

Moving into week two

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Interview with Toope
Pages 7 and 16 ►

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VARSITY

Outrage at Medwards President's fertility comments

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Public outrage has surfaced over the new Medwards President, Dorothy Byrne's, plea to students to start a conversation around fertility. Among the critics is well-known alumna, Zoah Hedges-Stock, who attacked the new President following her recent proposals to teach female students about their own fertility. Writing on Twitter on 11th October, Hedges-Stock, who was the first traveller to graduate from Cambridge, said that she was "ashamed that this is my college" and that she "wouldn't feel com-

fortable donating to the college whilst the President seems to hold such a narrow view of both womanhood and the intellect of her students." Hedges-Stock's reaction was sparked after the *Sunday Times* reported last weekend that Byrne is seeking to introduce a series of seminars designed to help young women understand that their fertility can dramatically drop after the age of 35. Byrne said: "We are teaching about consent, we are teaching about harassment but we are not teaching them the facts about their own fertility. It is a woman's right to choose to have a baby." Her focus on fertility stems in part from the falling national birth rate, which has dipped from 1.92 children per woman in England and Wales in 2011 to just 1.53 this year. Byrne says that better knowledge of fertility would "empower" young women. She believes that society has "swung too far one way" by not questioning "girls" on their future family plans and current dating lives. She cited herself as a victim of this trend, saying that having put her career in television news first, what "gets lost along the way is that you forget to have a baby, which I nearly did." Thanks to IVF, Byrne is a single parent, having given birth to her only daughter at the age of 45. After a deluge of criticism, Byrne has relented on her suggestions for formal

Story continued page 2 ►

'I am ashamed that this is my college'



▲ Her focus on fertility stems in part from the falling national birth rate, which has dipped from 1.92 children per woman in England and Wales in 2011 to just 1.53 this year (MICHAEL DERRINGER, MURRAY EDWARDS, KIM FYSON)

SU defends trans students in face of tabloid media storm

Akshata Kapoor
Deputy Editor

Content note: this article contains mentions of transphobic ideology and links articles that discuss transphobia

The SU released a statement today (14/10) reinforcing their "commitment to protecting trans students and ensuring they have a safe university in which to live, study and socialise." In an article published on (13/10), the Daily Mail criticised the Cambridge SU pro-trans guide on 'How to Spot TERF

Ideology'. The article contends with the idea published in the guide that being a woman is not just down to 'biological sex'. Milo Eyre-Morgan, the Cambridge SU Women's Officer, wrote the guide and tweeted about it, saying that they were "so excited about getting the update of this amazing resource together." The guide clarifies that "Trans liberation is part of feminism. Fighting for autonomy and freedom must be a fight for everyone, and there should be no room for transphobia or TERFs in feminist organising." It aims to help raise awareness

about how to spot and deal with TERF ideology and "how to make spaces trans inclusive." Inflammatory comments in the last 24-hours to the guide tweeted on 11/10 by Eyre-Morgan include calling it "deceitful garbage" and "delusional ramblings". In response to the comments directed towards the guide, the SU released a statement (14/10) defending the publication of the guide: "The guide was printed after being approved through our normal democratic processes at Student Council at the end of the 2020-21 academic year." The Daily Mail article comes after

their backlash against the Sussex UCU for publishing a statement in solidarity with trans and non-binary communities, a statement which Kathleen Stock, Professor of Philosophy, claims "has just effectively ended my career at Sussex University." Stock has been criticized for her trans-exclusionary views. In response to protests against Stock, a University of Sussex spokesperson commented that "as a university community, we must be able to have complex discussions without bullying or harassment" and that it will not tolerate threats to "academic freedoms."

An anonymous JCR Women's Officer told Varsity that they supported the creation of the guide and "hope the university produces a statement in defence of Milo and much of the content of the guide." While the Cambridge SU statement recognised the need to support trans rights "at a time when trans people are subject to an incredibly hostile political and media environment," it also clarified that the 'How to Spot TERF Ideology' guide was originally published in 2019 and "was not produced in response to any recent events."

News

EDITORIAL

Flourishing in spite of Fresher's flu

Week one came and went, falling away as swiftly as our immune systems. Whether you caught fresher's flu on a night out, in a lecture, or in Sainsbury's, you can be assured that you are living the shared Cambridge experience.

This week the University, as well as its colleges, in particular, Murray Edwards, found itself splashed across various national news outlets. The President of Medwards faced public scrutiny after her comments around fertility (page 1) and the Cambridge SU was criticised for its "How to Spot Terf Ideology Guide" (page 1). As the Editors of Varsity, we want to highlight the commitment CUSU made to protecting trans students across the University. Beyond the criticisms circulating the University, we want to also acknowledge the efforts being made towards change, such as the positive energy devoted to the upcoming Black History Month.

