

Spring 2007

PRISM

DIVERSITY. DIALOGUE. DIFFERENCE.

INSIDE:

Social Stratification in Princeton

The Myth of African-American Studies

Hikikomori

A Better Understanding

Tough Love in Berlin

Also: Poetry, Photography,
Commentary, Reflections and More!

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Letter From the Editors

Prism Readers:

As open-eyed co-editors, we are amazed at the progress The Prism has made since our Fall issue. Not only have we established a magnificent website (www.princeton.edu/~prism), but we have also changed the guard. Aitalohi Amaize '07, who is sadly graduating this year, overcame numerous obstacles in order to revive the Prism, and single-handedly pulled together the Fall issue. While the Prism staff is sad to say farewell to Aita, we hope to continue in her legacy and keep this publication not only alive, but also kicking!

As a community and as an institution, Princeton is also expanding. We are growing in diversity – even that word is changing form. For the Class of 2011, 10.6% of admitted students were citizens of international countries, representing a total of 77 countries. The Davis family's recent \$5 million donation to Princeton's International Center will serve to establish international students' firm footing in Princeton, and will strengthen the representation of international students on campus.

These movements at our university, however, exist in stark contrast against the recent Virginia Tech tragedy, where the shooter was singled out for his race, ethnicity, and national origin in the news media. It is through the Prism that we hope to move away from old communication patterns of racial discrimination and instead open the dialogue for diverse and international students to express themselves. With social commentary, poetry, prose, and art, we hope to pave the way towards change, and unite all students as we take greater steps towards a positive future.

Our Best Wishes,

Your Co-Editors in Chief

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(jbeebe@princeton.edu)

-Karolina Brook '10

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Interested in Writing for Prism's
Winter 2007 Issue?
Send us a query!
prism@princeton.edu

SOCIAL STRATIFICATION IN PRINCETON

“SOCIALY, WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A PRINCETONIAN?”

Ideas from a Sustained Dialogue Group Meeting

In one Sustained Dialogue meeting moderated by Carl Owens '08 and Aita Amaize '07, we noticed Princeton's penchant for social stratification, and came up with a list of qualities and characteristics ascribable to the most socially advantaged Princetonian (“Uber A”) and the least advantaged Princetonian (“Uber D”). The results are below.

Is there any truth to this?

::UBER ADVANTAGED::

distinctly male or female
 distinctly black or white
 heterosexual
 isn't gainfully employed
 uniquely cultured
 not an international student (but English-speaking countries are okay)
 English is first language
 free of learning impediments
 isn't an athlete (not the same as not athletic)
 not involved with extracurricular activities
 not visibly or mentally handicapped
 has an outgoing personality
 confident
 rich
 tall
 good looking
 applied to WWS
 Ivy Club
 straight A's
 self-centered
 from New England suburban area
 not an engineer or MOL major
 not particularly religious but is from a Judeo-Christian background
 future I-banker—has job right out of school through planning and connections
 has two cars on campus
 drinks—A LOT! --two nights at the street; more in own room
 eats out a lot
 chooses own hair color

::UBER DISADVANTAGED::

affiliated with no prestigious groups
 fat/"of size"
 LGBTQ
 has speech impediment
 not concerned with hygiene
 not fashionable
 friendly but awkward
 very religious
 no car
 short (if male); very tall (if female)
 limited means in general
 is independent, signed-in, or joined a co-op
 studies abroad just to get away from Princeton
 jobless right out of school
 struggles with academics
 isolating values/interests
 Emo/Goth
 unlucky
 not terribly involved but stays busy with work and or/school
 has family trouble
 was asked to take a year off
 asked to do FSI
 tried science—it didn't work out
 works full time over the summer
 English is a second language
 only drinks on the Street
 red-haired
 of any race
 not from New England
 not prelaw or premed
 not legacy kid



Sustained Dialogue at Princeton groups are safe spaces for Princeton students of all backgrounds to share their personal experiences with their peers and to discuss important issues facing Princeton students, with the final aim of improving the campus community for all students. Sustained Dialogue supports the *Prism* magazine as an additional forum for valuable open dialogue among Princeton students. For more information about how you or your student group can get involved with Sustained Dialogue see princeton.edu/~sd or contact Whitney Ajibade '09 at wajibade@princeton.edu.

Then, we asked: Under what circumstances would Uber A and Uber D meet? ...if ever?

early in their time at Princeton
Uber D is “regular” looking
they both have a good RCA
have to work on a project together

Pros of Uber A and Uber D meeting:

confidence builder for Uber D
new respect on both sides
find new similarities

Cons of Uber A and Uber D meeting:

awkward
jealousy
disgust
feeling judged
further widening the gap

TOUGH LOVE IN BERLIN

by Jeylan Erman '08

“We are poor, but sexy.” When Berlin’s beloved mayor Klaus Wowereit spoke these words in front of the German press, it was as if to claim that Berlin could make up for economic hard times through downright good times. It took a bit of boldness on his part, but this was nothing new to him (he had publicly come out of the closet prior to Berlin’s 2001 mayoral elections). But how else would you describe a city that loves to party and never sleeps? A city that, though ridden with unemployment, offers one of Europe’s most vibrant music and nightclub scenes and some of Germany’s most popular festivals like techno-lovers’ Love Parade. What is true is that life in Berlin is utterly naked, wonderfully free, and down-to-the-core raw. It’s where everyone seems not to give a damn about who you are but rather how you are. Yes, Berlin is probably one of the least pretentious cities out there.

That being said, it would be highly understated to say my study abroad experience in Berlin was unusual (not that anyone would imagine anything otherwise in

a city whose fate in world history was decided almost three decades ago). I arrived in the city with an overly romanticized vision of a city whose dark past was still gravely lingering over it. As my train road into East Berlin, the cloudy sky, the gray apartment complexes, and—though most probably imagined—eeriness of the people on the train gave me this overwhelming sense that the city was still afflicted with memories of its past. But I couldn’t have been more deceived. Instead, I came to find the city charming and optimistic. There was always something new to look forward to; something always seemed to be going on. Art exhibits, ballet, theatre... museums, orchestra concerts, flea markets. Every week I explored a new music venue or met up with friends at a club or hookah bar in the young, hip districts of Mitte or Prenzlauer Berg. With most tickets at just 10 Euros and cheap but delicious ethnic food everywhere, I reveled in the inexpensiveness of the lifestyle, something New York City could never claim.

Social Commentary

While people fall in love with Paris and Rome at first sight, the same couldn't be said for Berlin. For one thing, the city is covered in graffiti. That every apartment and office building, every subway station and train, every street corner and sidewalk will inevitably be touched by graffiti has become a simple fact of life (in spite of the hard efforts of the German street police, ingenious as they are). Also, some of the most hideous architectural contraptions on earth, I believe, are found in Berlin. The city's biggest mistake was, without question, the Plattenbauten, dismally plain concrete apartments that provided cheap housing in DDR times. How Berliners can continue to tolerate anything that adds no color to such a colorful city is mind-boggling to me. Also, Berliners aren't particularly friendly nor does their reputation attempt to disagree. To enjoy Berlin takes a little work. That is to say, in Berlin, it's not about love at first sight but tough love; you've simply just got to earn its pleasures.

But I found that searching for Berlin's real gems was well worth the effort—and patience. It turns out that my favorite places in Berlin weren't the tourist-flooded hot spots like the futuristic Sony Center or the ritzy KaDeWe shopping mall but rather old, forgotten parks or monuments like Viktoria Park or the Soviet Memorial in Treptow Park. One of my favorite memories took place on the last Saturday before I left for the States. Taking advantage of the sunny weather—a rarity in Berlin—I adventurously took off with my bike to explore

“To enjoy Berlin takes a little work. That is to say, in Berlin, it's not about love at first sight but tough love; you've simply just got to earn its pleasures.”

some of the sights of the city that I often missed from riding the underground U-bahn everyday. An hour later, I ended up along the river in Treptow Park, the heart of East Berlin. It was breathtaking: the green expanses of meadow, the glittering ponds that seemed to await me at every turn, the somber grandeur of the Soviet Memorial. I had this wonderful feeling of having just uncovered Berlin's greatest treasure and scoffed at the fact that it took me almost six months to find it.

I'll never forget how an American friend once reacted to my ranting about Berlin's merciless presence of graffiti. He curtly responded: “I think it's a great

strategy; it keeps the city from being discovered!” He had a point. Berlin is a city for those who can look beneath the surface for life's thrills—who don't depend on the glitz and glam of shopping malls and main avenues to enjoy a city. Whether or not the all-encompassing

“Berlin is a city for those who can look beneath the surface for life's thrills—who don't depend on the glitz and glam of shopping malls and main avenues to enjoy a city.”

graffiti has played a hand in protecting the city from hungry commercial and real-estate developers, I'm not quite sure. What is certain, for me at least, is that it reinforces what makes Berlin so Berlin: a city that cannot be enjoyed from without but from within.

Jeylan Erman '08 is a junior Economics major from Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. Jeylan's passion for cultures and languages has led her to pursue her freshman year summer in Istanbul, Turkey and her sophomore spring semester in Berlin, Germany. At Princeton, she is a project coordinator for the Big Brothers/Sisters program and is a performer for Raks Odalisque.

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THE MYTH OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN STUDIES

by Cindy Hong '09

“You’re getting a certificate in what?” My friends scoff in disbelief when they hear that I’m pursuing a certificate in African-American Studies. After all, I’m not what they envision as the typical African-American Studies student: I’m Asian and grew up in a suburban neighborhood.

