and heritage, food, and beauty standards.

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Protected Pasts, Forgone Futures

SARAH AND HAZEEM

A LIVING MEMORY: COLONIAL GARDENS

The botanic garden is a historical institution that played a key role in expanding the colonial enterprise. Singapore's Botanic Gardens is one of the many gardens remaining in former British colonies that comprise this institution, which was originally devoted to the scientific study of economically valuable plants. Other colonial enterprises included Cape Town, London, Sydney and Calcutta. These colonial enterprises were crucial in driving the economic engine of the British Empire where agriculture could be harnessed to gain profits within the region. Industries based on the plantation crops such as cinchona and rubber were integral to the British Empire's wealth.

In Singapore, the Botanic Gardens was important in exporting precious rubber within Southeast Asia where pioneering work began in the late 1880s and set the foundation for the 20th century rubber boom [1]. Singapore's Botanic Gardens was an outpost in the network of botanical stations that stemmed from Kew Gardens in Britain and spanned Jamaica to Fiji.From this network, the British colonial planters gained crucial knowledge about cutting-edge methods of cultivation, furthering the Empire's commercial growth.Rubber seedlings were smuggled from the Amazon Basin, ending Latin America's natural monopoly in rubber and turning Singapore into the "rubber capital of the world" by the 1940s, though the economic benefits of course went solely to the colonial planters and not the locals, who were exploited as labourers [2].

[A]

SINGAPORE BOTANIC GARDENS: HERITAGE AND IDENTITY?

Singapore's Botanic Gardens remain a physical relic of our colonial past. While the awareness of colonial history is not in itself negative, there is a disproportionate share of colonial heritage within national consciousness. Colonial heritage is anti-local and creates a troubling conundrum where Singapore's national pride relies on anti-Singaporean history of British domination and competes with attempts to preserve local pride such as its various languages and achievements of indigenous people. This adamant retention of Singapore's colonial past is a familiar phenomenon, reflected in the words of Frantz Fanon where "all colonized people...position themselves in relation to the civilizing language: i.e., the metropolitan culture" [3]. Singapore has placed its colonial past on a pedestal, letting it serve as the cultural benchmark.

Moreover, Singapore's colonial heritage is given disproportionately more visibility than other local cultures as seen with the Botanic Garden's recognition as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. A hierarchy between colonial and local culture is brought to light when the current bid for hawker culture was foregone in favour of Botanic Gardens to clinch UNESCO status first.

[B]

A STATIC HISTORY: COLONIAL MUSEUMS

Museums are often perceived as important sites of cultural and heritage preservation. This crucial role allows museums to shape our perceptions of what counts as legitimate art and history. Philosophers like Rolando Vázquez Melken argue that museums can be expressions of colonial and modern power, by determining the canon and defining aesthetic history on Western terms [4]. This is a product of eurocentrism, where "the rest of the world has to follow their lead...because their centrism is the 'best'", as Walter Mignolo explains [5].

From the outside of the National Gallery, the European architecture of the facade is immediately striking. It is a restoration of the former Supreme Court and City Hall that retains their roman-greco character. Of course, the City Hall and Supreme Court were the main offices of British administration. An article on NatGall's architecture writes, "The Supreme Court and City Hall buildings are austere and will always generate feelings of a nostalgic past for the people of Singapore...As such, the National Gallery is potentially the overseer today of not only our art but also our history." [6] (Not sure the people of Singapore viewed this chapter of our history with such fondness..)
The preservation of colonial architecture is without any attempt at integrating other local cultures as part of its cultural memory (i.e. Malay, Chinese and Indian heritage). By preserving European architecture in all of its virtue, it signals european architecture as wholly Singapore's national history and places European architecture as not just something to be remembered but everything worth remembering.

[C]

National Gallery, photographed by Sarah Chiang

IDENTITY CRISIS

Inside the museum, the story gets a little more complicated. Museums in Singapore strive to showcase Southeast Asian content, housed in disjointedly Western architecture. Currently, the National Gallery has an exhibition titled "Siapa Nama Kamu?" at the National Gallery which showcases art in Singapore since the 19th century, featuring pioneering artists like Liu Kang and Georgette Chen. The exhibition description calls it "an invitation to consider how art may relate to issues of self and community", featuring paintings that incorporate Chinese ink with Western modern art and works from The Equator Art Society who were inspired by anti-colonial movements in the region. It seems that NatGall is caught in a tension between pressures to integrate Western and colonial aesthetics into its architecture, and desires to uplift local art and history in its exhibitions.

JOURNAL DES VOYAGES

Ethnographie d'Extrême-Orient

Les Types de Singapour

Un jeune garçon travaillant dans le port.

Vieux Malais pêcheur de coquillages.

Deux femmes Malais devisant au soleil

Ethnographie d'Extrême-Orient and Les Types de Singapour (Ethnography of the Far East and The Types of Singapore) by Christian Wilhelm Allers, published in Journal des Voyages, Paris: 1913. Taxonomy studies were widely circulated in European newspapers and magazines, which were eager to interest their readers with tales and images of exoticised lands and peoples... (Photographed by Sarah Chiang)

THE FUTURE OF OUR PAST

It is time to reconsider the future we are striving towards. Modernity and coloniality, being "two sides of the same coin" [7], are inextricable from each other. Singapore constantly progressed towards a vision of a modern metropolis, but perhaps we have pursued this goal without first reflecting on the imperial designs that are inevitably propagated as a result. It is only when we look closer at the vision of modernity that we are pursuing that we realize the baggage and cost we have incurred in the process. As Dussel argues, upon closer inspection, we finally see "for the first time the hidden "other side" of modernity, its victims – "the peripheral colonial world, the sacrificed indigenous peoples..." [8].

The preservation of colonial history through the National Gallery's architecture or the Singapore Botanic Gardens must be seen with the other preserved elements of colonialism in Singapore such as the Raffles statues placed in prominent business districts. These sites are also highly commercialised and promoted as tourist attractions, as part of a carefully curated image that Singapore wants to present to the world. Looking forward, the prominence of National Gallery and Botanic Gardens makes them especially suited as sites of historical education to spark decolonial discussions. The Asian Civilization Museum in 2019 featured a critique of Stamford Raffles himself where he was labelled a "plagiariser" and did not truly comprehend the cultures he was laying claim to [9]. For Singapore to look into the future without being tied down by our colonial legacy, Singapore's heritage requires a balanced critique of our own biases and this involves looking at history with both its successes and failures. Colonialism is our history, but not our heritage.

Scene at a Chinese Wayang by Lim Cheng Hoe. 1959 Watercolour on paper (Photographed by Sarah Chiang)

Picking by Tay Kok Wee. 1955 Oil on Canvas. "The authorities started to clamp down on street hawkers due to hygiene and public order problems in the 1950s. This painting depicts the aftermath of one of these raids. Health inspectors came periodically to raid and confiscate the hawkers' equipment and stocks. Tay Kok Wee was a member of the Equator Art Society, which was known for painting scenes of hardship faced by the working class." (Photographed by Sarah Chiang)

Gunung Ledang by James George. 1815 Watercolour on Paper. "Gunung Ledang is one of the earliest painted views of the Straits Settlements...Like other similar works, this painting is not just a picturesque impression of an exotic locale-it also served as an observational recording of the colonial enterprise. Such images were often made during violent expeditions, carried out to expand colonial power. They conveyed to the European viewer the immense potential of the land and its labour force for the colonial endeavour."James George was a Lieutenant under Earl of Minto, who set up a base in Malacca to invade Java in 1811. (Photographed by Sarah Chiang)

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Food for Thought

AYRTON SAN JOAQUIN & MITCHELL LEE

How has coloniality affected how we value food in Singapore? How do we value local food? To answer these questions, we looked to the fine dining scene in Singapore. The concept of fine dining had its origins in late-eighteenth century France, after the French revolution, when the cooking of fine food became public and was no longer confined to Aristocratic households [1]. Chefs, previously under the employment of aristocratic households, established their own restaurants that differentiated themselves through their refined food, elaborate service, luxurious environment, and strict condition that diners exhibited proper dining etiquette [2]. And so, fine dining was born.

Perhaps the most famous hallmark of a fine dining restaurant is its inclusion and ranking in the Michelin Guide. As Michelin self-describes, the Michelin Guide is “your window into gourmet dining around the world” [3]. However, one should take “around the world” with a pinch of salt. Considering that Michelin is a French tyre manufacturer and that fine dining was born in France, it is unsurprising that France has the most number of Michelin stars [4]. Moreover, the Michelin Guide’s scope of countries leaves much to be desired. As of 2020, the Michelin Guide covers 32 countries, of which 25 are in North American or Europe [5]. The first Asian Guide was only published in 2007, approximately 100 years since the first guide was published [6]. Hence, the Michelin Guide is primarily western and is far from being a global guide on gourmet food. And yet, the Michelin Guide is influential in declaring which restaurants are ‘good’ restaurants. It is a Western publication that continues to perniciously shape our aesthesis on food. What expertise do the Michelin Guide Inspectors have to judge that Hawker Chan is the best soy sauce chicken rice in the whole of Singapore such that no other soy sauce chicken rice shop deserves a Michelin-star? No one knows; inspectors are anonymous. But we believe them anyway.

Even before Michelin released its first Singaporean guide in 2016 [7], Singaporeans were already familiar with the concept of Michelin-stars. The Singaporean guide can only have grown that influence. The Michelin Guide's ranking system is literally a measure of worthiness of patronage. "3-stars: exceptional cuisine, worth a special journey! 2-stars: excellent cooking, worth a detour! 1-star: high quality cooking, worth a stop!" [8].