As we move forward into the next week, the feeling of leaving something behind, perhaps even losing something, might follow us. Whether that be reflecting on pre-university life (page 9), or on the changing university itself (page 10), the variety of spreading illnesses doesn't seem to be the only thing on our collective mind. We also wanted to revisit our attention on the current Vice-Chancellor's tenure. In an exclusive interview with Varsity, Vice-Chancellor Toope discusses access and relations to the UAE (page 7).

Whether or not the Vice-Chancellor is also recovering from a bout of fresher's flu, we could all do with some advice on strengthening the immune system. If Lemsip doesn't seem to be doing the job, try delving into the 'Music as Medicine' article on page 14. Or, if you want to use the occasion to further your knowledge on the (still-existing!) pandemic, open page 18 for an interview with the COVID-19 clinical trials investigator.

With a cough and constant state of fatigue, you may have been questioning yourself: do I have COVID? If the answer 'no' has been reached through a lateral flow test, and the fact that you can still taste reinforces it, use that privilege to discover some new foods. On page 20, you can find a 'Student's search for umami', with a plethora of food recommendations around Cambridge.

In the context of Black History Month, Film & TV explores black cinematic narratives in a piece recommending various films beyond the limited scope of white mainstream cinema (page 27). In Sports, Sarah Walton-Smith publishes a reflection on navigating the growing toxicity of gym culture (page 32).

In the meantime, continue to take care of yourselves. Now that Fresher's week has come to a close, consider replacing that VK with a cup of tea. We know that tea will be our saving grace!

Nick and Isabel

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Human rights lawyer calls for inquiry over Princess Shamsa abduction



▲ "It's astonishing that this case hasn't been solved after more than 20 years"

(DIEGO DELSO / WIKIMEDIA COMMONS)

Georgia Goble
Senior News Editor

Human rights lawyer David Haigh has called for a public inquiry concerning Cambridgeshire Police's investigation into the abduction of Princess Shamsa in 2000.

Princess Shamsa, who is the daughter of Dubai's ruler Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al-Maktoum, was taken from the streets of Cambridge on her father's orders when she was 19, after escaping the family's Longcross Estate in Surrey. She was transported back to Dubai and has not been seen in public since.

The Princess, who is now 39, is presumed to be held captive. A High Court judge ruled in 2019 that the Sheikh held Shamsa, as well as her sister, Princess Latifa, against her will, after abducting them both on separate occasions. Princess Latifa made headlines around the world in 2019, when "hostage" footage of her was released in a "villa jail": "I don't really know if I'm going to survive this situation [...] I don't know what they're planning to do with me," Latifa says to the camera. The Free Latifa campaign group has now disbanded, as Latifa is thought to be free and safe.

It has been previously alleged that the Foreign Office "lent on" Cambridgeshire Police to "not carry on the investiga-

tion" into the Princess' abduction since it would be "diplomatically embarrassing" to take action against Dubai's ruler. It is for this same reason that it is presumed that action will not be taken against Sheikh Mohammed following revelations that he hacked the phone of his ex-wife, Princess Haya, and members of her legal and security team using Pegasus spyware in a family court hearing in the UK, despite it being an illegal offense.

The NSO Group's Pegasus software gives the user the ability to access photos, videos, phone calls - everything on the target's mobile phone. Sheikh Mohammed denies allegations of phone-hacking.

The Foreign Office has denied having any involvement in the investigation or its outcome.

Human rights advocate David Haigh, who has previously advised Princess Latifa on her escape from Dubai and claims against her father, has called for an inquiry to be carried out into why the investigation into Princess Shamsa's abduction was halted. He also claims that he has "crucial new" evidence into the abduction that he will present to the police.

Haigh said in a statement: "A brazen offence has been committed on a British street. It's astonishing that this case hasn't been solved after more than 20

years, but credit to the police for not giving up. They can rely on us for all the help and evidence we can give to bring the kid-nappers to British justice."

Princess Latifa called for the investigation to be reopened by the police in a letter from 2018, which was delivered by Haigh's advocacy group, Detained International, to Cambridgeshire police in February of this year. "All I ask of you", the Princess wrote, "is to please give attention on her case because it could get her her freedom [...] your help and attention on her case could free her."

The investigation was first launched by Cambridgeshire police in 2001 after Shamsa made contact via an immigration lawyer, although it came to a standstill when offic-

ers were blocked from travelling to Dubai to follow up on the case.

Freedom of information requests were submitted to the UK foreign office about the reasoning behind the decision to stop the investigation, but were rejected on the grounds that the relationship between the UK and the UAE could be harmed.

Cambridgeshire Constabulary stated on Friday (08/10) that the new evidence had not yet been presented, but that they were in the process of making arrangements for this to be done.