Unfortunately, there seems to be an overwhelming perception on campus that only black students take African-American studies courses. While studying during midterm week, I overheard a group of friends discussing the AAS course, “Race, Class and Intelligence in America:.” “Isn’t it mostly black people?” one asked. “Surprisingly no,” the other knowingly replied, “The higher level AAS classes are the ones that only black students take.”

But are all those perceptions really true? African-American Studies is the only program at Princeton that is explicitly centered around a racial American minority. By simply existing, it makes the statement that there’s something intrinsically unique about the African-American experience. However, it can be the most legitimate with as diverse a student body as possible. Therefore, we should be worried if the sole department that could be construed to represent a racial minority is not actually diverse. Senior Woodrow Wilson major Alice Abrokwa, an AAS certificate candidate, says “I think the classes are becoming more and more diverse, especially for the core class, AAS 201. The center has really stellar professors, and I’m always glad to see students of all backgrounds taking AAS classes.”

As with all perceptions, there is a kernel of truth behind the one that only a limited fraction of the student body takes AAS courses. Although the Center for African-American studies – like all departments – does not keep numbers on the racial composition of students who take their courses, however, anecdotal evidence suggests that some classes do have awkward splits in their diversity ratios. History major David Smart '09, a member of the Black Students’ Union, estimates that about 85% of his “Introduction to African-American Studies” course was black. Furthermore, a quick search

of students who listed “African-American Studies” as certificates on their Facebook profiles revealed that the overwhelming majority of students are African-American.

At the same time, the opposite is also true. The only AAS course I’ve taken, “Disaster, Race, and American Politics,” was the most diverse course of its size I had ever taken. Professor Albert Raboteau says that from his experience of seminars there also hasn’t been any noticeable pattern in the diversity of its students. Indeed African-American Studies courses are also some of the most diverse on campus. What is most surprising is that this level of diversity surprises students. What is of more concern is that other departments are not as diverse and that the African-American Studies department carries the burden of diversity.

Perhaps in an attempt to address these issues, Princeton University launched the Center for African-American Studies in Fall 2006. The new Center signals a greater recognition of the University to this field. It also marks a new step in the University approach to African-American Studies. President Shirley Tilghman’s statement upon the announcement of the new Center

“African-American Studies is the only program at Princeton that is explicitly centered around a racial American minority.”

states that “because of the continuing and evolving centrality of race in American political, economic, social and cultural life, reflection on race and on the distinctive experiences of black people is an indispensable element in a preparation for life in this country.”

The new Center is a milestone in the University’s twenty-five year African-American Studies program and also gears the University towards the creation of an African-American Studies major in the future. Throughout the past few decades, African-American professors – Toni Morrison, Cornel West, and Melissa Harris-Lacewell, to name a few – have been notable University hirers. It is no surprise that the announcement of the new Center coincides with public statements about the University’s goals to recruit a more diverse student body as well. Professor Valerie Smith, who was not available for comment on this article, stated that “This expansion will enable us to appoint faculty in fields where African American studies scholarship has historically been underrepresented at Princeton.”

Indeed, in terms of conveying the message that President Tilghman outlined, Princeton has come a long way. Evidence of the program's success lies in the number of students who are drawn to the program after taking classes in the program. Alice Abrokwa says "I decided to get an AAS certificate after taking a few courses my freshman year and realizing that the beauty of African-American studies is that it isn't relevant just to African-Americans... no matter who you are, you leave AAS classes better understanding your citizenship and relationship to our country." The curriculum of AAS classes is



Photo Credit by Khang Nguyen '07

now attractive to many more students. Students I spoke to often cited the department's phenomenal professors and interdisciplinary nature as characteristics that compelled them to obtain a certificate in the program.

While it is noble in its objectives, there are a few things that the new Center has overlooked. For one, the AAS department as a whole has successfully wooed students in AAS classes, but it's still having trouble reaching out to students who don't already have an interest in African-American Studies. Although its goal is not to explicitly recruit more students to the African-American Studies program, because of its close association with a racial group, it will be most successful as an educator of students who are not in that group. Just as the existence of programs such as Near Eastern, Latin American, and African Studies at Princeton University means that students who are not foreign will be exposed to those regions, the strength of the Center for African-American Studies depends on its ability to get its message out to the widest audience possible.

Luckily, the lack of diversity in African-American Studies courses does not come from the obvious culprit – a fear of alienation by being the “only” non-black student in a class. Unfortunately, it does come from apathy and inertia. Students view African-American Studies courses as a specialty course. Senior Ben Massey explains that he's never taken an AAS course here and “I probably wouldn't take any even if I had four more years here, but I wouldn't take any women's studies or physics classes either.” Like Electrical Engineering or French/Italian,

the African-American Studies department is still perceived as a department that takes an expertise to enter.

Others see it as a luxury. David Smart, a history major, says that despite his interest in AAS courses, “Usually I end up not taking them because I'm interested in taking a wide-array of subjects.”

A sophomore, who wished to be quoted anonymously, says that some people are surprised when they find out he is getting a certificate in African-American Studies because he is white, indicating that “There are perceptions that AAS classes will be black or that the material is not serious academically.”

Before the University can establish an African-American Studies major, it needs to consider the obstacles to students taking courses in it. To expose students to AAS courses, the University could change some of the core requirements to give students more opportunities to explore classes outside of their comfort zones. Large departments such as Politics and the Woodrow Wilson School could offer more cross-listed than the single ones

they're offering this semester. The Center of African-American Studies has much to offer this student body – but only if the student body is willing to listen.

Perhaps in an attempt to address these issues, Princeton University launched the Center for African-American Studies in Fall 2006. The new Center signals a greater recognition of the University to this field. It also marks a new step in the University approach to African-American Studies. President Shirley Tilghman's statement upon the announcement of the new Center states that "because of the continuing and evolving centrality of race in American political, economic, social and cultural life, reflection on race and on the distinctive experiences of black people is an indispensable element in a preparation for life in this country."

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Cindy Hong is a sophomore from Princeton, New Jersey, majoring in the Woodrow Wilson School.

RETURNING HOME

by *Karolina Brook '10*

Something's strange. As the plane flies over my home, about to land, I notice that the land is green. It's never been green. Almost always in a drought season, my country, as a result, is always brown, even in the summer. It feels odd to me staring out the window, expecting crop fields to be brown and dry, the farmers desperately trying to yield something from the fertile but parched land. Seeing the lush green crops, I am discomfited by a creeping sense of unease. I try to shrug it off, hoping that this feeling will not dominate me for the

rest of my first trip back home. I try to convince myself that this foreign-looking land is indeed my home.

The plane taxis on the runway. I know I'm home when I recognize the white tiles spotted with black beneath my feet, the characteristic floor design of Johannesburg International. But, as I suck in my breath, even that has changed, no longer is the airport even called Jo'burg International, for its new name is Oliver Tambo airport. What other unexpected changes were awaiting me?

These feelings melt away when I see my parents. Routine questions: how was the trip, was the food good, did everything go well with getting my suitcase (too many times have I lost my suitcase on the way home). But then, my mom's next question is slightly disarming, "How are you finding it here? Back home for the first time?" A strange feeling shudders up my spine, and the green crops flash through my mind. "Oh, it's fine," I laugh, trying to make my accent blend in with those around me, "just fifth stage culture shock, that's all." At least, I hoped that was all.

The worst was yet to come. That first night, dozing off in bed, the house silent, I was shocked back to being fully awake when I heard a loud noise

downstairs. The noise was unremarkable, just a typical house noise (and far less than what can be heard in Princeton at night), but I found my breathing rate increasing, my heart beat racing. I was scared. The paranoia I used to feel of being attacked, of being robbed, of being raped, of being hijacked, of my house being broken into – it had come back. The silent, haunting fear of crime that I had put to rest in safe, suburban New Jersey, and which I

thought I would never feel again, had risen from the crevices of my mind like a ghost from its body. Silent recitals of what I would do were someone to actually break into our house in the dead of night – plans which



Photo Credit: by Teck Hsien Ho '10

I thought I had forgotten, and would never need – occupied my mind until my heart beat slowed to normal and no further noises were emitted from downstairs. As I tried to relax to fall asleep, I realized one thing: living far away from home, I had been cushioned from these aspects of my day-to-day living, and as a result, it had been easy to forget about the worst. But unfortunately, being back home meant that all those memories – and the paranoia, especially the paranoia – had been unearthed from the drawers of my mind.

There were other things that I had forgotten about as well. Getting stuck in traffic in the middle of the day, I commented to my mom, “There’s nothing like South African traffic.” An illegal taxi whizzed past, driving on the shoulder as all the drivers patiently waiting in line cursed under their breaths. “There’s nothing like the South African taxis,” I chuckled. It was also strange to me using the local currency. Suddenly, simply everything seemed expensive to me, even though everything was in fact cheaper if converted to dollars. For the first time in five months, I was surrounded by Afrikaans, Zulu, and Xhosa speakers, who would chat to one another in the tills in the shops while I paid for my purchases, while I was unable to understand what most of them were saying. People would speak to me in Afrikaans, a shock to the system after not really hearing the language since I’d been in Princeton. And the strange looks I got when they heard me speak, and my South African accent, although still there, weakened, and slowly being overridden by an American accent. I did not belong.