So, which restaurants in Singapore have Michelin pronounced to be worthy of a visit? In the 2019 guide, Michelin awarded at least one Michelin-star to 44 restaurants [9]. The two 3-star restaurants serve French cuisine. All 12 non-Japanese Asian cuisine restaurants were awarded 1-star. The Japanese restaurants were isolated because we believe that they serve uncontroversially non-local cuisine. However, because of Singapore's multi-cultural demographic, it is more difficult to make any further distinctions. Thus, Chinese, Indian and Peranakan cuisine will be treated as local cuisine. Of the 12, two are situated in hawker centres and fail to meet the aforementioned characteristics of fine dining of elaborate service, a luxurious environment and the requirement of 'proper' dining etiquette [10]. Finally, only one of the remaining ten (Labyrinth) self-identifies themselves as selling Singaporean cuisine [11].

Is there something inferior about Singaporean cuisine such that few restauranteurs are willing to attach that label to their restaurants? Perhaps it is the perception that selling Singaporean cuisine in Singapore is a bad business model. Or perhaps it is the sensing that Singaporean cuisine is too unrefined to be charged fine dining prices for. Michelle K touches on the perception among Singaporeans that Singapore does not have much culture and argues that coloniality is perpetuated when people around the world continue to let their conception of the good life be dictated by Western ideals [12]. Similarly, coloniality lives on when we buy into the myth that the West knows all there is to know about food and what 'good' food is. Coloniality lives on when we let the West decide what local food deserves its Western seal of approval. But most importantly, coloniality lives on when we automatically rank local food as inferior to Western food.

Our aesthesis of food has without a doubt been influenced by Western cuisine and this is not bad in itself. In fact, there is much to be celebrated from a mixing of cultures. It only becomes problematic once we unquestioningly accept Western standards as the Standard, when we uncritically allow our sensibilities of the world to be coloured by Western sensibilities. Decolonial aesthesis is all about questioning this Western hegemony.

What does Decolonial aesthesis in cuisine look like? Must there be an explicit distinction between foreign and local cuisine? Ayrton starts to answer these questions by thinking of birthdays.

I never really liked birthday cakes. It is too sweet. The sweetness sticks in your mouth as you finish your slice. Cake is also cold. It doesn't warm your stomach, and it doesn't feel filling until you've eaten too much. I do like spaghetti, though. It always accompanies the birthday cake as a full platter where all the guests, no matter how many there are, aren't just restricted to a single serving. Granted, it's almost as sweet as a cake, and the sweetness also sticks in your mouth. But there's a tangy flavor that clings to the sweet sensation. And it sticks in your mouth and in your lips like how sauced dishes are supposed to stick. The biggest advantage of spaghetti is that it's served hot, and it warms the stomach. Whenever I have a birthday, I try to avoid eating the cake and instead get a full plate of spaghetti instead. But when I came to Singapore, there were no birthdays with spaghetti. It was always cake. It made me wonder: why is spaghetti served on Filipino birthdays?

In the Philippines, Filipino spaghetti is ubiquitous. You can find 'Filipino-style' sauces in groceries alongside other spaghetti sauces. Almost every fast-food chain has a Filipino spaghetti as an item [13]. Yet many do not know its origins. It is based on the Bolognese spaghetti with its tomato-based red sauce and finely-chopped beef and pork. The Bolognese spaghetti in turn is regarded as an inauthentic part of Italian cuisine because it is derived from the Tagliatelle al Ragu Bolognese and likely invented by Italian immigrants in the United States [14]. Filipino spaghetti started with the popularization of the Bolognese spaghetti during the American occupation of the Philippines in the early 19th century. But Filipino spaghetti's modern incarnation developed during and after the Second World War when the lack of tomatoes compelled Filipina chemist Maria Orosa to invent banana-based ketchup [15]. After the war, Filipino spaghetti became increasingly popular because it was easy to make, and it required inexpensive ingredients.

Filipino spaghetti is an acculturation of the Bolognese spaghetti, which I believe makes it a mode of decolonial aesthesis. Decolonial aesthesis is defined as the resistance to the standards of what cuisine ought to be as imposed by coloniality. Coloniality dictated that we must preserve the ingredients and form of the Bolognese spaghetti. It must preserve its distinction in opposition to the rest of Filipino culture. It is Western. It is foreign.

Instead, we see the opposite effect in the development of the Filipino spaghetti. The scarcity of tomatoes during the war eventually gave way for the sauce to be made from the abundant and innovative banana ketchup. The expensive beef meatballs gave way to the common pork-based giniling or picadillo introduced by the Spanish. In some variants, the Filipino spaghetti also comes with sliced hotdogs brought by the Americans. It is not imitation because it does not seek to replicate the smell and taste Bolognese spaghetti has. It does not pretend to be a local variant of the Bolognese spaghetti because it does not beg to be seen as authentic. It does not challenge the acceptance of Bolognese spaghetti because it does not seek to be seen as superior to the Bolognese spaghetti. The form may be similar to any other pasta/dry noodle dish, but it does not have the sauce nor the meat the Bolognese pasta has. Rather, it is an adaptation owing to what ingredients are available and what taste profile most people in the local community want. It is a reflection of the active choice of a community to embrace a once foreign food into its own culture. There is Filipino spaghetti on birthdays because we like it.

But in a globalized time where ingredients are abundant to recreate authentic Italian Bolognese spaghetti, there is surprisingly no decline in the Filipino spaghetti. Filipinos are not trying to reconstruct the Bolognese spaghetti and that is because they do not see Filipino spaghetti as a mere placeholder. Instead, globalization only served to spread the Filipino Spaghetti around the world wherever Filipnos are. It has become an identity marker. As with how I saw it at every birthday party growing up, I have seen it in Christmas gatherings and Independence day celebrations. In Singapore, almost every Filipino gathering I attended had Filipino Spaghetti. It accompanies us wherever we are in the world and shows us that we can continually shape our own culture in relation to foreign cultures without one culture dominating. The Filipino spaghetti reminds me that differing worldviews and cuisine share the same reality. As much as one culture tries to impose a feeling of exclusivity, we can always adapt it into our culture to make it inclusive.

Filipino Spaghetti is seen in almost any place where Filipinos are. Here, Filipino Sailors, which constitute the biggest group of sailors by nationality and scattered throughout the world, are enjoying a Christmas Party [16].

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Image on pg. 8 (left): Filipino Spaghetti. Photograph. *Kawaling Pino*y, 13 Mar. 2017, www.kawalingpinoy.com/filipino-style-spaghetti/.

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The Coloniality of Colorism and Self Definition as an Act of Resistance in the Beauty Industry

WRITTEN BY ANN CHEN AND FAITH AGILI

Colorism

Colorism refers to the prejudicial treatment which discriminates against people based on the shade of their skin (1). It can occur intraracially and interracially: people from the same racial group and those in different races can discriminate against each other based on their skin tone.

Origins of Colorism

Colorism is historically rooted in colonialism and slavery. During the 19th century, German Colonial administrators in Rwanda gave more administrative power and privileges to the Tutsis who were considered "lighter" than Hutus (2). Light skinned Indians were considered allies of the British and given preferential treatment in the form of better job postings (3). Conversely, dark-skinned Indians, received menial jobs and were prohibited from entering certain restaurants and educational institutions (4). Some scholars argued that Black Indians during the British colonial period were treated as less than human and lived a life similar to slaves (5). In the Americas, the mass rape of female African slaves by white slave masters led to the birth of mixed-race children. These children, offspring of the slave masters, looked 'lighter' than the rest of the slaves. They were given preferential treatment, working in the house. Meanwhile dark-skinned slaves worked on the plantations, doing more laborious work. Although most countries, including the aforementioned, gained independence, the influence of colonialism and slavery in inventing a racial hierarchy based on skin tone perpetrates insidiously today.