A spokesperson for Cambridgeshire Constabulary told *Varsity* that it "has carried out a detailed and exhaustive review of the reported abduction of Shamsa Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum in Cambridge in 2000" but "are not in a position to take any further action at this time."

The statement continues: "New lines of inquiry were pursued in what has been a uniquely challenging and complex case, however, there remains insufficient evidence to reopen the investigation. As with all cases, it could be reopened, should we receive significant and substantial new evidence."

The spokesperson added: "There are details of the case that are inappropriate to discuss publicly due to this being an incredibly complex and serious matter. The welfare of individuals is our primary concern and it would be inappropriate to share publicly details in relation to this investigation."

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alike - would be laughable if it weren't so infuriating."

Students appear to agree. An anonymous student at the College said that the conversations might "alienate many of Medwards' male, non-binary, and gender minority students, as well as heaping an unhelpful 'reproductive focus' upon others, especially given the fact that the workshops will be the first engagement new students have with the College during freshers week."

Another Medwards student, Nieve Brydges, echoed the student's sentiments, saying that it felt like a "kick in the face" for LGBT+ students whose "legitimate desires" to see the College's "female-only" focus dismantled appear to have been ignored. To these students,

Byrne's message felt like a set-back in an "uphill battle" to cultivate "safe spaces within the University."

The student added that whilst "opt-in, university-wide classes may be useful to some students", they "should never be mandatory nor limited to so-called 'women's colleges'."

However, others are more sympathetic to Byrne's plans. Another Murray Edwards alumna, Lisa Burke, welcomed the development. She told *The Sunday Times*: "I was the first of my peer group to have children. At the time I would say it destroyed my career. It's taken me a lot of time to rebuild my work. However, I also thoroughly enjoyed having time with my daughters."

Colleges accused of exploiting temporary contract supervisors



LOUIS ASHWORTH

Caitlin Farrell
Deputy News Editor

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Senior News Editor

Cambridge colleges have been accused of exploiting “gig economy” temporary teaching staff to deliver supervisions, according to research by members of the University and College Union (UCU) which suggests that almost half of supervisions are delivered by “gig economy” workers who do not hold proper contracts.

The investigations from the UCU found that nearly half of supervisions at

Cambridge colleges are delivered by precariously-employed teaching staff, one-third of whom are postgraduate students or freelancers who have recently completed their PhDs.

Many supervisors gained work at Cambridge through email agreements and personal contracts offering a rate of £31 per supervision with no guarantee of the numbers of students available.

A Freedom of Information request (FOI) from UCU to Pembroke College showed that the University had been challenged by HMRC about its exclusion of supervisors from the payroll.

Pembroke defended the exclusion as “analogous to the college’s use of exter-

nal maintenance contractors, for example plumbers and decorators”, and HMRC later reversed its decision.

Several anonymous supervisors who spoke to the *Guardian* stated that the rate of pay failed to cover the high preparation workload of supervisions, which includes setting reading lists and marking papers.

One supervisor, who relied on teaching hours to supplement his £12,000 annual stipend, had his hours cut suddenly and claimed that he had “no protection” due to lack of an official contract.

“A framework [to] eliminate the use of precarious contracts” is one of the UCU’s “four fights” for which it has campaigned at institutions across the UK with industrial action in 2019 and 2020, in addition to strikes over pensions, which began in February 2018.

Dr Lorena Gazzotti is a postdoctoral researcher coordinating UCU’s campaign against casualised work, hoping to include demands in the strike action proposed later this year for secure contracts, guaranteed hours and higher pay.

Speaking to *Varsity* in September on the UCU ballot to strike, which opens at 152 institutions on Monday (18/10) and could see strikes begin this term, Gazzotti commented: “It’s extraordinary that such a large proportion of the quality individual and small-group tuition, upon

which the reputation of Cambridge is based, is being delivered by people who basically have no workers rights.”

Speaking to the *Guardian*, she said colleges were operating on a gig economy system “like Deliveroo”.

Gazzotti also critiqued the use of casual workers to deliver Cambridge’s trademark supervision system, saying, “If most people working on your unique selling point are treated as individual contractors you have a problem because this is the main mission of your institution.”

Mary Newbould, who has been a supervisor since finishing her PhD in 2007, said that supervision preparation times correspond to a 75-hour working week but only typically earned around £10,000 a year.

“I’d like to see something formalised and recognised, where you don’t feel like you’re filling a gap,” she stated.

The University of Cambridge stated: “A majority of supervisors are self-employed, choose which colleges they prefer to work with, the hours they work and often work with multiple colleges.”

“The colleges are separate legal and financial employers, so cannot be covered by a single agreement. Supervisor training is provided for free and the average pay for supervision, including preparation, is well above the Living Wage.”