My stay in South Africa was sadly short. Ten days after first stepping on South African soil, I had to return to Princeton. Heartbreakingly, I no longer felt as though I belonged in South Africa. While I was foreigner in the U.S., I was already being considered an outsider in South Africa too. This feeling of distance from South Africa was taking on a more prominent shape, and I was slowly recognizing this feeling as being the same one I felt when I first saw those green crops.

My mom, hugging me before I disappeared into the airport, asked me, “So, how was your stay at home?” I looked for a while at her, before saying, “But Mom, I’m returning home.”

Prism co-editor-in-chief, Karolina Brook '10 (kbrook@princeton.edu) comes from Johannesburg, South Africa. She is an active member on the OWL (Organization of Women Leaders) board as Community Service Chair, and on SHAB (Student Health Advisory Board). She is involved in Sustained Dialogue and participates in community service by learning American Sign Language to communicate with students in the Katzenbach School of the Deaf.

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- THR 331 Special Topics: Albee on Albee
- THR 401 Advanced Studies in Acting: Scene Study and Style
- THR 411 Directing Workshop

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- VIS 231 Ceramics
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- VIS 303 Intermediate/Advance Painting
- VIS 312 Introduction to Color Photography
- VIS 315 Digital Photography
- VIS 343 Major Filmmakers
- VIS 361 Intermediate Video & Film Production
- VIS 392 Issues in Contemporary Art
- VIS 401 Advanced Drawing
- VIS 442 Film Theory

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A BETTER UNDERSTANDING

by Isabel Wojtowicz '10

As I am sitting at the table with my Polish grandmother, Babcia, my uncle says something in Polish; I do not comprehend. My mother comments in Spanish how much she likes the food; only my sister and I understand. My sister makes a joke in English; my cousins and I are the only ones who laugh. I think back on all of these people, trying to make sense of the confusion of tongues where families break bread, where cultures collide. My family and I had come to this dinner to be together, but we were separated by the barrier of language. We were lost in our own Tower of Babel, only we were intent on coming together instead of scattering.

Since my mother is Mexican and my father is Polish, two vastly different cultures have nurtured me. I have grown up with Christmas dinners where our meal consisted of Polish stuffed cabbage, beef stew, Mexican tacos, and pozole. Instead of two grandmothers, I have a Mexican “abue” and a Polish “babcia”. My mother made it a point to teach my sisters and me Spanish and for that gift I am grateful, but I never learned Polish. I cannot communicate with a significant part of my family, yet both the Hispanic and Polish cultures are important to me because they constitute part of who I am.

It was not until I went to Poland this summer without my father the translator that I realized how restrictive not knowing the language could be. Babcia, an important person in my life, could only speak to me in Polish, and not understanding the words coming out of her mouth was not only frustrating but painful. I decided to buy myself a Polish course book. I mastered only simple vocabulary, but the words at the dinner table were not as alien. I began to recognize certain meanings and I was beginning to understand my family better because with language inevitably comes a better understanding of culture.

Learning French has helped me see the connection between language and culture. Two years ago, I believed that I really needed to immerse myself in a completely French-speaking environment in order to become fluent. I stayed with a host family in France and my French did improve greatly. I not only wanted proficiency in the language, but I also wanted to immerse myself completely in the culture. Language goes beyond a simple means of communication,

beyond the relationship between signified and signifier. It brings people together. Learning languages has really opened me to new cultures, whether my own family's or a foreign one I have made my own.

Two days before I left Poland, Babcia was telling my cousins and me the story of how she had met my grandfather. Suddenly, my cousin, who was translating, had to leave and she asked Babcia if it was all right, afraid that the story could not go on. Babcia simply nodded and said “Isabel rozumie”. Isabel understands.

Isabel Wojtowicz '10 is a freshman from Houston, TX. She graduated from Awty International high school.

CHEETAHS

by Sian Ofaolain '08

There was a 5 rand admission charge to see the cheetahs. I told my aunt I didn't have any cash, and she responded that nieces don't need cash unless they're on their own. The ticket lady immediately jumped in with a cheerful, “you don't need money when you have an auntie! That's what aunties are for!”

It was a relatively mundane exchange, I guess, but let me break down the dynamics of that interaction to show its significance and what it means to me. I'm studying abroad in South Africa and my (white, Irish) aunt is visiting me for the week. In South Africa I'm considered “Coloured”, in the States I've been considered lots of things, but for the sake of simplicity I'll just say I'm mixed. The woman who was selling tickets at the cheetah reserve was a Coloured, or perhaps a lighter-skinned black, South African.

The quickness of her reaction and her immediate acceptance of the fact that I could have a white aunt is what took me by surprise, and upon further consideration I realized that it might have been the first time in my life that a stranger unquestioningly acknowledged that a white person could be related to me. That might sound weird, but I think it's true. Growing up in the US nobody ever doubted that I was my mom's daughter, she's significantly darker than I am, but people say we

Photo Credit: by Sian Ofaolain '08



look alike. On the other hand, nowadays when I go anywhere with my dad, people assume I'm his girlfriend or wife before they'll believe I'm his daughter; it seems to be hard for people to understand that a white man could have a non-white daughter. It's silly because people of different "races" have been mixing literally forever, but at least for the past 300 years, all over the world.

Being in South Africa is so cool for exactly that reason. There's an entire "racial" identity called "Coloured" for people who aren't "black" or "white" and whose ancestors usually come from some combination of the Khoisan people of South Africa, Bantu-speaking Africans, White Afrikaners with Dutch ancestry who colonized South Africa, British people who also colonized South Africa, Portuguese people who were another colonial power, Malay people who were

brought to South Africa from Dutch colonies as slaves, and Indians and south Asians who were brought by the British as indentured servants. The idea of having a category for these people is unique to South Africa because of its history, but it's also the only place I've been to that accepts mixedness or multiraciality as a legitimate identity.

While the South African system is by no means flawless, it feels so much nicer to have the complexities and nuances of your identity acknowledged, as opposed to the situation in the States where only now are people beginning to realize that it's possible to have ancestors from lots of places and to identify racially and culturally with more than one group.

Sian Ofaolain '08 is from Atlanta, GA. She's involved with Sustained Dialogue and Princeton for Worker's Rights. Her favorite movies include *Amelie* and *Trainspotting*.

ONE SIZE FITS ALL

by Ellen Adams '10

Photo Credit: Khang Nguyen '07
(Princeton 2007)



The way you round over me,
the cushion of your thigh on my twenty years of calcium
make me pace myself not to puncture, not to pound you with
these elbows and the dry knees and the pierce point above my hip;

you feel my collar bone more than my breast,
but in all my smallness something else sticks out.
Let me fit; let me bruise; let me melt like you do.
Let me wrap around you too.

Ellen Adams (eadams@) is a first-year. She attended the University of Granada, and is a Matthew Shepard scholar of the Point Foundation.

SPRING HAIKU

by Teck Hsien Ho '10



Spring in Princeton

Snow melts, sun rises,
Frisbees thrown, Spring has arrived!
Then sleet crashes down.

The sun rises after winter,
The ring melts, ice turning into water,
Swans and ducks float by.

Spring Break

At last the week ends,
Midterms and papers finished!
Homeward bound, we leave.
Then ice pelts the earth,
Newark and JFK close,
All flights cancelled. Nooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo.....

Teck Hsien Ho:
Malaysian Freshman
Got hit on head as baby
Thinks he's Japanese

"Flowers and Firestone" by Teck Hsien Ho '10 (Princeton 2007)

PROOF

by Natalia Naman '08

I.

When I was old enough
to know what they really wanted
when they asked
what are you mixed with
where are your parents from
(and no, not New York...
yeah, yeah, Jamaica, that's better),
then I started giving answers
they really wanted.

II.

Entonces
when I was even older
and realized when you've got
that many parents from that many places
it's sometimes easier
and more satisfying to the listener
to just say you're black,
I went to Tia Carmen's one hundredth birthday party.

oo eres tan bonita

Cheek pinch. Wet kisses.

Uh huh...thank you? Smile?

(upon realizing the nappy-headed child
doesn't know her Spanish)

eres morena

Through false-toothed smiles
two great Puerto Rican aunties
I didn't know belonged to me
spoke to me broken English—
each accented, ungrammatical phrase
popping from their thin, pruny lips—
while my distant cousin Penelope
(my age, lighter eyed, nicer haired)
carried on long chats with them
about school or something...

I can only imagine.

III.

Entonces
when I was old enough
to make the decision
that when they asked
I could go through the now well-memorized list
(yeah, yeah, Jamaica, Puerto Rico,
yeah, uh huh, Venezuela, India)

OR

I could just as rightfully say
"I'm from Georgia. I'm a country girl,"
those old moments gathered momentum
and finally left me for good.
I'm a country girl: Columbus, Georgia.
That's fine.

I met his parents.

Lovely people, paid for lunch—

Colombian restaurant.

Sitting there

in a haze of bolero,

in my face

three plates

carne

asada arroz

con frijoles—

my acre of peach trees

shriveled in a spontaneous blaze.

Sitting there a morena, again,

who should hang her head for her ignorance

in front of two prunes for great aunts

that were in reality his mom and dad,

just as split by the wall as I,

just didn't know.

When his mom looked at the bill,
I noticed her hair was like Penelope's.

Smile?

IV.

If I'm ever going to be what they want,
when I claim Puerto Rico,
if they're ever going to believe me,
if my Tia Carmen ever turns two hundred
and we ever see those aunties again,
if I'm ever back in that Colombian restaurant
with any comfort, with any confidence,
I must know my Spanish.