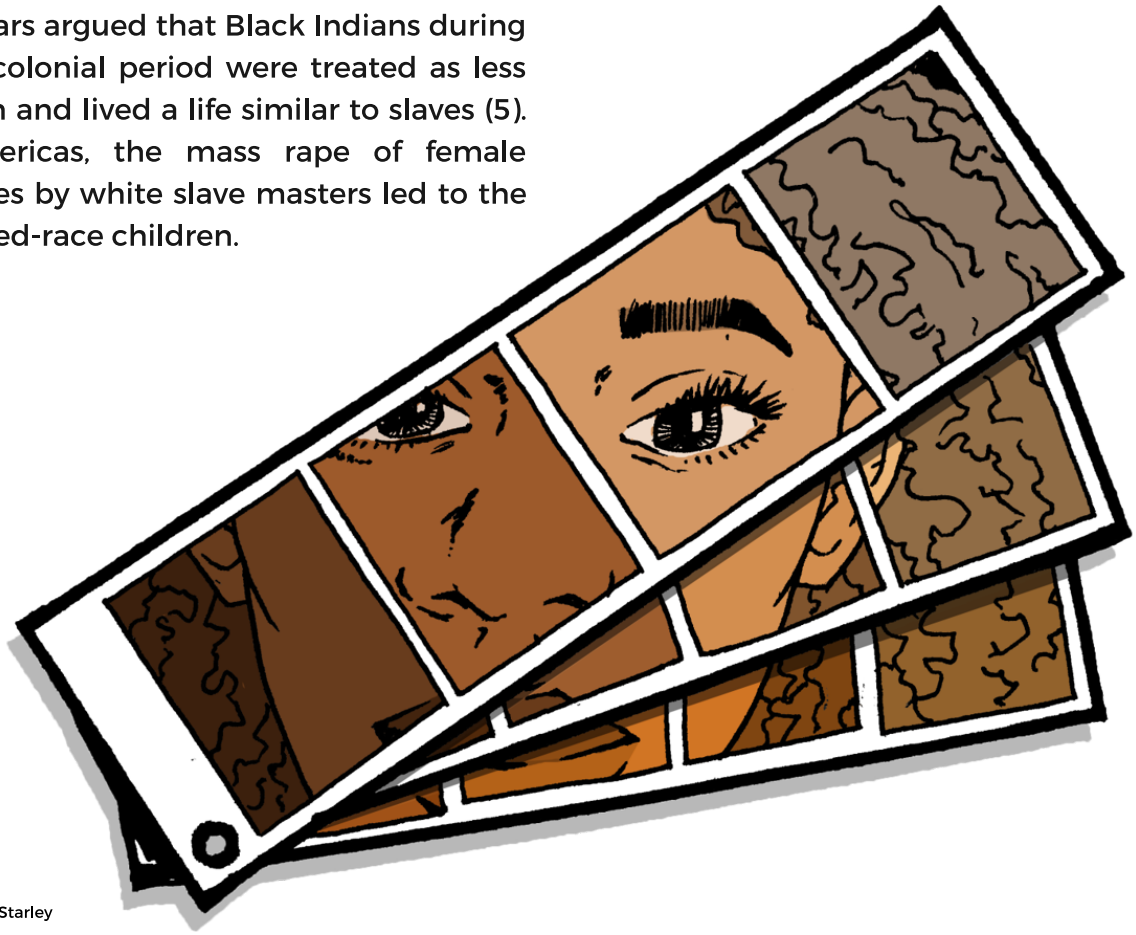


Image Source: Colton Starley

Colorism as it Relates to Coloniality

One method of understanding the influence of colorism today is through the concept of coloniality. While coloniality and colonialism seem to have similar semantics, they are two distinct concepts. According to the decolonial thinker Quijano, colonialism refers to Western imperial or colonial expansion that led to the conquest of the Americas, Asia, and Africa; whereas, coloniality is the ideology that arose from and outlives colonialism (6). Since it began with Western ideals, the ideology of coloniality highlights an ideological problem that we see today: the unquestioning "desires, beliefs, and expectations" borrowed from the West which continue to be conserved in the name of modernization (7). Drawing back to the urgency and pervasive nature of colorism, colonialism led to the prejudicial treatment of light-skinned natives and slaves. Today, as an ideological underpinning, the same preferential treatment of light-skinned individuals and pervasive skin whitening industry has culminated in the hegemony of European features and 'light-skinnedness' as a dominant beauty standard.

To break free from these hegemonic Eurocentric beauty standards, Quijano suggests that individuals should engage in epistemic reconstitution. Having determined that coloniality operates within a matrix, called the colonial matrix of power, epistemic reconstitution occurs when people detach themselves from this matrix through new modes of thinking, languages, and ways of life (7). Institutions and actors in the beauty industry, such as beauty companies, often fail to question the hegemonic beauty standards implanted by colonial powers. They conserve, expand, and change the structure of knowledge pertaining to beauty within this matrix (8). The cycle of discrimination perpetrates itself as consumers, out of ignorance or wilful neglect, also fail to analyse their experiences and the continued preservation of hegemonic Eurocentric beauty standards, along with the consequences of this aberration. Consequently, colorism within the beauty industry is due for an epistemic reconstitution - a delinking from colonial or imperial knowledge production on beauty standards - to truly embrace decolonial thinking (decoloniality).

Image Source: NCCJ

Case Studies of Coloniality within the Beauty Industry

People of color are the main consumers of skin lightening creams. Despite knowing harmful ingredients like mercury, hydroquinone, and corticosteroids are used in creams, people of color “are burdened with the oppressiveness of a hegemonic beauty ideal that excludes the majority of the world's population”(9). Statistics showed that the global skin-lightening industry was worth $4.8bn in 2017 (10). Corporations take advantage of hegemonic Eurocentric beauty standards, especially in their advertising, to prey on the insecurities of people of color and earn enormous profits.

Fair & Lovely/Website

01 Fair & Lovely

Hindustan Unilever's Fair & Lovely occupies 80% market share of India's 270 billion rupees ($3.5 billion) skin-lightening industry (11). Launched in 1975, it sells products throughout Asia. The company’s marketing implies that dark skin needs ‘fixing,’ and whiter skin equates self-confidence and beauty. Unilever claimed that "90% of Indian women use whiteners because it is aspirational, like losing weight. Fair skin is, like education, "regarded as a social and economic step up” (12). This prejudice against individuals with darker skin tones, reinforced during the European colonization of Asia is prevalent in Asia to this day. Fair & Lovely’s marketing, by continuing to privilege light skin, reinforces colorism and fails to question the beauty standards borrowed from the West during India's colonial past.

02 Natural Fairness

Nivea/Website

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), skin-whitening products are commonplace in Nigeria, India, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia. Usage occurs at 77%, 61%, 60%, and 43%, respectively (14).

Nivea's Natural Fairness line is sold in the Middle East, Nigeria, Ghana, and India. The company advertises its ability to "prevent the darkening of skin tone" for "visibly fairer skin." Upon clarification, Nivea stated that its SPF-15 content prevents sun-induced skin damage, such as irregular dark pigmentation, for all skin types.

However, Natural Fairness's messaging suggests that one must actively prevent darker skin. Extending beyond Fair & Lovely's message of striving to become lighter, Nivea suggests one must proactively guard against becoming dark. Thus, the company perpetuates a "social classification of the world's population around the idea of race" (13), as reminiscent of the placement of the natural inferiority of people of color to white colonial domination. Natural Fairness's marketing does not only reinforce the hegemonic standard of white beauty, it conserves the colonial matrix of power, reinforcing people of color's inferiority and racial hierarchies.

Nivea/Website

03 Neutrogena Naturals

Skin-lightening products are not foreign to North America and Europe; however, in these regions, companies' messaging is more subtle. Though the brand name does not explicitly make reference to aiming for fairer skin, most beauty companies sell 'brightening' or 'radiance' creams. Neutrogena Naturals, for example, sells a Brightening Daily Moisturizer in North America to reduce "the look of skin discoloration for visibly brighter, even-toned skin" (15). The product does not explicitly say it lightens an individual's skin, but its effects are similar to those of Fair & Lovely and Natural Fairness. These products still reinforce the hegemonic standard of white beauty even if they are far less direct in their messaging.

Neutrogena/Website

A Need for Epistemic Reconstitution of Beauty Standards

Recently, the Black Lives Movement has been effective in dismantling some facets of these hegemonic Eurocentric beauty standards. Fair & Lovely has been renamed to Glow & Lovely (16). Natural Fairness has revised its product description focusing on promoting 'skin radiance.' Neutrogena has discontinued the Brightening Moisturizer. Unilever, P&G, and L'Oreal have committed to removing 'brightening' and 'lightening' from their products.

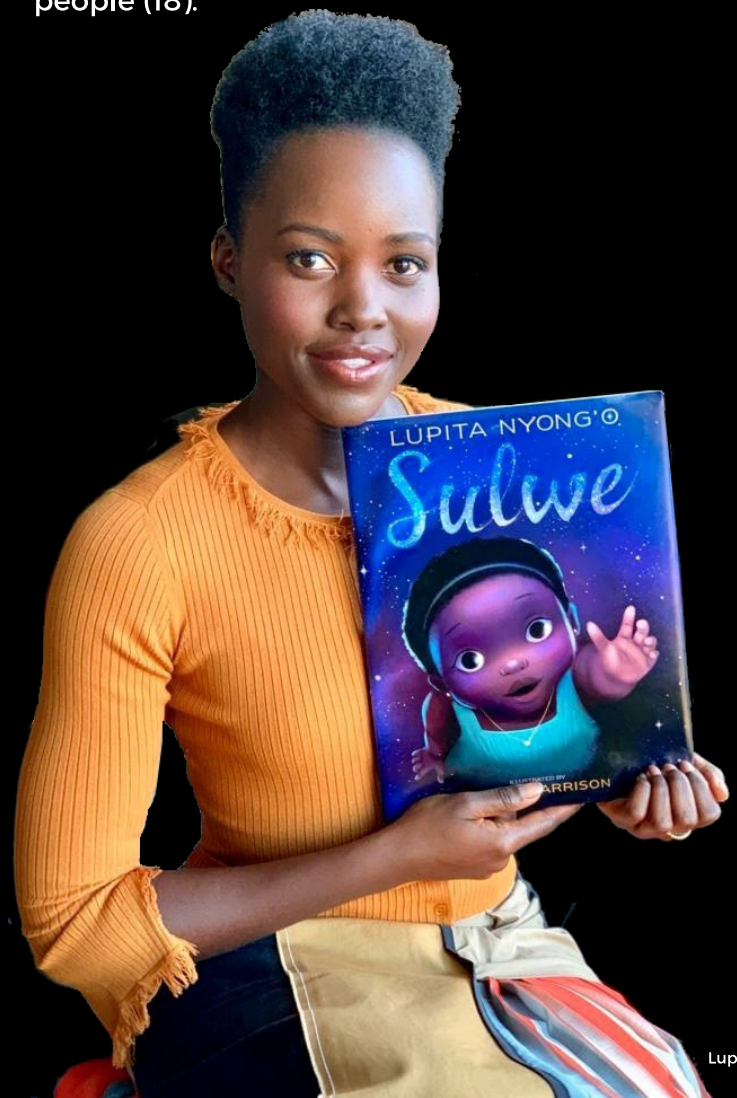
While these are significant shifts in the beauty industry, decolonial thinking requires a greater epistemic reconstitution of beauty standards. We must conceive of and analyze the formation, transformation, and management of beauty standards within the colonial matrix of power that has enacted the aberration that suggests darker skin is inferior to lighter skin.