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Interview with Stephen Toope

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Tales of a broke, brown babysitter



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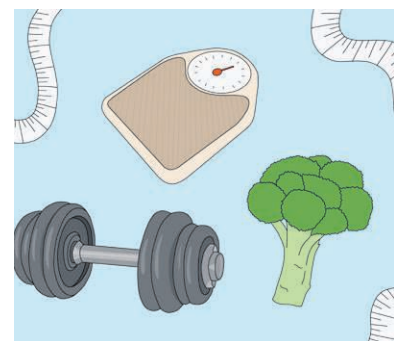
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Violet tries... Punting

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SPORTS

Navigating the growing toxicity of gym culture



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Oxford-Cambridge Arc scheme criticised by local figures

Christopher Dorrell
Associate Editor

The Oxford-Cambridge Arc scheme has been criticised by local figures and environmental groups as the first period of consultation comes to an end.

The Arc is a government led development scheme designed to create sustainable growth in the region between Oxford and Cambridge.

Professor David Rogers, a professor of ecology at the University of Oxford, speaking on behalf of the Stop the Arc Campaign, said “Cambridge city will expand beyond recognisable limits.”

The Arc, he continued, would “destroy the reason why people like to live in Cambridge.”

It is thought that one million new homes could be built in the Arc in an attempt to double the region’s output to £200 billion.

The government is concentrating on the Arc region because it “has the potential to become a world-leading and globally renowned centre for business, innovation and investment in a variety of industries.”

However, Professor Rogers contends that many of the new houses will be bought by investors or people commuting into London. He pointed out that “in the OxCam Arc a quarter (of new houses) is earmarked for London commuters. So, the arc is going to partly be a dormitory for London because London isn’t building enough houses.”

Environmental concerns were also raised by many critics of the Arc.

The government claims that a key aim of the Arc is to encourage “clean growth and the creation of sustainable communities will support us in improving the quality of life for those that live and work in the Arc. While also helping us future-proof its businesses and communities against the effects of climate change.”

However, Stop the Arc campaign group, of which Professor Rogers is a representative, said that “adding (around) two million people to those already living in the area will put a strain on all existing infrastructure...and will threaten existing ecosystem services and wildlife areas.”

Toby Bancroft, Woodland Trust director for Central England, said: “It’s astounding that the government has set out a draft vision for the growth Arc which does not even mention the environmental ambitions that have been agreed by a majority of the Arc’s council leaders as well as many of its universities and leading business organisations.”

These environmental ambitions were published by the Environmental Working Group. The Environmental Working Group represents the environmental aspirations of the councils within the Arc.

Their aim is “for the principles to inform and become an integral part of developing plans and statements in relation to the Arc, local plans, local council activities and the plans and activities of activities and delivery programs for all bodies operating in the Arc.”

The principles the councils committed to include “achieving net zero carbon, climate resilience, biodiversity net gain, environmental net gain, doubling the

The environment was important to **2,892** residents who participated in the first consultation process

Oxford-Cambridge Arc: area between Oxford, Milton Keynes and Cambridge

1 million new homes could be built in the Arc

area of land actively managed for nature, restoring, protecting and enhancing the natural environment and ensuring renewable natural capital.”

The environment was also the most important issue for the 2,892 residents

who participated in the first of three consultation processes, which finished on Tuesday 12th October.

The first consultation process, which ran for twelve weeks between July and October, is intended to help the government develop concrete plans based on local concerns. This will then be published in the Spatial Framework, which is expected in Autumn 2022.

Regarding the consultation process, Cllr Sam Davies, Independent councillor for Queen Edith’s on the city council, tweeted: “This is ridiculous. Zero attempt to familiarise local residents with this ‘ambition’, zero attempt to help them understand why it’s important that they should ‘engage’. And now – bang – here’s a 12-week consultation process running over the summer holidays.”

Daniel Zeichner, Labour MP for Cambridge, said: “It is just ridiculous they are still asking what the vision is. It seems they were prepared to build a major road without knowing what this was about.” The major road Zeichner mentioned was the Oxford-Cambridge expressway, which was cancelled due to popular outrage at its likely environmental impacts.

The Oxford-Cambridge Arc is a globally significant area between Oxford, Milton Keynes and Cambridge. It is formed of 5 ceremonial counties: Oxfordshire, Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Northamptonshire and Cambridgeshire.

It supports over two million jobs, adds over £110 billion to the economy every year and houses one of the fastest growing economies in England.

News

This week in research...



▲ Szreter's book explores how the PM should deal with Covid-19's economic aftermath (WIKIMEDIA COMMONS)

Louis Hodgson
Senior News Editor

Tax the rich to feed the poor

Simon Szreter, Professor of History and Public Policy at Cambridge, has co-authored the book, 'After the Virus - Lessons from the Past for a Better Future', which explores how the government could better deal with the economic fallout of the pandemic.

Szreter uses a historical perspective to argue that the government's cut to universal credit is a mistake and he calls on the government to learn from the past.