I must know it, Grandpa Julio—
you never taught me because I was a baby and you
died too soon
and so I must
and so I must
entonces (this) morena (must learn her Spanish

Natalia Naman is a junior in the English Department with a certificate in Theater, Creative Writing, and African-American Studies. She is the co-Artistic Director of eXpressions Dance Company and loves to dance, choreograph, sing and write songs, plays, sitcoms, and poetry (duh). Her hometown is Columbus, GA. She can be reached at nnaman@princeton.edu.

Photo Credit: Khang Nguyen '07 (Princeton 2007)

96TH & THIRD

by Kim Kamarebe '07

3

Fifty blocks on, Mumtaz was still trekking through the city. Her hour-long stroll, coupled with her racy recollections, had left her a touch flustered. Still, she adored walking through Manhattan, letting it tell her, with every block, one fascinating tale after another. Mumtaz surveyed her present surroundings. A certain finesse, intangible and barely perceptible, enveloped

the classy Upper East Side, home of America's most expensive

real estate. It was as though the very architecture, in knowing its prized place in the tapestry of New York society, was more refined in its stance and more chiselled in its look, possessing a self-assuredness that eluded the lofts of Soho and the brownstones of Harlem. The smell of smog and sewers had long vanished, and in its place was a scent clean and crisp as new dollar bills. While she savoured the serenity of the Upper East Side, Mumtaz could almost feel its towering townhouses look down at her and its tranquil thoroughfares whisper 'Old Money'. Mumtaz sauntered through the suburb, basking in the 'American Dream' that the rest of New York City was ardently chasing. She felt at once a part, and yet apart.

The art of belonging, and yet not belonging, was one she had been rudely introduced to the day before. True to his word, Sa'ed had come over to meet the Ali family. Even though she had known her family – and particularly her father – would think him perfection, she had longed to hear the 'oh's and 'ah's for herself. The intelligent, articulate and accomplished Pakistani man – what more could one wish for?

The evening had gone just as planned. Sa'ed had amused her father, flattered her mother and engaged her little brother. His seamless navigation impressed her; she found his newfound control a turn-on. At the evening's end, she had walked him to the door with her arm smugly in his, a royal procession of pride. More than ever, she could hardly wait for their midnight rendezvous.

You see, those radicals, they marry more than one wife. And then, they mistreat them all!

Returning to the front door, she had smiled, anticipating the rave reviews.

Hardly had she opened it, when her wide smile faded away. The criticism to which she returned had shocked her and popped her just inflated sense of self back to size.

Her father had struck the first blow. "Those Islamabad-born Pakistanis, they are radicals, you know. That's why I can't walk down Fifth Avenue without being labelled a terrorist, because of people like that ..." Mumtaz's jaw dropped in disbelief. "... You see how he was talking about Islam and ..."

"But you're always talking about Islam, dad," her brother Imran had interrupted, "Plus, I thought you were always stressing Mumtaz to bring home a Muslim boy for once! Voilà! Muslim boy...!"

Her mother had promptly joined the assault.

"You see, those radicals, they marry more than one wife. And then, they mistreat them all!" Turning to her daughter, she had added snidely, "You don't want to end up sitting home on your Economics degree, do you, making chutneys and kormas all day?"

Photo Credit: "Schools of Thought" by Khang Nguyen '07 (New York City, Fall 2006)

“Or in the hospital!” Imran had added, switching allegiances.

Mumtaz’s heart had sunk, overwhelmed by disbelief and disappointment. Worse still, her father’s torrent was far from over.

// You don’t want to end up sitting home on your Economics degree, do you, making chutneys and kormas all day? //

“These radical ideas did not exist in my days, you know. Pakistan used to produce intellectuals, not fanatics. But this new generation – not enlightened at all. They may look civilized on the surface, but their hearts are not.”

He had turned and addressed his daughter sternly, “I wouldn’t get involved with these types if I were you. Aren’t there any enlightened young men at your university?” She had felt tears well up in her eyes.

96th Street. Though she was still cushioned in the elegance of the Upper East Side, the sight across the street threatened her utopia. Swarms of second-hand retailers, outdoor grocery stalls, crumbling ‘project’ flats, blaring sounds of Reggaeton – the entire scene screamed ‘Welcome to Spanish Harlem’. The adjustment was too abrupt for her to take in. 96th Street straddled two worlds, two disparate existences, so close yet so far apart. One side spent most of the working day sitting home on their million dollar cheques, the other on their welfare cheques. Just as Mumtaz stretched her foot out to cross the street, she retreated brusquely, as if a massive truck was speeding her way. She wasn’t ready to leave the Upper East Side just yet. Besides, she didn’t have to. She had time to stall, to take a detour.

She turned to walk along 96th Street, bidding farewell to Third Avenue. As she walked the street, she kept glancing from side to side, amazed at how 96th Street balanced these two worlds ever so adeptly. The little street seemed to bear the juxtaposition with

ease; in place of covering under claims of farce and paradox, it marketed itself as multifaceted and versatile, a pastiche. She liked that.

4

The South Bronx. Exhausted, Mumtaz looked up at her aunt’s apartment in relief. Well, sort of. She had a feeling the makeshift clarity her Manhattan stroll had availed would fold to the clamor inside. Twenty four hours ago, a family dinner had fed the bloodthirst of her precarious psyche. Perhaps she had approached the ritualistic feast exposed; perhaps they had smelled her fear from afar, as wolves do a lost lamb. Not again. She would enter the lair anticipating the attack. On the doorstep, her finger a whisper away from the bell, Mumtaz looked back at New York one last time. The sun was setting on the city and she watched as her skyscrapers scuffled to be seen on the horizon. From a distance, the discrepancies of New York disappeared, masked by her salient, highest-flying asset, her captivating skyline. All the while, as these high rises entranced even the keenest observer, New York patched up her loose ends on the ground.

Her phone vibrated. ‘Sa’ed calling,’ it flashed.

She smiled. Biting her lower lip, a yearning mounting where anxiety once had.

Kim (kamarebe@princeton.edu) is a senior from Uganda currently working on a collection of short stories about individuals grappling with a single dilemma: negotiating changing identities. The collection spans issues of biculturality (and multiculturalism), multilayered migrancy, overseas education and sexual ambiguity; and elucidates the contiguous circumstances and equivocal effects of escalating identity disjunctures in our rapidly globalizing world. Parts 1 & 2 were published in the Fall 06 issue of *The Prism*.

NO PIERDES EL TIEMPO

by Ellen Adams '10

She leaned her head out the wide, opened window and ashed (*what do you mean here? Cigarette ash?*) over the empty alleyway my apartment faced into, where the sun pounded straight down. A loop of her black hair fell out of its tie.

"So really," she said over her shoulder to where I sat on the couch, eye level to her hip. "Tell me. How many has it been?"

I laughed and waited for her to look at me, but she didn't. "Well, are we talking since the beginning of time, or since I've been living here?"

"Well, I don't really need to know about the ones from beforehand."

"Yeah, they are a little further away, aren't they?"

She swayed a little in the rim of the window, up on her elbows with her arms crossed at the wrists, cigarette anchored to the hand on top. "Yes, yes they are."

"So since this fall?"

She bobbed the hand with the cigarette a little. "Sure. Since this fall."

"But wait, why you want to know so bad?"

"Oh, I don't know. See how you Americans operate." She turned her head towards me, the right side of her face getting darker in the shade of the apartment. She hunched up her shoulder and forced a grin.

I looked up to the ceiling and splayed my fingers out, wrapping the entirety of my left hand over each right-handed finger as I counted, starting back at the thumb again before saying, "Eight."

When I looked to her she turned her head back to the sun. "Olé," she said. She lifted her cigarette, caught her breath, then looked for it with her lips. "How long have you been here? Seven months or something?"

"I didn't speak Spanish very well back then. I didn't really know who they were."

"Right, right."

"I dunno, Chusa. When you're in a new place..."

"You don't have to defend yourself." She let out another breath of smoke.

I stood up, pressed my left hip into hers. "Scoot over." She took a step to the side. I leant into

the window frame next to her. "Gimme a cigarette."

She stepped out of the window, reached for her backpack at the far end of the couch, then pulled out a pack of Fortunas. She handed me one, then the lighter. "There you go, Doña Juanita."

I took a fast pull and reached over and kissed her over the ear. "And how big is your tally supposed to be, then?"

She looked down across the way of the alley, one story up, to the old Maruja in the large floral print house gown stepping out onto her smoking porch at the corner of the block. She held a large wicker basket in one arm. She started laying out socks along the railing of the balcony.

"I made out with a woman in a bathroom at La Sal."

"Yeah?"

"It was before I met you."

"Well, that sounds like a good time."

The woman reached her last sock, set the basket at the side of her feet, and leaned over her balcony. The flesh in her arms hung down in the sun. She turned to look at us.

"It'd only been a year since Paloma cut it off. I wasn't well."

"If you needed to take your time, then it's good that you did."

She laughed, pressed the butt of her cigarette up against the brick that ran all around the window frame, then dropped it down into the alley. "Time. Well, you sure didn't lose it."

"Losing it?"

"It means that you don't wait around waiting for something to happen." She flicked her wrists strongly and withdrew from the window.

I pulled myself back into the room, feeling the heat of the sun still on the top of my hair. "No, I didn't." I sat down into the window frame and crossed my arms, tapping my bicep with the two fingers bookending my cigarette. "You want to talk to me?"