Image Source: ABC News

Employing Decolonial Thinking: Self Definition

Overtime, more decolonial-oriented responses have emerged globally. Last year, Lupita Nyong'o released her children's book, Sulwe, which speaks to her experience growing up facing colorism. Nyong'o revealed that during her childhood, she frequently interacted with media and book depictions of light-skinned people as more desirable than dark-skinned people. These experiences made her lose self-esteem. After going through years of self-discovery, she wrote Sulwe as her way of expressing acceptance. Hence, she believed that writing the book could help children of color from a young age affirm their beauty as early as possible (17).

Black Feminist, Patricia Hill Collins, refers to self-definition as a form of resistance that can take various forms such as music, written text, or relationships that are connectional and facilitate positive affirmation for oppressed people (18).



Lupita Nyong'o/Twitter

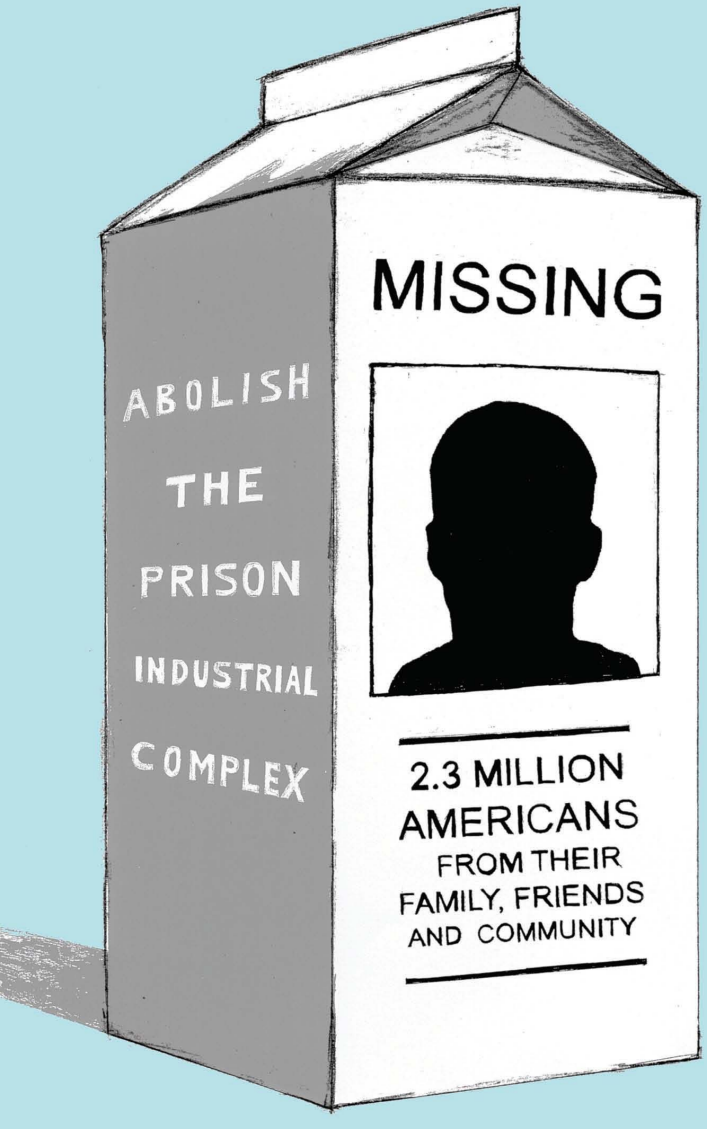
Lupita, by writing her children's book, created a safe space that advanced the empowerment of children (and women of color) through self-definition. Additionally, Lupita was able to reconstruct her own knowledge of what entails beauty and reject the hegemonic narrative that fairer is more beautiful.

Furthemore, Rihanna has revolutionized the beauty industry with her beauty brand, Fenty, that sells more than 50 shades of foundation catering to women of color (19).

Today, one of the best methods in combating colorism has been women of color connecting with one another to create a community of solidarity and empowerment. With Sulwe and Fenty, the dominant view of light skin being favored among and across different racial groups meets resistance and provides a strong foundation of self-definition, especially for women of color, against colorism. Beyond renaming skin-lightening products, people around the world like Lupita and Rihanna are challenging the hegemonic standard of white beauty and reconstituting our knowledge about what it means to be beautiful.

NIVEA
body lotion
Natural
Fairness
Neutrogena
naturals
Brightening
Daily Moisturizer
with
Sunscreen
Broad Spectrum SPF 25
by Beverley 3 Dec 2020

PRISON ABOLITION AND TRANSFOR-MATIVE JUSTICE



In this segment, we will explore different topics and case studies surrounding police abolition and transformative justice, both in and out of Singapore. In Angela Davis' *Are Prisons Obsolete?*, she critiques the institutions of both the police force and the prison industrial complex. Particularly for the police, she argues that the history of the police in America has deeply racist origins, and that this institutionalized racism has survived to this day. [1] She further invites us to imagine a world without police and prisons, where justice can be achieved without violence, especially to our most vulnerable. [2]

Here, we will first discuss the recent call for police abolition in Minneapolis in relation to Davis' arguments. In Minneapolis, there is a recent surge of political will for (at least) reform, but the state faces a normative challenge of abating citizen confusion, reticence, and concern. We then move on to more familiar territory, and look at Singapore, where there is little political will for a change to transformative justice. In Singapore, while there is no call for overall abolition, there is at least a movement for the abolition of the death penalty. We explore here the role of the death penalty in state control and oppression, as well as the recent surge of support for the abolition of this part of the institution.

Finally, one reason for the lack of interest and will for change might also be attributed to the powerful effects of controlling images, in the representations of the police and crime in the media and in advertisements. Collins suggests that stereotypical images of groups of people can directly lead to their oppression by reinforcing their roles in society as well as norms surrounding their behaviors. [3] It seems plausible that something like the opposite can hold true too: positive stereotypical images of police can reinforce and normalize the role of violence in our justice system. In our final section, we will take a look at how the state portrays crime and punishment, in relation to Collins' conception of controlling images.

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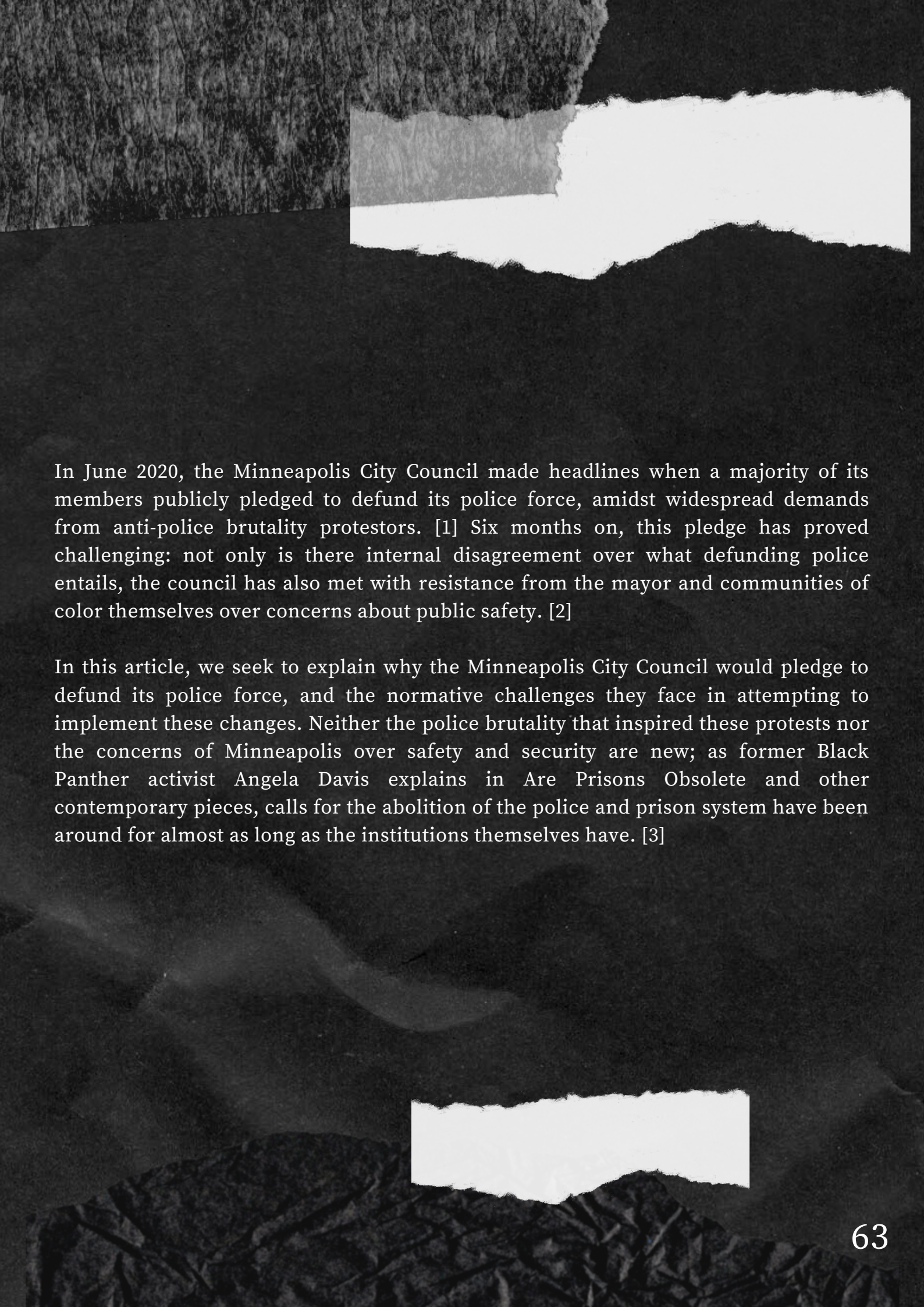
THE END OF POLICING?