In particular, the book focuses on Queen Elizabeth I and the lessons we can learn from her 'Poor Laws'. The Poor Laws obligated local parishes to care for the poor, which essentially resulted in the formation of the first welfare state.

Szreter argues that "the evidence of history is that societies and economies fare much better with a strong welfare state and when you cut welfare to make savings, you damage society and the economy."

Szreter's co-author Hilary Cooper, a former government economist and senior policy-maker, asserted that "Elizabeth would absolutely have taxed the rich to support the poor" in the aftermath of the pandemic.

Cooper warned of cutting welfare such as education and health, "Covid-19 hit the poorest the hardest, with death rates highest in deprived areas and among people of colour."

Crayfish push ecosystems to their 'tipping point'

Meanwhile, in the Cambridge zoology department, researchers have been looking at how a mere crayfish could destroy

the ecosystem of a lake.

Dr Sam Reynolds, the first author of the report, stressed that human activity and climate change are introducing invasive species into ecosystems. These new species diminish the number of important organisms in lakes and lead to a reduction in water quality.

The report also explains that degraded, cloudy lakes are dominated by algae, which blocks light and prevents ecosystem recovery.

Reynolds commented that "algal blooms represent one of the most significant threats to the security of the Earth's surface freshwaters. Simply undoing the circumstances that triggered a tipping point will not restore the ecosystem - the road to recovery is slow and steep."

The reporters suggested that their findings may be applicable to other ecosystems that experience that are on the verge of their "tipping point", such as forests and coral reefs.

CO2 monitors may make workplace safer

To contribute to the ever-growing body of Covid-19 research, researchers from the University of Cambridge, Imperial College London, and the University of Leeds have teamed together to develop a Covid-19 model that may make the workplace safer.

The model uses CO2 and occupancy data to predict how many workers will be infected by an infectious yet asymptomatic colleague.

Areas with high occupancy and low ventilation are associated with an increased infection rate. This study's scientists ascertained that rooms with low ventilation and high occupancy have higher CO2 levels.

Therefore, monitoring CO2 levels in offices may be a useful indication as to whether an intervention is needed to reduce the infection rate.

Co-author Professor Paul Linden from Cambridge's Department of Applied Mathematics and Theoretical Physics said: "Ventilation is complicated and airflow is invisible, so it's hard for people to appreciate the effects in the home or workplace."

"Commercially available CO2 monitors are being installed in schools and I would recommend their installation in the workplace."

Can wealthy role models help the climate crisis?

A paper the University's Psychology department has suggested an innovative new way to tackle climate change: through the wealthy and well-connected.

The authors propose that changing the behaviour of those in high socioeconomic positions will help impact carbon emissions: the individuals that they refer to are both those of high income, and also those with better social networks.

Dr Kristian Nielsen, a postdoctoral researcher in the University of Cambridge's Department of Psychology, argues that people of high socioeconomic status have important connections: "Their connections can enable them to influence behaviours and policies to help mitigate climate change - and we need to find ways to encourage them to do this."