She looked at me, with her unzipped backpack in her hand, and laughed. "Aren't we talking?"

"You know what I mean."

"Is that what all the Americans say? Talk to me?"

"That's what I said to you three seconds ago."

"Who were you saying it to three weeks ago?"

"I was with you three weeks ago."

"And three months from now?"

"I'll be in Seattle."

"Exactly." She looped a strap of her backpack up around her shoulder and zipped it shut, then swung it behind her, hoisting it onto her back.

"What, so you're leaving?"

She headed to the door, and before she closed it, she turned back and said, "Your country is big, right? Explore the bodies there. I was born and raised here. This is where I live. I have no more room to explore."

The door closed behind her and I threw my head out the window, wondering what to say to her when she finally stepped out into the ally from the bottom of the stairs.

"Chusa!" I yelled. But how tiny she was. And it was only the top of her head that I could see, until she grew a torso and legs, and turned the corner at the end of the street. I looked up at the old woman in the floral gown, who saw her closer than I did, and who has since lit up a cigarette, wondering why a foreign accent is chasing after the dark hair of a silent girl.

Ellen Adams (eadams@) is a first-year. She attended the University of Granada, and is a Matthew Shepard scholar of the Point Foundation.

HIKIKOMORI

by Yvon Wang '08

Okaeri nasai.

Today he woke with a tremendous headache. In the process of pushing himself from the bed, he retched, but there was nothing to bring up. There was the clump-clump of Her coming up the stairs in slippers, and presently She paused in front of his door. She brought eggs and a glass filled with milk, and after She'd left them and had given the single knock on the wall beside his door, he opened the door to get the tray. The mere thought of food cleared his head. She hadn't cleaned on the landing for some time, and it was hard to push the door open.

Outside, in the husky evening sun, preschoolers were coming home in a waddling line on the sidewalk. He had liked preschool and the toys, especially the building blocks, but he had not been very good at making houses. He liked to simply look at them, their

rounded corners and bright edges. He had stolen a few of them once, but the teacher had found out and he had been made to apologize to the class and be the cleanup monitor for two weeks. He wrinkled his nose at this and went to the television. There was a new game-show. They were making girls run on treadmills while in high-school uniforms and answering questions about the French Revolution. The winning contestant was very pretty, he thought; she might look a little bit like someone. Instantly he decided against it. He changed the channel to the news: someone had won a medal somewhere. There had been strange weather patterns in the North.

Her knife rose and fell, and the radish obediently dropped onto the cutting board in white-veined wafers. A soup for this chilly noon would be good, though he might have to wait a while longer for it. She shuffled the radish into the pot, watched the bubbles swallow and spit. She heard Goro coming downstairs and went over, wiping her hands with subconscious vigor. There was already a newspaper under his arm, and as he sat, Goro unfurled it with the same involuntary grace as her hands rubbing in the whitish-pink of her apron. The soup was ready, the radishes and cubes of beef bobbing in a miso-shiro sea. She set Goro's bowl carefully before the unflinching front page, which had a picture of three meters of snowfall around Sapporo. She had just started to scoop the rice when the snowfield spoke. "Don't take that up." With moist plops, the rice landed in waiting bowls. There was rustling in the direction of the snowfield, and she looked over to see that it had been swapped for a grinning baseball player's face. He had an ink smudge or a pimple on his chin. She offered a bowl of rice to the baseball hero, where it steamed. She knew Goro shook his head as she turned to the tray.

He had overslept. The sun was a tawny patch high behind thick clouds. He no longer felt the pain and nausea, and he was extraordinarily hungry. The soup was cold and the miso-shiro had settled to the bottom of the bowl, a creamy mound, but it all mixed in his mouth as he chewed. The rice he practically threw down his throat. He switched the television on. It was another game-show, a trivia tournament. They were fond of flashing neon letters on the screen: they flashed to him "Tokyo U." over one team and "Keio U." over the other. His stomach ached. Perhaps he had eaten too fast. Quickly he changed the channels until he reached

a cartoon, in which teenagers transformed into cyborg aliens and shot lasers. As he watched a girl, blonde and purple-eyed, he remembered something of a white girl he had known--she had also been blonde, but he was not sure of her eyes. But he could not remember where he'd met her. Certainly not preschool, or primary school--but beyond those he remembered little. There was one time when he had been in the bathroom, in junior high...? Surely there had been no white girl there. Thinking made the headache come back.

The telephone chirped just as she reached the first floor. It had been such a while since there had been a phone call that she was almost terrified of it. The receiver seemed weirdly heavy in her hands, and she thought she might drop it. "Hello." She could not think of what should come next, and said it again. "Hello."

"Hello," said the other end. "Is this Mrs. Morita?"

"Yes, yes. You... are? Er, may I ask...?"

"This is Arai. Your son and I were classmates."

"Ah, did...did you want to speak to him?"

"Could I, please? It's been quite a few years, actually."

"Yes..." There had been phone calls like this, but it had been, after all, nearly four years. "That is, I am sorry. He no longer lives here."

"Ah." There was a dry pause. "Thank you. I apologize for bothering you." She replaced the receiver, elated--because she had not made a mistake or because of something else, she was not sure.

The bell was no longer ringing, but as she put her hand around the knob, it started again, a polite jingling. With mechanical precision, she turned back the bolt and pulled the door open. There was a man outside, standing very straight, his hair pomaded into a glistening cap, his dark blazer sleekly cut. He bowed, and she returned it, not knowing what else to do. It occurred to her that perhaps he was only a determined salesman. They looked at each other. "Mrs. Morita?"

"Yes?" She felt as though her feet were grown into the wood. The voice in the phone flowed from

Photo Credit: Khang Nguyen '07 (Princeton 2007)



the man's mouth like reversed ventriloquism. The wind had succeeded in unraveling her bun, but she put up no hand to stop it.

"I was passing by and saw Kano from our high school, and he said, uh--" Arai had a black briefcase, she saw. It looked new, or perhaps very well-kept. "Uh, that is, Mrs. Morita, I am here for a conference and while visiting my parents they told me about--uh...so since I was here already..."

"Please, do come in." The acute joy of putting down the receiver was returning to her as she nodded him inside. She did not know why it should make her happy,

but as Arai removed his shining loafers she felt ecstatic, the same tingling rush as when she ate a chocolate and let it slowly down the back of her throat. The chocolate continued melting as she suggested that Arai go upstairs. Of course it would be no inconvenience.

He sweated under the clammy covers. He heard Her now, clumping up. She was early, which had not happened before, except one day--but had that day happened? Or had he dreamed it? The feet were stopped on the landing. There was some shuffling, the squeak of cardboard and styrofoam, plastic rustling.

Arai said his name.

He walked to the door, his muscles loose as gelatin, his mind blinking blankly. He turned the lock, twisted the knob. He did not pull the door open. Arai said his name again. "May I come in?" The tearing pain in his temples forced him to the floor, and he laid his face against the cold wood of the door as the things returned, a long torrid sludge from the past streaming into his helpless brain, flooding his stomach.

"You know," said Arai quietly, "everyone knows you're in there.

"We know how long you've been in there. Sarah, you know, the American, she even asked about you back in the beginning. It's not some big secret. Kano told me you wouldn't let him in either when he came over so I'm not expecting better. Just saying. It's pointless.

"I married Eriko last year, by the way. She was in that seminar with you, if you remember. I'm sure you remember. You've always had a good memory. I brought you our wedding movie. I'm going to leave it here." There was a slight rasp of plastic. "Why didn't you get that job with me, man? It's not like you couldn't. Did you fuck up the interview on purpose? I think you did. I think you fucked them all up on purpose. You know how much money I'm making now? I'm living in Takadanobaba." Arai breathed deeply. "Man, you could've at least gotten a fucking job at the Family Mart or something. I mean, Eriko

worked there. It was fine! So did like half of everyone we knew. They're all fine! Goddammit, man!" There was a slap on the door. It sounded dry and desperate like a handful of twigs crushing themselves. Outside the wind had died, and a sleety rain was beginning to fall.

Note:

Okaeri nasai, [lit. "please return"] is used upon the return of someone else to one's immediate surroundings. It is used automatically in response to *tadaima* [lit. "here (I am)"].

The *bikikomori* phenomenon, wherein young adults (usually seen as male, though this may be a result of socialized gender expectations) live as recluses within their family homes, has been recognized as a social problem in Japan since the nineties. It is considered the product of problematic Japanese socio-cultural norms, viz. the emphasis on examinations and the discouragement of individuality. Recent cases of violence attributed to *bikikomori* have drawn even more critical attention; the population of recluses is estimated at around one million.

Yvon Wang is a junior in the History department, with a focus on East Asia, and plan to certificate in Creative Writing. This story was inspired by a stint as a volunteer for Dream Corps International last summer. She can be reached at yiveww@princeton.edu.

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SUMMER EMPLOYMENT : ROME

by Nicholas Lilly '07

Your shirt lies where you left it, slung over the desk chair. One sleeve hangs out, the other is tucked in, creases still visible where the linen had hugged the bends and folds of your skin. It was hot today. The train had been late taking you back into the city, and you had sat, fully exposed beneath the sun, the metal bench burning grid-marks into your back and thighs. In the past few weeks, this had happened frequently—the trains were stopped regularly, searched regularly, and were tardy. When you finally boarded, you would find your eyes moving askance, watching the other passengers as they sat and flowed past. In tunnels, you had noticed, you would inhale and hold until you saw light. It had become part of the ritual of your commute.