An account of Minneapolis' pledge to defund its police department

BY ALEX AND JIE MIN



In June 2020, the Minneapolis City Council made headlines when a majority of its members publicly pledged to defund its police force, amidst widespread demands from anti-police brutality protestors. [1] Six months on, this pledge has proved challenging: not only is there internal disagreement over what defunding police entails, the council has also met with resistance from the mayor and communities of color themselves over concerns about public safety. [2]

In this article, we seek to explain why the Minneapolis City Council would pledge to defund its police force, and the normative challenges they face in attempting to implement these changes. Neither the police brutality that inspired these protests nor the concerns of Minneapolis over safety and security are new; as former Black Panther activist Angela Davis explains in Are Prisons Obsolete and other contemporary pieces, calls for the abolition of the police and prison system have been around for almost as long as the institutions themselves have. [3]

#BLACKLIVESMATTER

It is perhaps unsurprising that Minneapolis is the site of this attempt at radical transformation. In 2020, the U.S.A. was swept by protests against police brutality -- human rights violations by police, including beatings, unlawful killings, or indiscriminate use of riot control agents at protests [4] -- and racially-motivated violence against communities of color in general, and Black people specifically. This wave of protests had been ignited by the actions of four officers from the Minneapolis Police Department (MPD), whose participation in the killing of unarmed African-American man George Floyd served as the tipping point for a nation fed up with police brutality.

Labelled "Black Lives Matter" after a social media hashtag that arose in 2013 amidst outrage over the acquittal of Floridian police officer George Zimmerman for his role in the shooting of unarmed African-American high school student Trayvon Martin, this wave of protests was the latest and largest iteration of the movement yet. If the polls are to be believed, about 26 million people have protested in the movement. [5] These figures have led commentators to call it one of the largest movements in U.S. History. [6]

As the protests rolled over the country, Minneapolis was under pressure to respond to protestors' demands for reform. In addition to being the site of George Floyd's murder, the MPD has long been under scrutiny – like the rest of America, Minneapolis has a long and sordid history of police brutality, which has led to community initiatives such as MPD150 being formed to shift the discussion around police and policing in Minneapolis from one of bureaucratic reforms towards one of meaningful structural transformation. [7]

On 7 June 2020 – just one day after the Black Lives Matter movement peaked with half a million people demonstrating in over 550 locations across the country – Minneapolis seemed to rise to the occasion. On a stage in Powderhorn Park, a sizeable majority of the Minneapolis City Council pledged to answer these long-anticipated calls for radical change in the criminal justice season. Standing on a stage, they spelt out their pledge in large white letters: they would, as their sign promised, "DEFUND POLICE". [8]

WHY DID MINNEAPOLIS PLEDGE TO DEFUND THE POLICE?

The Minneapolis Police Department's role in the killing of George Floyd was but the tipping point. Like in most of the U.S., marginalized groups in Minneapolis have had a tumultuous relationship with the police. Criticisms made of the MPD are similar to critiques made nationwide: activists have stated that the police have historically been established to protect the interests of the wealthy, manifesting in racialized violence directed at the Black community and other persons of non-Caucasian descent. Their presence in communities has funneled scores of ethnic minorities into prisons, and they escalate situations that could be resolved using social service interventions. [9] Attempts for reform in the MPD have been stymied for decades: activists note that as far back as 20 June 1922, Minneapolis officers brutalized 4 Black men for allegedly inviting white women to a dance, and another tried to shoot a Black man for refusing to "move on". [10] When members of the Black community mobilized to demand reform, their calls went unheeded. Eighty years and half a million protestors later, the failures of the MPD can be ignored no longer.

Yet, while it is uncontroversial that the police department must reckon with its sins, the Minneapolis City Council seems divided on the future of the MPD.

WHAT DOES "DEFUNDING THE POLICE" MEAN?

Minimally, defunding the police means that financial resources would be diverted from the police force to other public resources, such as non-police first responders, healthcare and community development work. Council members have expressed that they are under the opinion that policemen should not be expected to answer calls pertaining to mental health crises, as they are insufficiently trained. The council proposes that these calls be directed to those trained in social service intervention and that more funds be poured in other social services, eliciting widespread city support for this sentiment. [11]

Defunding the police could also mean the complete abolishment of the police force: an interpretation of the pledge that has proved controversial from within and without. As of October 2020, even though council members like Alondra Cano has maintained her pledge to abolish Minneapolis' current police system, 6 out of the 13 council members did not express support for the abolition of the MPD. [12] This pledge has proven controversial outside of the council, too – calls for police abolition has been met with the normative challenge of being rejected by the city's mayor and a growing number of citizens and community groups. [13] We therefore see that while there has been broad consensus on the diversion of funds to other public resources, the Council is divided on the future of policing moving forward. Some voices are in support of total police abolition, while some are in support of the reducing but retaining the role of police.

WHAT WOULD ANGELA DAVIS THINK?

It seems that regardless of whether or how Minneapolis stands by its pledge to defund the MPD, its actions will be found wanting not only by the conservative Caucasian majority, but by protestors and community groups which demanded systemic change. At this point, it is important to note that while Black Lives Matter protestors are united by their call for increased police accountability, the movement comprises variegated protestors with a plurality of goals and ideologies. Protestors have expressed a vast variety of sometimes contradictory demands, ranging from the prosecution and incarceration of police officers to the complete abolition of the police and prison system.

Davis falls into the latter camp - she concurs with the abovementioned critiques of the MPD, and condemns council members' proposal for reform instead of abolition.

Davis believes that the police should be **abolished**. In works such as **Are Prisons Obsolete**, she acutely identifies racism in police and prisons as a structural issue, stemming from the historical role of police and prisons in subjugating communities of color. In the 21st century, police in major departments have generated formal procedures designed to arrest as many African-Americans and Latinx as they could, even in the absence of probable cause. To Davis, the police do not serve and protect communities of color. Instead, they terrorize these communities from cradle to grave: as children, their education is disrupted by officers who treat them as future criminals. As adults, they are racially profiled, arrested without probable cause and subject to brutality from a highly-militarized police force. As prisoners, they are converted into tools of production for the prison industrial complex, which uses convicts for low-cost labor. [14] For their complicity in this violence and exploitation, Davis argues that the police must be abolished.

For Davis, the Minneapolis City Council's pledge to defund police is encouraging, but inadequate. Even if the Council does end up abolishing the MPD, they have made no promises about prison abolition. In fact, doing so would likely antagonize the carceral activists demanding that Floyd's killers be prosecuted and imprisoned, whilst exacerbating the community's concerns about security and safety.

As the title suggests, Davis thinks that **prisons are obsolete**, both in terms of their role in doling out retributive justice, and in maintaining safety and security.

Davis does not believe that the American justice system should focus on retributive justice - instead, she suggests that we look to alternative models of restorative or reparative justice, where lawbreakers like the MPD officers who killed Floyd are not treated as evil men but debtors to society with an obligation to repair the damage that they have done. [16]

Davis also does not shy away from addressing communities' real and valid concerns about safety in a police, prison-free society. Instead, she sees an opportunity to interrogate the idea that only police and prisons can guarantee safety and security. To Davis, security can only be guaranteed when we pay attention to the physical, mental and spiritual health of our communities. Like most of the Council members and the general Minneapolis public, she approves of diverting MPD resources to social services. She believes that as purveyors of violence, policemen are ill-equipped and actively harmful when they are tasked with responding to calls which require social service intervention. Not only are they technically untrained to help with psychiatric episodes, they might end up escalating the situation to violent ends. [15] Fundamentally, directing resources to social services addresses the root causes of crime, which she theorizes to be rooted in economic motivations or mental health issues. Instead of funding prisons and police, resources should be redirected towards avenues such as healthcare for the community's physical and mental needs, in addition to education and community development so that the material and immaterial needs of communities of color might be met, reducing the need for crime in the long term. [17]

Davis is clear on what Minneapolis has to do: they cannot **partially** defund the police. They must **abolish** the police force altogether - and prisons should be next on the agenda.