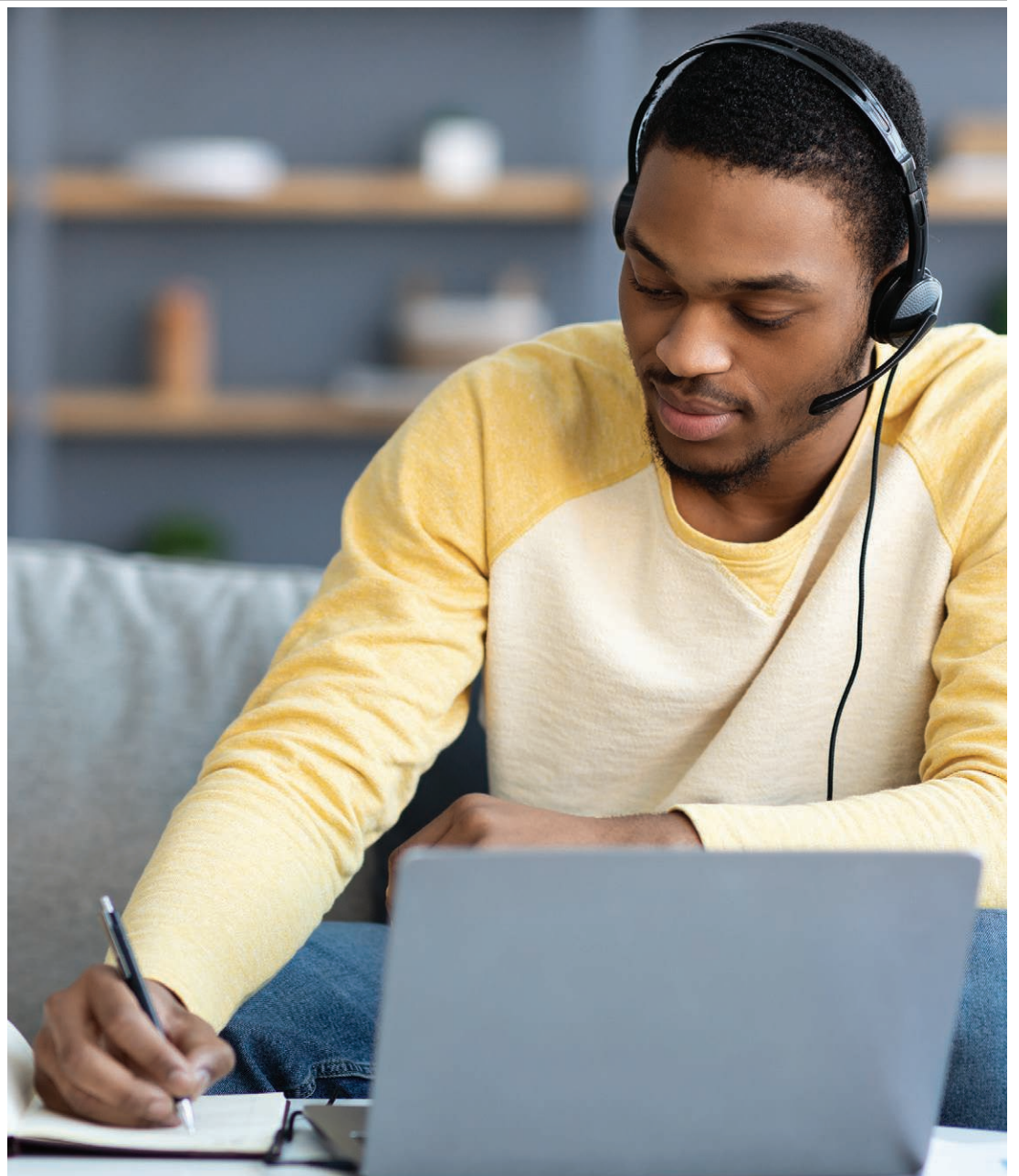
Nielsen continued: "People of higher socioeconomic status could also act as role models, making more climate-friendly choices that influence others - for example driving electric cars or eating a vegan diet."



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Trial begins for security agents accused of killing Giulio Regeni



▲ Regeni was killed five and a half years ago while in Cairo Gyan Shahane / Unsplash

Georgia Goble
Senior News Editor

CN: This article contains a brief mention of graphic physical injury

The trial has started in Rome for the four Egyptian security officers accused of kidnapping and killing the 28-year old Cambridge PhD student Giulio Regeni.

Regeni was found dead in a ditch five and half years ago in Cairo, where he had travelled to carry out research into trade unions and the Egyptian economy. His body carried signs of burning, beating and mutilation, and an autopsy revealed broken ribs and a brain haemorrhage.

Gen Tariq Saber, Col Aser Ibrahim, Capt Hesham Helmi, and Maj Magdi Abd al-Sharif are accused of the “aggravated kidnapping” of Regeni. Sharif is additionally charged with “conspiracy to commit aggravated murder”, a charge which could lead to a life sentence in Italy.

With Egypt refusing to acknowledge the trial, it is taking place in absentia. The country closed its own investigation last year concluding that “the perpetrator of the student’s murder remains unknown”. They have also rejected requests to supply the addresses of the four men accused, preventing Italian officials from officially informing them of the trial.

The four accused worked as agents for Egypt’s National Security Agency (NSA), which prosecutors have said heavily surveilled Regeni in the months leading up to his death. Regeni was arrested in January 2016 and taken to a police station in Cairo. He was then taken to an NSA facility where he was tortured, according to Italian prosecutors.

Amy Hawthorne, an expert on Egypt at the Project on Middle East Democracy in Washington, told the Guardian that “the trial in Rome represented a rare moment of accountability for the Egyptian security forces”.

DIVERSITY DAZZLES Diversity campaign makes Asian Media Awards 2021 shortlist

Initially launched in 2019 to boost diversity and the representation of Black students, the second stage of the University’s ‘Get in Cambridge’ social media campaign last year sought to increase engagement with Bangladeshi and Pakistani applicants. A series of films and videos illustrated the experiences of ten state-school students with such heritage, contrasting them with their previous perceptions of Cambridge.

An additional six videos aimed to dispel misconceptions which might dissuade viewers from applying. It is one of five finalists in the Creative Media Award section, with the winners set to be announced at Emirates Old Trafford in Manchester on Friday 29th October.

STASH Cambridge Uni might get its own kicks

Fans of university ‘stash’ will be delighted to hear that Cambridge might soon have its own customised Nikes.

The Cambridge Nikes, designed by footwear company The Sole Supplier, would be white and red and include the University crest.