At first, you had enjoyed the sensation of basking on the platform as you waited for the train into the city from work, but soon you realized that the sun was ceaseless. And today, when the train slowed in front of you, you were surprised to find yourself grateful for the shade. Outside the city's central station, your feet sank into the tar at the street corner. As you walked, the road tugged at your feet, clung to your soles and came away in straight lines of tread marks. The walk home will be a long one, you thought to yourself. The word "trudging" came to mind as you steered yourself down the thoroughfare, wiping the sweat from the back of your hands across your pockets in dark, irregular streaks. You hung your head, your neck bowed like the wilting sycamores that seemed to line all the roads around Rome. Their bark, which fell off in olive and mint-colored sheaths, crunched beneath your feet. Sunburn, you laughed to yourself, peeling after too much sun; even the trees are feeling the heat.

In a piazza open to the sky and ringed by white marble and ancient ruins, you circled round the perimeter of a large, shallow fountain, dipping your fingers into its flat basin as you swung out toward the shade of Renaissance palaces turned apartment buildings. The water, wide and blue, looked deceptively cool; yet it was hot as well,

almost scalding. As you moved away, you looked back toward the fountain. The bronze nymphs that encircled the central spire—they either strangled the horses and swans they rode or embraced them, you were never sure which—were hung with stalactites, the remnants of hundreds of years of calcium-rich water. In the sunlight, they glittered, shone as if they were covered in a blanket of tiny icicles. Another lie: their metal would most certainly be hot to the touch.

You turned away toward the market where you would find the white-fleshed peaches and apricots that sit, un-put-away, on the kitchen table. Your weekly route takes you through the small ethnic neighborhoods of this otherwise homogenous city. They are all clumped together, overlapping and intertwined; sari shops—their sale pieces, in red and green silk, hung outside the storefronts on metal racks—share walls with Chinese grocery stores that display dried squid and coconuts in their windows. Nearing the market, the ads' script transforms from Hindi, Tamil, Korean, and Chinese into Arabic. Here, the families come from northern Africa—Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt. Many of them had begun businesses in the market; they worked outside their front doors.

When you had first arrived to work in Rome at the onset of summer, this area of the city had sparkled like a hidden oasis of exotics. You had reveled in the smell of curries, had examined the stores' glazed and unfamiliar confections with an almost ravenous fascination. Recently, a dull, weighty uneasiness—you felt it might be the weather—had settled upon the buildings' shuttered windows and narrow entryways. The shops' prismatic displays now seemed somehow less alluring.

As you walked through the market's double-arched entrance—the arches emblazoned with the incongruous Italian greeting, "Benvenuto a Mercato Vittorio Emanuele"—a woman with dark skin and tightly braided hair passed you a flier. You glanced down at it, the words "festa" and "Maria" circling an icon of the Virgin, her face swollen

with light. You thought it strange, standing beside the covered market's line of butchers' counters, inhaling the salty scent of fish and cured ham. You looked up at the crowd that flowed from booth to booth: there were the saris from the shop windows, draped round the ample shoulders and bosoms of grey-haired grandmothers; there were men in skull-caps, weighing out lentils for impatient customers, passing them back their change for tomatoes and snake beans. There are almost no Catholics here, you thought; not even me, and I the likeliest of us all. You pocketed the flier and, stepping into the weary crowd, moved away from the crack of cleavers severing cartilage from bone.

You had come to the market with a list of intended purchases: spinach, for salads; black beans if you could find them; red peppers; pine nuts. Yet you would leave with only fruit. Hugging your bag to your chest—your landlord had warned you about the pickpockets—you wove toward the market's center in search of your black beans. The lentil man might have them, you thought, but they always seem to be gone by the time I—

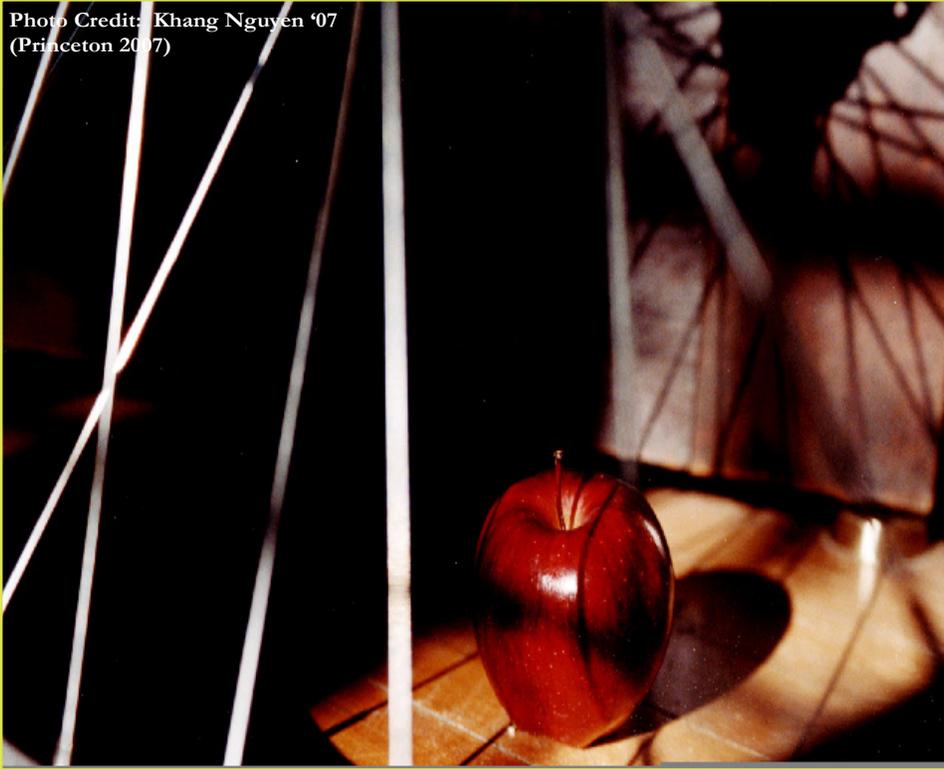
You were stopped. Behind one of the produce booths, a man stood and screamed. Your gaze followed his shouts toward a woman frozen in front of the trays of fruit. She had dropped her bags, the bright orange apricots they contained rolling away toward the feet of the gathering crowd. She was as dark as the terraced shelves of produce were colorful, her black robes a startling silhouette against the orangey-red peaches and strawberries that seemed to blush and burn behind her. Her sleeves revealed only her hands, and these clung desperately, it seemed to you, protectively, at two children whom she hugged against her sides. Unthinkingly, you pulled your bag closer to your chest as you looked at them. One was a boy, the other a girl. Their clothes, visible beneath their mother's covered forearms, revealed this: the little boy wore plain brown trousers and a blue sweater, and the girl a pink dress with long ruffled sleeves. However, above their mother's grasping elbows, they appeared virtually identical: round faces suspended in black folds, tawny scalp clean-shaven and shiny, and brown eyes staring resolutely at the man who stood to their mother's left.

You looked with them. He was a police officer—one of many who had spread across the city in recent days, coating the streets and train platforms like a wandering colony of uniformed ants. His face blank, his voice silent, he raised his hand and pointed toward the woman's veil. The man from behind the fruit display came forward, stooping to gather the escaped apricots back into their bag. He pleaded, argued on the woman's behalf as he walked from fruit to fruit, plucking them from the dirty floor. For you had been mistaken: he had not been screaming at the mother with her stoic, androgynous children, he had been begging the policeman to let them be. Yet the officer had ignored him, and the fruit vendor's redoubled efforts did little to persuade him now. Once again, the policeman pointed voicelessly at the veil and extended his hand—palm upward, open and expectant.

Headlines ran through your mind—the London bombings, still hot and violent in the public consciousness, new threats of terror, the Italian government's latest efforts to secure its realm. And then, you remembered: a new law, barring anyone from covering their face in public.

You wondered, as the mother slowly released her children and began to unwrap her veil, if she knew of the law, what it meant to her. You looked around at the crowd—shades of brown punctuated by the sheen of fruit-filled plastic bags and variegated silk—the faces not tense, but set in silent, complacent pity. It must be an insult, you thought, a punishment, a public embarrassment. You need not have seen more than her eyes to be sure of this, but as she calmly pulled aside the black curtain that covered her nose, mouth, and neck, you felt her fury as well: the mother's face flushed and burned with a look of utter contempt. Still, folding the veil in quarters, she placed it gently on the officer's outstretched hand. Without a word, she grabbed her children's hands and looked as if she would leave; instead, she waited. Then, releasing her son and daughter as quickly as she had seized them, she snatched the headscarf from the crown of her forehead and threw it in the officer's face. Her children once again held to her side, her black hair—darker, it seemed to you, than even the scarf

Photo Credit: Khang Nguyen '07
(Princeton 2007)



that had covered it—billowing out behind her, it was then that she left. Suddenly, you were struck with the realization that she had been beautiful.

The silence that followed seemed to signal the approval of the crowd. After recovering from the initial shock of the mother's boldness, the women in saris and kaftans, the shopkeepers and butchers in their dirty and bloodstained aprons, returned resolute, as if unaffected, to the hum of bartering. The officer was left befuddled, staring down at the scarf that had fallen from his face to the floor.