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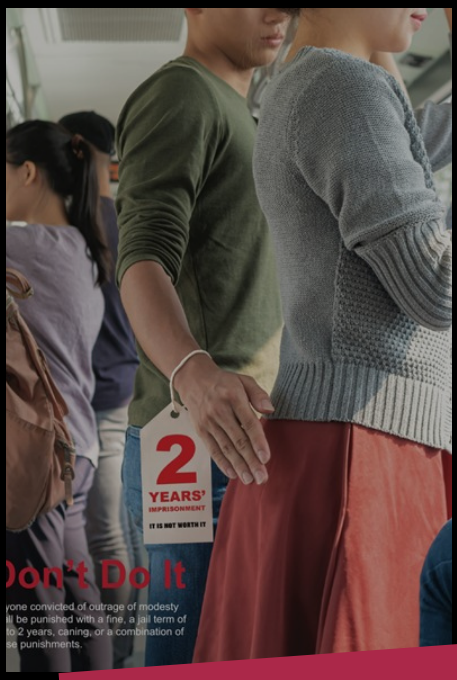
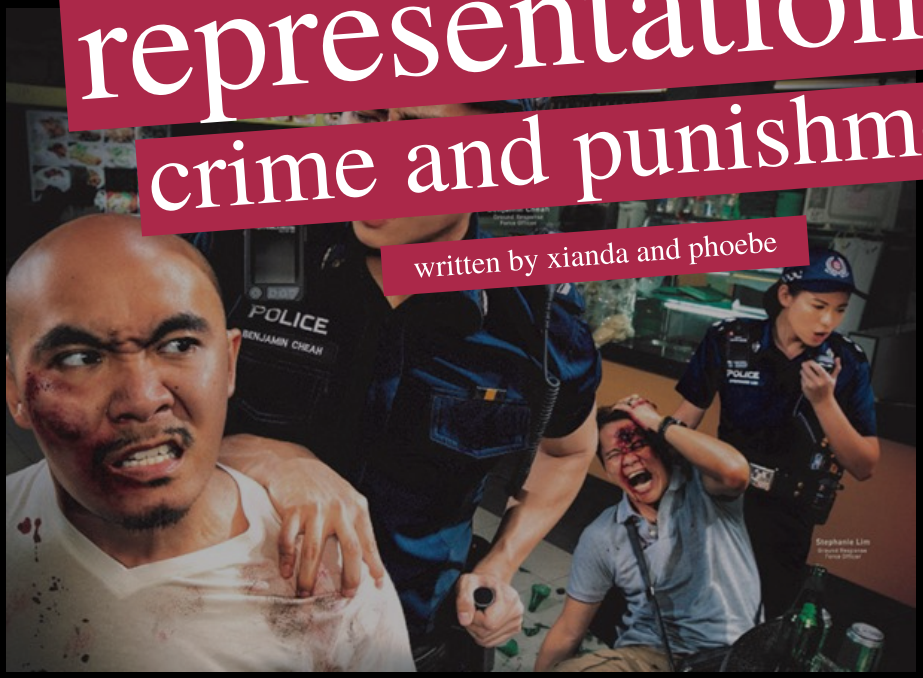
representations of crime and punishment

written by xianda and phoebe





[a]

cw for mentions of sexual harassment

SPF - 200 years of (colonial) history

The Singapore Police Force (SPF) was established in 1820, by the first British resident of colonial Singapore. The force started off with 12 men, and as it grew, was primarily only staffed by Malay and Indian officers. [1] Much of the violent crime in that time was caused by conflicts between local secret societies. [2] Early uniforms also included the songkok, a traditionally Muslim headdress. [3]

Notably, Singapore's police force did not have roots in slavery the same way America's police force has. However, this does not mean that Angela Davis' ideas in *Are Prisons Obsolete?* do not apply at all. As an institution based on violent suppression of local conflict, Singapore's police force arguably remains an oppressive arm of the state.

We explore here how representations of the police force, as well as of crime, in advertisements and posters reinforce and normalize the role of violence in our society. Violence is neither necessary nor sufficient for harm prevention, (transformative) justice, and conflict de-escalation. However, by normalizing the role of the police in peacekeeping, as well as the ideas of law enforcement and peacekeeping themselves, the police force becomes accepted as a necessary institution.

[b]

The Enforcers

[c]

angry grimace even when apprehended by the police implies that this person is not normal in some way, suggests that the person is not remorseful after what appears to be a violent attack with no clear justification

the text below suggests sufficient training in mitigation of conflict and violence, while the image suggests that the officers do so by threatening violence themselves

reinforces the image that crime is violent, and done by violent individuals

normalizes the role of police in enforcing law, rather than protecting people

keep peace might seem to imply protection, but 1) keeping peace is not equivalent to protection, and 2) even if it is protection, does not address the institutional roots of crime

vague wording: "real difference" as opposed to some sort of "fake" difference? Who is being safeguarded? From what/who?

The Enforcers

This recruitment advertisement for the Singapore Police Force shows an image of a violent fight being broken up by two police officers. Presumably, the violent perpetrator is being arrested, while the victim is being taken care of by another officer. Overall, it appears that the police officers' role here is to stop crime, keep peace, and enforce laws, again presumably, for the safety and protection of regular citizens. According to Collins, images constructed with stereotypes—controlling images—can serve the function of control, by normalizing injustice, and reinforcing norms. [4] By presenting police officers as enforcers of the law and keepers of the peace, we get an image of the police force as a positive force. This imagery, while not obviously reinforcing oppressive stereotypes, has a more insidious function: concealment. A simplistic representation of the police officers stopping a violent crime by arresting the obvious perpetrator covers up many important questions: why did the crime happen? How else can we stop violence between individuals beyond physically restraining them? How can we ensure the rules being enforced are for the benefit and safety of all citizens?

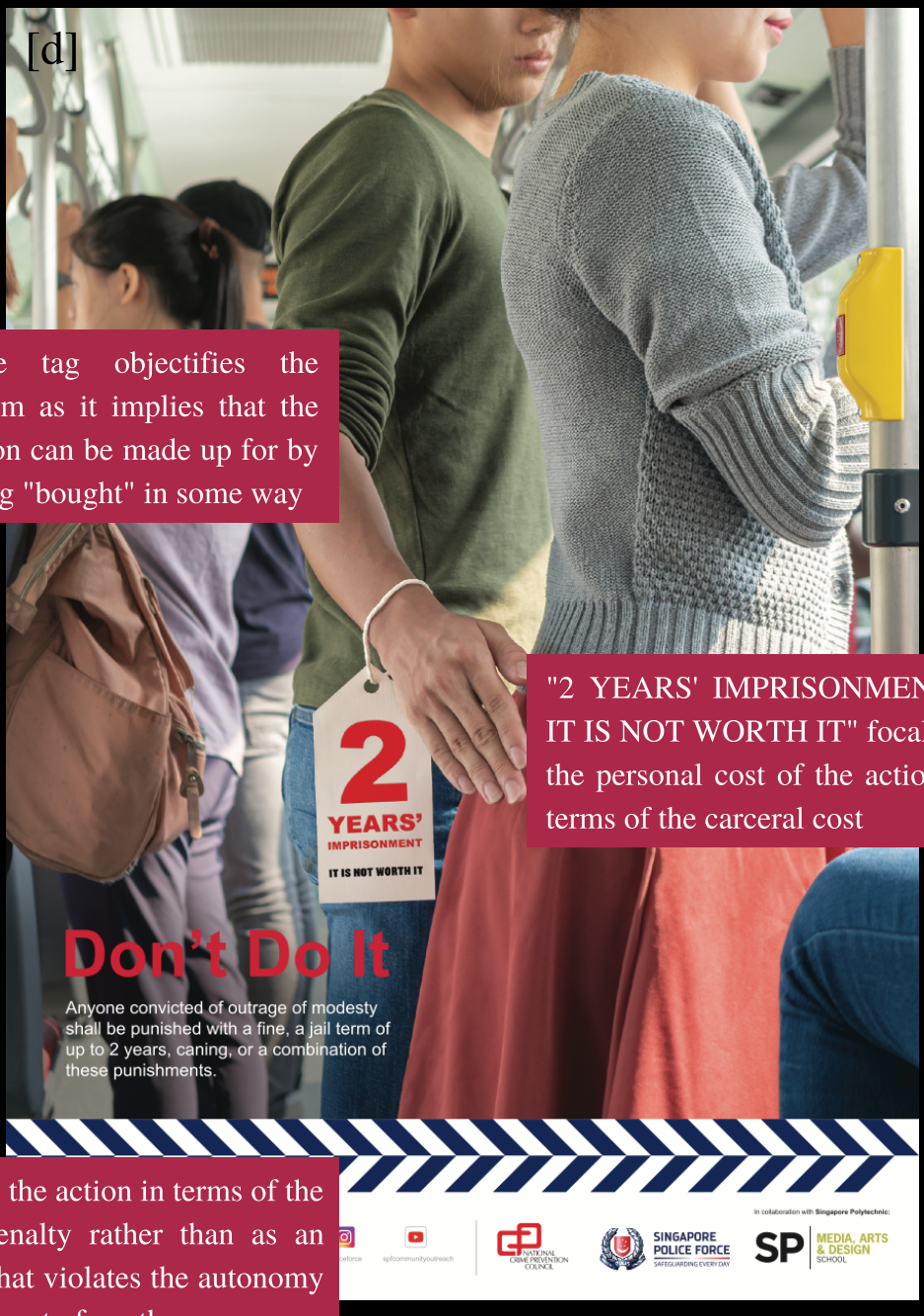
Instead, from images like this advertisement, we get the following messages: only the police can help stop violent crime; violent crime will always happen, and the police are needed to protect regular citizens; the only way to prevent harm is to have armed personnel physically step in and interfere.