The university-inspired trainers are subject to voting, with the winning design set to be pitched to the trainer manufacturers.

TOURISM New tourism company takes on Cambridge

A new tourism company is being set up to replace the city’s former major tourism organisation, Visit Cambridge and Beyond, which went into liquidation last July.

Last week, Cambridge City Council’s Environment and Community Scrutiny Committee voted to set up Visit Cambridge as a community interest company (CIC). According to a council report, the main aims of the new company will be to “support the recovery and sustainable development of the city’s tourism sector” and to “market and promote the city and represent the city’s tourism sector locally, regionally, nationally and internationally”.

Instead of operating from a permanent visitor information centre like the former company, Visit Cambridge is hoping to “procure a mobile unit with ‘pop up’ functionality.”



▲ The design features the Cambridge crest

TV Uni-based crime drama returns to TV

The successful smart crime drama Professor T has been recommissioned by ITV for a second season, and is set against the University of Cambridge.

The drama, starring Ben Miller (who appeared in Bridgeton) and Frances La Tour (who featured in The History Boys), attracted 5.41 million viewers in 28 days for its launch episode.

The first season had its opening scene shot in the football pitch of Jesus College, with the college’s postgraduate accommodation Little Trinity set as the family home of protagonist Professor T.

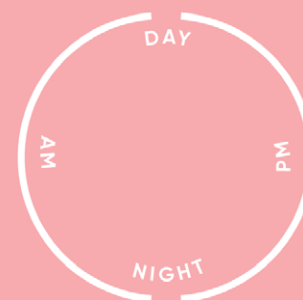
SCIENCE Darwin’s dwarf kidney beans go online

The Darwin Correspondence Project, an independently funded project run partly by Cambridge University Library, is to document thousands of the eponymous naturalist’s “weird and wonderful items” in an online archive: including 392 dwarf kidney beans.

Other items include Brazilian butterfly wings and exoskeletons, microscopic pollen grains, pony hair and beard hair.

Thus far, 90,000 images have been uploaded, with 4,000 to be conserved and 36,000 more to be taken. The project should reach its conclusion by the end of 2022.

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News

Cambridge celebrates Black History Month

Serge Isman
Deputy News Editor

Black History Month (BHM) celebrations, which are held every October across the UK, are now underway in Cambridge. Eight Cambridge colleges - Newnham, Trinity, St Catharine's, Lucy Cavendish, Murray Edwards, Churchill, Wolfson, and Hughes Hall - have detailed their plans for BHM to *Varsity*.

Newnham College has commissioned Barbadian-British documentary photographer Myah Jeffers to create portraits of black students to mark BHM. These will be exhibited in the College's Iris Café until July 2022 as part of the College's 150th anniversary celebrations.

In a college press release, third-year student and former JCR BAME Officer Oluchi Ugochukwu said: "Being a Black student at Cambridge can still often feel ground-breaking to those outside of the University and so the aim is to challenge possible inaccurate preconceptions of what a successful, scholarly student looks like today.

"At present there are very few portraits of students or of Black individuals on display in College. We wanted to explore Newnham's history, our present, and how Newnham could look in the future.

"In the wake of the Black Lives Matter movement, students and staff have been collaborating to better support people of colour at Newnham, and it has been even more important that Black students feel connected and cohesive as a community. This project will help us better represent and celebrate the values and true diversity of the College in its anniversary year, to make visible, to celebrate and to take up space."

“
Being a Black student at Cambridge can still often feel ground-breaking to those outside of the University
”

Jeffers said: "I was honoured to be given the opportunity to photograph a number of Black students as part of Newnham College's 150th-anniversary celebrations. My starting point was interrogating the composed nature of traditional academic portraiture and then subverting that in a way which felt true to the contemporary nature of the project and of highlighting the individual."

She continued: "For me, the idea of having these portraits exhibited in

such a space felt really radical - moving from traditional portraiture's celebration of achievement over actual existence. Visually, the portraits are simple and somewhat formal in their composition - but it's a project which represents so much and its momentous nature gives each portrait gravitas."

Trinity College has also invited photographer Henry Kamara to work on a project that will build on last year's 'Succession' exhibition, which featured 11 portraits of Black Trinity students. Kamara's work will be exhibited at the College from 25 October through to 12 November.

Meanwhile, a number of colleges are flying flags during BHM. Churchill Col-



▲ St. Catharine's College flying the Pan-African Flag for Black History Month (ST. CATHARINE'S COLLEGE)

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lege is among those flying the Pan-African flag throughout October, while St Catharine's College will fly the Bahamian flag at full mast on the 1st and 31st of October to commemorate the College's earliest known Black student, Alfred F. Adderley CBE (1891-1953).