For a moment, you too gazed confusedly, with a peculiar sense of guilt—a guilt of voyeurism, a guilt of mistrust, a guilt of the one that summarily escaped, prickling at your fingertips and resting, thick and warm, over your face—upon the crumpled scarf. But your eyes drifted aside, to the bags that rested not far behind: white-fleshed peaches, and the apricots rescued by the valorous produce man. Without thinking, you snatched up the mother's bags and bolted after her. By the time you reached the market's double-arched opening into the piazza, you were running, determined to return something to the woman

who, despite her humiliation, had somehow managed to retain her dignity and cause you to question yours. But the mother had gone.

You left the market then, turned toward the river and began your walk home. Disconsolate—strangely so, you thought—you did not stop as you normally did to look in the shop windows filled with oddities, at the gaudy and, to you, unintelligible advertisements that floated past. Your gait was determined, your eyes blinded, and you did not notice when the circular bulk of the Pantheon passed above you, or when the streets—narrow enough in

this ancient part of the city—grew narrower yet in the area still known as the Jewish Ghetto. It was not until you reached the Tiber, climbing the footbridge over the River that swirled menacingly below, that you realized the mother's bags of fruit were still clasped firmly in your right hand. It's the heat, you thought; it must be the heat that is upsetting me. And, waiting on the street corner, watching your feet sink once again into asphalt, you tried to comfort yourself with images of your bed, an open window, and a standing fan. But, when the light changed, the crowd that stood on the corner did not make its way into the street.

You lifted your gaze; onlookers, their heads slightly bowed, lined both sides of the street. No cars, no motorinos sped and swerved along the cobblestone road. Instead, a line of monks—Franciscan, you thought—advanced down the street. They marched ploddingly, their brown robes swishing in time with their slow, monotonous chant. As the vanguard approached, their marching grew louder, their steps echoing toward you with the cacophonous crack of dozens of feet dropping down on bark shards. Sycamores, you remembered; sunburnt trees, trees burnt beneath the sun.

Behind the initial clump of Franciscans came a priest, robed in white, a life size cross shunted over his left shoulder. And in the distance, held aloft on the shoulders of six more similarly robed holy men, rode the effigy of Mary. From where you stood, she was an amalgam of white silk, painted porcelain, and incandescent candles, all swaying and tilting with her bearers' steps. You wiped your free hand across your pants—you had grown sweatier in the crowd—and felt the lump of paper, the image of the Virgin folded inside your pocket. You wondered, is this the festa of which it speaks?

Mary rode closer, the crowds swelling inward from the sides of the street as she floated past, their hands eager to reach her dais, to capture a piece of her holiness and secure it as their own by crossing themselves. It was not until she rose in front of you—your neighbors on the street corner surging forward to grasp at the altar cloth on which she rode—that you noticed the thin piece of tulle fluttering around her temples and before her eyes. It was not until she had passed, until the band that followed her broke their penitent silence with a raucous march—you swore, delirious, that you recognized in it the noxious strains of Sousa—that you saw the policemen spread behind the spectators who now followed the parade down the road. As they walked—a starched line of blue, rocking in time—they held their hats respectfully beneath their arms. You watched them disappear with the bend in the River and crossed the street alone.

On the other side, in the square opposite the row of sycamores, you stumbled over the cobblestones and stopped, your breath tingling in your lungs, to drink from the piazza's small public drinking fountain. First one woman, then two, emerged from the shade behind the fountain's marble edifice—you glanced, saw blankets spread there—and stood beside you as you drank.

The first smiled at you, leered at you, the dimples at the corners of her mouth pulling upward into cheeks pasted with neon rose blush. Her hair was matted, hanging down past her waist in hanks of peroxide dreads. She leaned into the faucet as you finished, holding aside her hair like a fistful of dirty white snakes, like the curving

neck of a bedraggled swan, and gulped the water in vicious mouthfuls. The second woman—you had seen her before—wheeled her dog up to the fountain's marble base in a decrepit pram. She often sat outside your apartment building, feeding the paralyzed Dalmatian from a bottle as she asked passersby to contribute a little money to her family's wellbeing. She lifted his head now, balancing his muzzle on the marble basin into which the faucet drained, so that he could drink with his lolling tongue. You wondered if she had found him like this, cared for him, or if she had instead been the source of his ailment—even now, the dog's life hers to bend and suffocate. You looked at the basin, its edges coated in the same dripping rock as the larger fountain's nymphs had been, and you saw lava—viscous, melting, and violently lit.

You ran then, past discount groceries, past religious revelers who had wandered off from the parade and did not stop until you heard your apartment door—four turns to the left—lock behind you. Panting, sweat racing down your back and beneath your belt, you dropped the mother's fruit onto the kitchen table, removed your shirt, draped it over a chair, and collapsed into your bed.

The city, you repeated to yourself, your voice crackling, raw and splintered in the stale air of the apartment, the city was hot today.

Nicholas Lilly '07 is a senior doing his thesis research this summer in Tortuguero, Costa Rica. When not having sand flipped into his face by turtles, he writes regularly. He can be reached at nlilly@princeton.edu

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PLAYING ISOLATIONISM

by Elizabeth Kohansedgh '10

Photo Credit: Khang Nguyen '07



Expressionless, they
stand, pieces in position
across the board of a
subway platform scene.

The rules are quite simple:
Indifferent and numb,
Remain an island among
the scattered sea.

Expressionless, they
transfer themselves in
clusters
aboard the compact train,
now with nowhere to flee.

Yet the rules are no different:
Make your moves as you may,
But try not to brush any
shoulders in between.

Expressionless, they stumble, as
the cold car jolts,
throwing passengers atop one
another forcefully,

Still those rules refuse to budge:
To acknowledge is to lose,
So do not touch, care to listen or,
even worse, dare to see.



Photo Credit: Khang Nguyen '07

Liz is currently a freshman in Mathey from Queens, New York. When not debating over what her future major should be, she enjoys pina colodas and getting caught in the rain. Oh yeah, and writing, too. She can be reached at ekohanse@princeton.edu.

SI TU N'ETAIS PAS LÀ

by Blair Hurley '09

In April, the spring planting was done with but the spring rain was only just beginning. Jean-Claude's boots splashed mud into the kitchen every time he came in, just like all of us, but the Madame had died a few years back, of cancer, so there was no one to scold him. The rain made a pool of the yard and in earlier years Jean-Claude's boy liked to splash the indignant geese and chickens, a serious, intent little smile on his brown face.

Jean-Claude is a long man, with narrow shoulders, angular arms and a thoughtful bloodhound face. Because his farm is next to mine I would see him stalking long-legged across his plot, looking for gopher holes. But most often I saw him standing in the yard scattering feed for the birds. He used to say those goose livers kept him in Christmas money. I tried raising geese for a season, but they kept my wife awake all night with their honking and didn't fatten well. The spring Jean-Claude's boy left I would pass the yard whenever I went to town and more often than not, Jean-Claude would be leaning against the chain link with a cigarette, watching the big grey birds squabbling over a corn cob. His boy was studying at the école du vin. He'll be a grower someday, and apprentice at Guillard's vineyard. "Someday my boy will have a little vineyard of his own," Jean-Claude told us at the bar, and again after his third and fifth cognacs.

He doesn't speak of it much but he fought in the War ten years back. He was too old to be drafted but he went anyway. I can't imagine that man, usually pottering about his yard, lying on his belly with a semi-automatic in his hands. I took Alex – he was about nine then, and Marie not even born yet – and my wife in the truck and we went south like everyone else. We didn't come north again until we heard on the radio about Charles de Gaulle marching down the Champs Elysées with the Americans behind him. When we came back, the farm was burned, we lost all our milk cows, and I wouldn't let Alex play in the fields for fear of land mines. But at least we all had our lives. Well, then we did.

The skies are always heavy and pressing this month and you can feel the dampness in the palms of your hands. In the mornings our daughter

Marie helps me do the milking in her nightgown and rain boots before school. She's doing it more and more by herself, but I like to shudder into my clothes in the dawn grayness and sweep the aisles in the shed. I like watching Marie do the milking because she presses her small head against the cow's side and squeezes gently with her eyes half-closed, almost as if she is playing an instrument.

It is the same intensity I see with Jean-Claude and his geese. Force feeding is a nasty business and I couldn't bear to do it with my geese; that's why they didn't fatten. But every year I see Jean-Claude grasping the wriggling neck of a goose, thrusting a funnel down its beak, and jamming corn meal into the funnel with brutal precision. You have to do this to make the livers expand for proper foie gras. The other morning he came into the shed with his hair plastered to his head from the rain and his long, lean face pale as a glass of milk. "Mirabelle, she is not eating," he pronounced.

I stopped sweeping and Marie stopped milking. "Mirabelle...is she a goose of yours?" I asked, suddenly understanding. I thought it



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was strange at first, how he named the geese he butchered, but then I thought how lonely it might be to go into a dark house with no one there to tell you to take off your boots, climb the stairs and see two empty rooms instead of the usual one.

He nodded, blew out his cheeks and one

bicycle rusting against the side of the house.

“There,” he said suddenly, pointing. Behind a chain-link fence were three of the largest geese I had ever seen. They were fully as tall as eight-year-old Marie, massive, iron-grey monarchs striding about their enclosure with unflappable



Photo Credit: Teck Hsien Ho '10

hand fumbled in his jacket for a cigarette. The pack was soggy; I gave him one of mine. He bobbed his head politely, then took a long, careful time lighting it before saying, “I knew she would be a bad one. The man I bought her from threw her in with the guard geese.”

“Guard geese?” I repeated.