While Collins does not explicitly refer to the representation of police, her ideas remain highly relevant. Instead of being controlling images of oppressed groups of people in order to reinforce and normalize the oppression, these controlling images of the police reinforce and normalize the power and role of the oppressing force. [5] That is, on one level we are told that the police are a necessary element for a peaceful society, and on another level there is only one way of being police: a physical, often violent enforcer of laws, and nothing much beyond that.

Further, an interesting note is the distinct lack of any reference to justice. The language used refer specifically to peacekeeping and law enforcement. Consequently, the idea of the police that is reinforced becomes one that focuses only on control, rather than protection and prevention of harm. In other words, control of those who may potentially disrupt the peace, control of those who may potentially disobey the law, without an element of preventing the violence before it happens, or even deescalating situations without resorting to violence themselves.

Caught Unaware

[d]



price tag objectifies the victim as it implies that the action can be made up for by being "bought" in some way

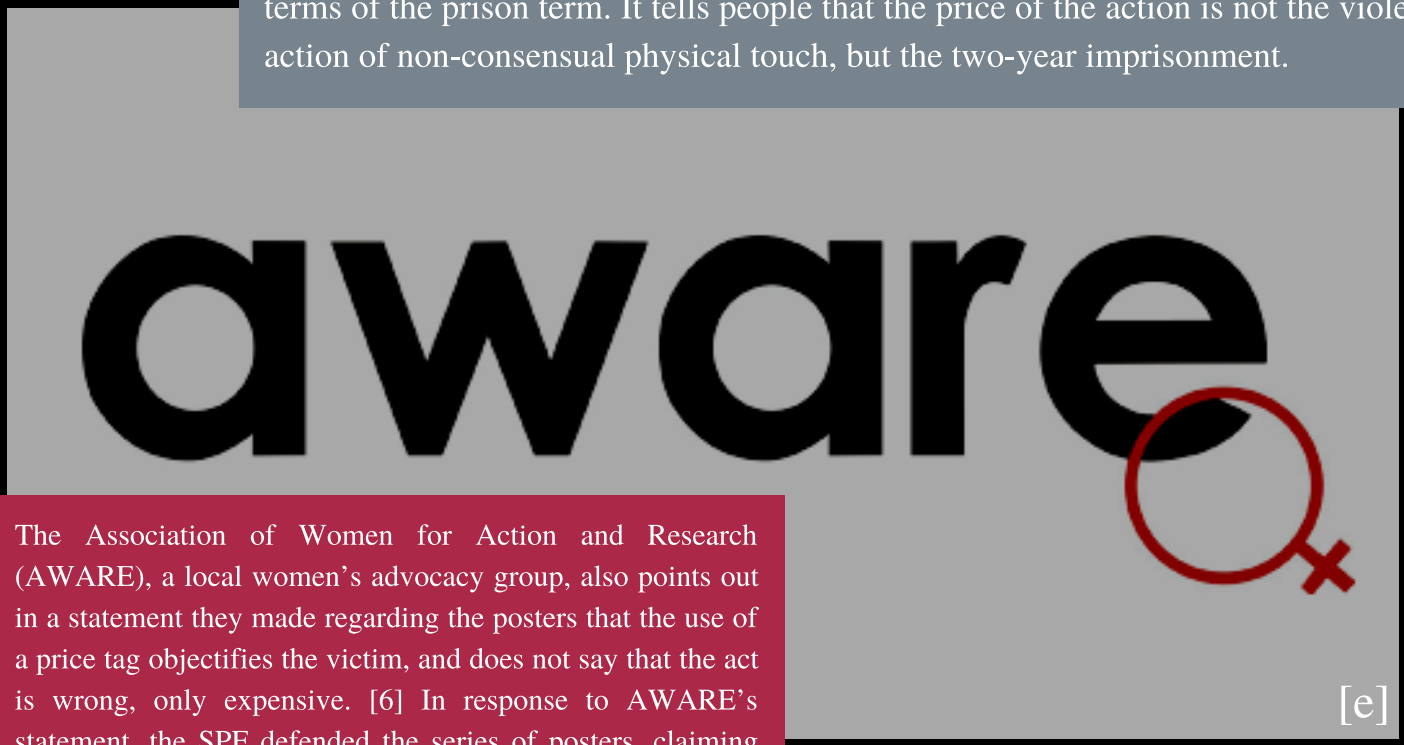
"2 YEARS' IMPRISONMENT - IT IS NOT WORTH IT" focalises the personal cost of the action in terms of the carceral cost

framing the action in terms of the legal penalty rather than as an action that violates the autonomy and consent of another person

The Singapore Police Force (SPF) has also released a series of crime prevention posters that have been controversial. While the previous poster makes the police out to be the primary (if not only) solution to crime, these crime prevention posters supplement the idea that police intervention and imprisonment are the main modes of punishing undesirable behaviour.

Caught Unaware

In this particular poster, the issue of outrage of modesty becomes one that is solely concerned with the carceral consequences - the price tag that says "2 YEARS OF IMPRISONMENT - IT IS NOT WORTH IT" frames the entire action as wrong not because of its lack of respect for another person's bodily autonomy, but in terms of the prison term. It tells people that the price of the action is not the violent action of non-consensual physical touch, but the two-year imprisonment.



[e]

The Association of Women for Action and Research (AWARE), a local women's advocacy group, also points out in a statement they made regarding the posters that the use of a price tag objectifies the victim, and does not say that the act is wrong, only expensive. [6] In response to AWARE's statement, the SPF defended the series of posters, claiming that they were targeted at "would-be offenders who are unable to exercise self discipline or control themselves," and they felt that highlighting what they referred to as the "personal costs" to the offender would be a "pragmatic" and "effective" solution. [7]

This back and forth between AWARE and the SPF is symptomatic of the larger problem of how we look at hurtful acts in Singapore. The ping-ponging between two major organisations through press releases and social media (the initial AWARE comment was via Facebook [8], and the SPF issued their statement on Facebook alongside the press release) shows an ineffective means of discussing the issue, much less collaboration before the fact to prevent these mishaps from happening. Could the SPF have consulted AWARE to ensure that their posters were survivor-centric while also serving the narrow purpose of deterrence?

Caught Unaware

Because, in the grand scheme of things, focus on this kind of deterrence is narrow. Prison abolitionist Angela Davis provides criticism to a problem that runs deeper than the lack of communication on what makes a sensitive and effective crime prevention poster: that there is no sustained and dedicated debate on whether seeing things as crimes for the police to intervene in is even an effective means of deterrence. [9] Although Davis writes from the perspective of the American prison system, where capitalism and racism has spawned the prison industrial complex, her criticisms still apply. The SPF as an institution does its work in policing and incarcerating people who have done "crimes" without questioning how we conceive of crime, what incarceration does, and whether it is even effective. The efficacy of labelling outrage of modesty actions as crimes in the way that the crime prevention poster has does the work of trivialising the enormous implications of consent to a simple jail sentence with caning and fines. Davis might ask, is the appeal to "personal cost" really effective in making a more just society? Or does understanding outrage of modesty as a crime contribute to the idea of 'do whatever, as long as you don't get caught?'

AWARE's statement on the "outrage of modesty" posters

November 17th, 2019 | Gender-based Violence, News, Press Release

[f]

AWARE's statement attempts to address how the poster alienates us from the real, human consequences of the action, alluding to the need to move away from seeing the act as a commodity that one can "pay" for with jail time. However, they do not make the step further to assert that we need to move away from seeing the act as a crime. In fact, AWARE affirms the SPF's key deterrence message [10]:

> We fully support SPF's key deterrence message—that molest is a crime recognised by the state, and that perpetrators will be held accountable for their actions. It is critical that the consequences of committing sexual violence be known to the general public. We were not suggesting otherwise and there was no criticism directed towards this.

AWARE falls into the same trap as the SPF in affirming the role of the police in law enforcement, failing to bring about the much-needed discussion on the efficacy of incarceration as a tool of deterrence. Davis' assertion that frameworks relying only on reform produce the idea that the prison is the only viable consequence of wrongdoing comes to mind; AWARE feeds the idea of reforming the police's methods of crime prevention to be more inclusive while denying the need for discussion as to whether a police and prison-based method should even be our default to begin with.

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CAPITAL PUNISHMENT: CUI BONO?

YAQIN & YASMIN

This essay will utilize the works of Angela Y. Davis to frame and evaluate the effectiveness of the death penalty in Singapore and the United States. By comparing both states, this essay hopes to show that whilst there is a tendency towards abolitionist movements in the United States, it may not be done for necessarily pro-abolitionist reasons that Davis propagates. Rather, abolitionist strategies (in this instance, the abolishment of the death penalty) may be co-opted by the larger prison industry, which feeds back into the prison-industrial complex Davis explores in her novel 'Are Prisons Obsolete?'. As for Singapore, this essay will examine how the retentionist stance taken towards the death penalty is one that is rooted in asian values, which, while valid as a moral framework in its own right, but statistics also reveal that the alleged asian values are not one strongly evoked by Singaporeans when they were surveyed and asked about their sentiments towards the death penalty.