He nodded quickly and I saw a conspiratorial glint in his eye. “Have you seen them yet?” I realized that this was why he had come over in the first place – to show off a new purchase. It was my obligation as a good neighbor to admire whatever he had gotten, just as if I had a new heifer it would be his obligation to mutter appreciatively over her.

The rain had faded to a heavy mist that settled on my jacket like dew as I followed him to the yard, both of us stepping high like soldiers to pull our boots free from the mud. There were tools scattered around the yard, a

dignity. Their long, straight necks were as thick as my arm. As I walked closer the heads turned, the beady little eyes fixed on me and one of them hissed softly. I took a step back and said, “Some geese!” That was all I could think to say.

“One *claque* from that wing and that dog will think twice before he takes one of *my* chickens again,” Jean-Claude muttered grimly.

“What dog?” I had thought for sure it was a fox that had been around the hen yards recently; only a fox takes the whole bird and doesn’t leave a mess afterwards.

Jean-Claude gave me a quick look. “The dog that’s been eating my chickens, that’s who! It’s that shepherd of Loisseau’s!”

“What makes you think it’s Madame Loisseau’s dog?”

He took a quick look at me, his dark eyes strangely bright; then he turned back to the geese,

watching them greedily. “A man knows. It’s hers all right. She’ll have a surprise when she sees Chloe, Marguerite, and Juliette.” He pointed to each of them as he named them, proud as if they were children. Chloe tried to snap at his finger as he pointed and he had to jerk his hand back.

“I thought it was a fox getting the chickens,” I tried, but he just shook his head, his gummy lips working around their cigarette. I knew I wasn’t going to change his mind, so I left.

After Marie had gone to school, I told my wife I was going to buy peat bedding and drove into town. The streets are small and narrow, and were slippery with rain that day; the little gray houses lean in over you, closing you in. In the high summer there are geraniums in every window box and you feel cozy, embraced by warmth and charm; but on this drenched April day the effect was strangely forbidding. First I had to get the baguettes; I parked behind the patisserie. It was still early in the morning and bustling with people. Madame Arnaud, the patisserie owner, was moving swiftly behind the counter, wrapping up croissants by twisting them in bags. The place was strangely quiet though -- normally the farmer’s wives are chattering about village doings and the farmers talking about their livestock. Today the only sounds were the shuffle of feet and the rustle of tissue paper. I realized they were listening to the radio, balanced on top of the radiator. “A baguette, please,” I said. The rebels had bombed another government building in Algiers. The army was setting up barriers on the border with Tunisia and Morocco.

“We’re blocking the weapon supplies for the Algerians,” Henry, the plumber, said in satisfaction. “This war won’t last much longer.”

“Just you wait, this will take years to end,” Daniel Lamonte countered. He had fought in the War too, and walked with a cane because of shrapnel in his leg.

The radio announcer started talking about an anti-war protest happening in Paris. Daniel’s face hardened. “The protesters, they’re undermining everything.”

He shoved the baguette under his arm and limped for the door. I hurried to hold it open for him. Daniel was a neighbor of mine, only a little younger than myself, and I had always admired his

quiet, capable manner. I tried to convince him to come with us ten years ago, but he wouldn’t.

“My nephew’s friend just left for Paris,” Madame Arnaud said, nodding rapidly, her eyes bird-bright. “He’s joining the protest. I just don’t understand it. His parents are horrified, of course.”

The group fell quiet again as a tinny voice from the radio mentioned casualties for the day. I nodded to Madame Arnaud and left.

To be continued...

Blair Hurley '09 is a sophomore majoring in English and pursuing a Creative Writing certificate, and has been writing fiction since a young age. Short stories of hers have been previously published in *The Armchair Aesthete*, *Quality Women’s Fiction* and the *Claremont Review*.

THOSE MORMONS

by Ellen Adams '10

They’d met, both nearly fluent, in a month-long language intensive class in September. In February they decided to skip Thursday classes to head up to Madrid for the opening of Deb’s boyfriend’s exhibit. He was older and painted landscapes that neither of the young women cared for too much, but he had wonderful poet friends who liked to dance. They wrote love poems on napkins to Mariah when they got drunk.

As they lined up to load into the ten o’clock bus, the wind picked up and a handsome young man with thick eyebrows and brown leather shoes stepped forward towards them and said, with words heavily weighted with Castilian, “We have mass in English too.” Deb turned away. The leaflet he then handed to Mariah was printed on thin paper with the words “La palabra de Dios como Cristo nos enseña¹” written on its cover in Old English script. Mariah said, “Graciá,” and boarded the bus.

They found their seats halfway down the aisle of the bus. Deb took the window, and Mariah pushed the backpack they shared for the trip up into the overhead shelf. Sitting down, flattening the leaflet against her thigh, she said, “I had a crush on a Mormon once.”

“Yeah?” Deb said, turning from the window to look at Mariah. “Was he tall and blonde and good at basketball?”

“I dunno. I never actually

met him. He called the house.”

“One of those door-to-door guys?”

“I think that might be more Jehovah’s Witness. No, there was a Mormon boy on my school bus who signed me up for mailings from the Church, and then this guy called up to see if I wanted to talk about it more.”

“What, was he a smooth talker or something? Smoooooth operator,” Deb sang. The *abuela*² across the aisle frowned at them and tightened her jacket around her. “Mariah, that’s not a crush. That’s a fantasy.”

“No, I wanted to write letters to him. He was heading out on his mission.” She ran her hand over the leaflet again, smoothing it around the curve of her leg.

“About what? What were you and a Mormon going to write letters about?”

“I wanted to hear about his travels. I’d never been out of Idaho before.”

“How old were you?”

“Thirteen.”

“Good God, Mariah. You coulda sabotaged him.”

“What?”

“A thirteen year old girl writing to a grown man? How old are those Mormons when they go off to ride their bicycles and shovel the snow off people’s driveways?”

“I dunno. Like twenty maybe?”

“Christ, Mariah, you’re unbelievable.”

“Why is this so outrageous to you?”

The voice of the bus driver picked up through the speakers. There’d be a stop halfway through the trip. Should be getting into Madrid around three. Deb pulled out her cell phone and checked the time, thought about her boyfriend, then turned back to Mariah. “Did you have any interest whatsoever in becoming a Mormon?”

“None at all. But I don’t see any reason why that should have kept me from writing to him.”

“Well, why the hell were you writing to a Mormon anyway? To seduce him? What kind of crush was this?”

“I was curious, Deb.” The bus began to roll backwards.

“About what? Why the hell were you writing letters to a Mormon missionary if you had no intention of converting? That’s just leading him on!”

The *abuela* clucked her tongue against the front of her palate at their loud English. Why did people like this come to Spain if they did not want to learn Spanish?

“I was thirteen! And do you seriously believe that he never got tired of reading about Joseph Smith all the time? Or talking about the angel Moroni?”

“Wow, you even know their names.”

“So what? It’s not a hard thing to remember.” She let out a hard breath, then bent her head down, folding the leaflet in half, the edges lining up with the two small staples. “I take it you didn’t grow up religious.”

Deb turned to her. “No.” She watched for a reaction but saw none, just Mariah running her fingers up and down over the staples. “And you did?”

“Yeah, Deb. I did.”

They were leaving Granada, rising up onto the highway. Mariah’s head stayed down. Deb watched

through the window for signs for Madrid, but then said softly, “What was his name?”

Mariah looked up to Deb looking away. She blinked twice. “Elder Pat.”

Deb sighed deeply, still looking away, reading idly the billboards that grew larger then fell back past the bus. “Elder Pat,” she said. “Elder Pat,” she said again. For a long time after, she did not speak. She thought back to the wide strip of asphalt where she used to ride bikes with her brother. It had been months since she’d talked to him and she did not know where he was.

¹ The word of God as taught by Christ

² Grandmother; slang for an frumpy old woman



Photo Credit: Teck Hsien Ho '10

Ellen Adams (eadams@) is a first-year. She attended the University of Granada, and is a Matthew Shepard scholar of the Point Foundation.

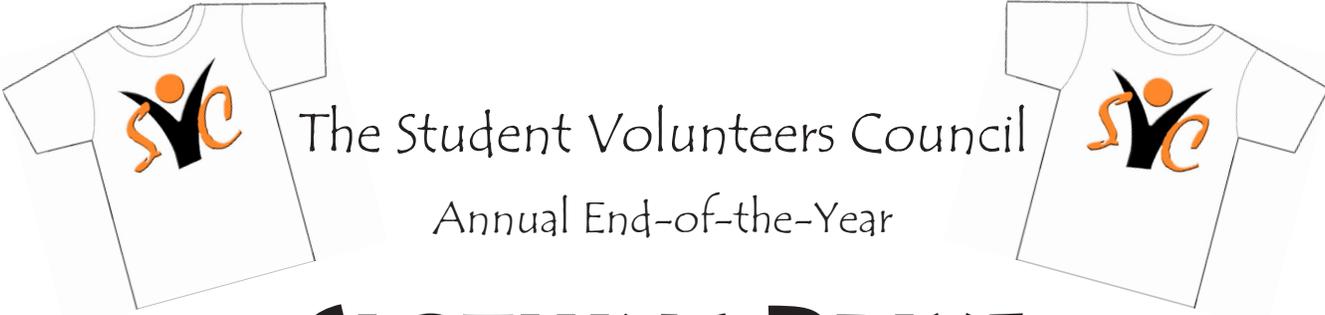
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