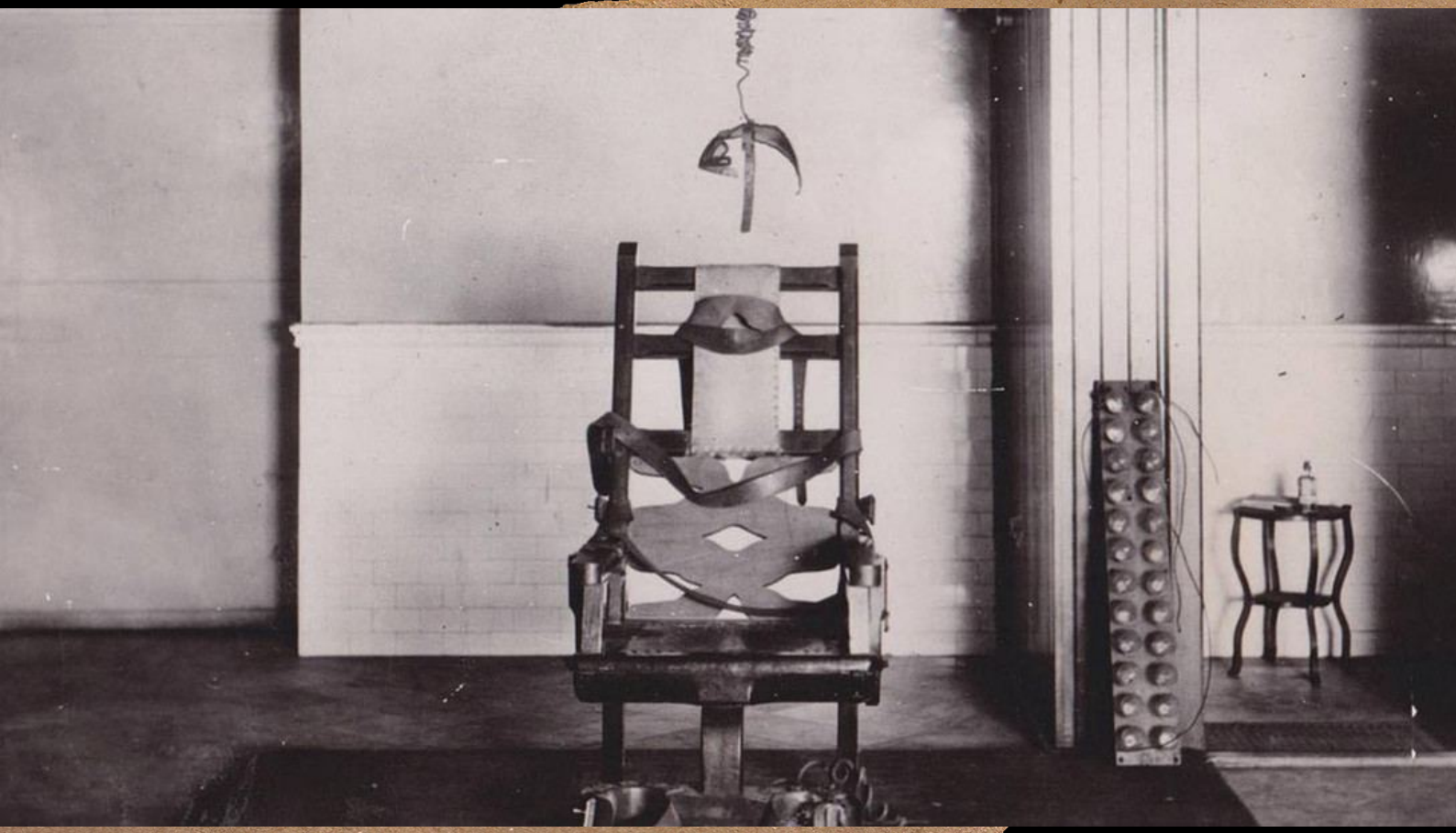
UNITED STATES: IS THERE A CO-OPTATION OF ANTI-DEATH PENALTY SENTIMENTS?

In the United States, some states have imposed moratoriums on executions, which resulted in over a third (34.1%) of death-row inmates who have been incarcerated pardoned from their slated execution. California's Governor Gavin Newsom went so far as to call the current penitentiary system a failure.

"It has discriminated against defendants who are mentally ill, black and brown, or can't afford expensive legal representation. It has provided no public safety benefit or value as a deterrent. It has wasted billions of taxpayer dollars. But most of all, the death penalty is absolute. It's irreversible and irreparable in the event of human error."

Following this statement, Governor Newsom also called for the withdrawal of California's lethal injection protocol and for the immediate closure of the execution chamber at San Quentin State Prison. While not exclusively abolitionist, a government moratorium is not retentionist either, but nevertheless shows an inclination towards prison reformation that is in Davis' eyes and in Governor Newsoms words, one that is less racially biased and punishing. Still, one can't help but be suspicious of the Governors claims, as aside from acknowledging how certain facets of society have been systematically oppressed, the following sentence seems to appease the benefactors of the prison-industrial complex, those who stand to lose 'billions of taxpayer dollars', which could otherwise be used to fund other aspects of the prison industry.

Despite the large number of death sentences in California, the state has conducted only 13 executions since reintroducing the death penalty in 1978. A 2011 study estimated the state had spent more than $4 billion on death penalty trials, appeals, and incarceration, and estimated an annual savings of $170 million if the death penalty were abolished. In his executive order, the governor said that the cost has since risen to $5 billion.



It is difficult to ignore the economic reality of abolishing the death penalty. Especially since human mortality and rights are quantified through currency. The idea of $4 billion dollars spent may be congruent with waste or loss, especially when contrasted with the estimate savings of $170 million dollars if the state takes a pro-abolitionist stance on capital punishment. Davis' prison industrial complex is relevant here, which leverages and profits off of a convict lease system that is built on slavery.

While the convict lease system was legally abolished, its structures of exploitation have reemerged in the patterns of privatization, and, more generally, in the wide-ranging corporatization of punishment that has produced a prison industrial complex. If the prison continues to dominate the landscape of punishment throughout this century and into the next, what might await coming generations of impoverished African-Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, and Asian-Americans?

As Davis points out, the corporatization of punishment has resulted in the prison-industrial complex to be one of lucrative gain, with a disproportionate amount of capital being accumulated by corporations and states running the prison, whilst the 'defendants who are mentally ill, black and brown, or can't afford expensive legal representation' are the ones who pay the price. Thus, one is apprehensive to root the actions taken by the United States to be abolitionist in nature when it may well be simply the logic of capitalism to minimize cost of production in order to reap greater profits (in this case, the estimated savings from abolishing the death penalty). Capital punishment is permissable insofar as it is a positive return-of-investment for private institutions who perpetuate the prison-industrial complex. Of course, the disproportionate cost is 'hidden' in the sense that it is those who have been marginalized and erased who suffer under an institution that perpetuates such a violent violation of human rights. Thus, while the United States may be used as a yardstick of sorts when measuring the the progress of prison reformation, one must still be cognizant of the motivations behind strategies that may seem abolitionist on the surface; since it might well be a co-optation under the logic of neoliberalism, which may distort and commodify prison reformation as a marketable solution, if only to reinforce its own capitalist underpinnings.

Some may justify that the reason for Singapore to retain the death penalty is the Asian conservative traditional belief, as the Former Deputy Prime Minister, Professor S Jayakumar, states, "The death penalty is the will of the majority." Given such an assumption, it seems that it is impossible, or ineffective, to abolish the death penalty without failing the will of "the majority". The invisible public support for death penalty also supplements Singaporean government's public stance that death penalty is effective and Singaporeans should have the "sovereign right" to decide whether to practice the death penalty or not. However, such claim's very foundation: public support for death penalty is taken for granted by many authorities. There are two problems that are overlooked by such a claim: (1. Do Singaporeans really support death penalty? (2. Do Singaporeans have accurate understanding of the death penalty policies that are currently practised?

Survey conducted by Dr. Chan Wing-Cheong in 2012 [1] has shown that the majority of Singaporeans (55 percent) are not interested in death penalty. The public apathy towards death penalty has weaken the voice against death penalty as well. The intentional disengagement from the media has resulted in public's blindness (8 out of 10 Singaporeans rarely/do not talk about death penalty) and ignorance. In Angela Davis's words, such a practice is a "Cognitive dissonance from the public through the desensitization of violence".Moreover, Singaporean government has taken such apathy for the justification for their action.

Table 1 Interest in the death penalty

Level of interest	Percentage
Very interested or concerned	5
Interested or concerned	45
Not interested or concerned	11
Not very interested or concerned	40

Even for those who are interested in this topic, the information they can get is highly regulated. Prisoners are illustrated as violent, crimes are educated to be irreversible. To the public, prisoners are seen as naturally evil and subhuman. Among the small portion of people who are interested in death penalty, they state that death penalty should be used for those who have conducted intentional murder. Fear towards intentional murder makes up the majority of the support for death penalty. Therefore, the public's so called "support" for death penalty only operated under two assumptions: (1. Death penalty is practised on those who commited intentional murder; (2. Death penalty is effective in stopping similar crimes in the future. However, these assumptions are ignored by the government. On the other hand, the authority takes such an underlying thought as an opportunity and establishes the "controlling image". Using media censorship, the government stops everyone who is eager from sharing their political opinions. It is not representable for the Singaporean government to conclude the necessity of death penalty based on the public's lack of information. The dangerous of such a conclusion is not only about the practice of death penalty, it is also a reflection of the democratic depotism, which means that the government not only refuses to give the public accurate information, they also use the blindness for benefit to justify their decision. In such a way, although the public seems to have the power on their countries's policies, they are nothing but a tool for the government's dictatorship.

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IMAGE SOURCES

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NO JUSTICE
NO PEACE
DEFUND THE POLICE
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MADE OF
200 YEARS
OF HISTORY.
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