Research conducted by the College in 2020 found that Adderley arrived in Cambridge in 1912 to study Law, after which he returned to the Bahamas and became a leading lawyer, politician, and sportsman. St Catharine's first flew the Bahamian flag in his honour during last year's BHM celebrations.

The Churchill Archives Centre is commemorating another notable Black alumnus of the University, Dr Davidson Nicol, in an online exhibition. Nicol graduated with a degree in Natural Sciences in 1947, and went on to become the first black fellow of a Cambridge college. After a scientific career he became a

senior diplomat, serving as Sierra Leone's Ambassador to the United Nations.

Many colleges are planning internal events to mark BHM. Murray Edwards, Hughes Hall, and Wolfson will hold BHM formals, while St Catharine's and Hughes Hall have organised BHM-themed movie nights. Lucy Cavendish will host an online panel discussion of alumni discussing their experiences at the College and after graduation, while St Catharine's will hold a special Choral Evensong service featuring the works of Black composers.

“
Black History Month presents the University with the perfect time to celebrate the contributions of its Black members who have shaped, and continue today to shape this place
”

At the University level, a touring exhibition called 'Phenomenal Women: Portraits of UK Black Female Professors' is on display on King's Parade outside Great St Mary's Church, and in Senate House Yard.

It features 45 photographs and biographies of Black women academics, such as author Bernadine Evaristo, poet-playwright Joan Anim-Addo, and Cynthia Pine, the first woman ever to be appointed head of a UK dental school.

On Friday 22 October, a panel discussion organised by the University's Race Equality Network at Selwyn College will

focus on the experiences of Black staff at Cambridge; on Thursday 28 October the University's Annual Race Equality Lecture will be given remotely by Professor Amy Romero, an American sociologist at Arizona State University.

In a statement to *Varsity*, a University spokesperson said: "A wide range of events and activities are taking place across the University and Colleges to mark Black History Month 2021. Cambridge's commitment to equality and diversity is undiminished, however preparing for another unusual term and managing COVID risks means that some events have been reimagined as virtual commemorations."

Tara Choudhury, CSU BME officer, commented: "Black History Month presents the University with the perfect time to celebrate the contributions of its Black members who have shaped, and continue today to shape this place. I'm excited to see so many important events and discussions taking place across the colleges and University this month, however I'm conscious that this institutional enthusiasm to discuss race and Black History all too often dissipates at the end of October.

"Going forward, I would of course like to see more colleges continue to celebrate Black History Month, but I also hope that these celebrations extend beyond temporary flag-waving and one-off events. Any academic institutions truly committed to celebrating Black history will be at the forefront of the mounting calls for a decolonised curriculum; the complex histories of Black people can no longer be reduced to an optional paper or condensed into a month. Black history is a fundamental and inseparable part of British history."

An exclusive interview with Vice-Chancellor Stephen Toope

'It's a privilege to be at the helm of an institution so important'

The *Vice-Chancellor* discusses university relations with the UAE, widening access, and navigating criticism

Georgia Goble
Senior News Editor

Nick Bartlett
Editor-in-Chief

A few weeks after announcing that he will step down from the role of Vice-Chancellor in September 2022, Professor Stephen Toope sat down for an interview with *Varsity* about his time in the role so far.

During his tenure, Vice-Chancellor Toope faced the challenge of leading the University through a global pandemic, which presented difficulties both in his personal life and in his role at the helm of one of the world's most prestigious universities. In March 2020, Vice-Chancellor Toope made the decision to shift the University entirely to online learning and integrated online exams, many of which were carried out with mitigation measures to reflect the range of factors that had affected students' learning across the year. Reflecting on the way that the pandemic will change the University going forward, Toope commented that it "has definitely heightened this sense that there are enormous pressures on students all the time."

The Vice-Chancellor noted that even before the pandemic there had been a "real recognition" that "focusing on student mental health and wellbeing was something that the university had to do even more assiduously than it had." However, the pandemic has brought these issues to the forefront of decision-making, he says.

"We've just approved a new student mental health and wellbeing framework which I really hope will link together the efforts of the Colleges and for more serious cases connect us better with the NHS. This is the first time we've had a framework that will let us think holistically about student mental health and wellbeing and allows us to think about it at an earlier stage, not just when things get to a crisis. Will that have an impact on how we continue to do assessment and how we think about our teaching provision? I think it will.

To find that we can use other mechanisms [to examine students] has opened up ways of thinking. When I talk to colleagues across the university I'm now hearing people who are excited about the idea of looking for alternative methods of assessment."

This is a journey we're on. But there are a lot of people across the University fundamentally committed to keeping student health and wellbeing at the forefront of our consideration."

Though the pandemic has put vast

"I have never met with the Crown Prince

barriers on international travel over the last two years, it has not prevented Toope from considering deals between the University of Cambridge and foreign states.

Earlier this year, *Varsity* revealed that a controversial £400m deal had been proposed between the University of Cambridge and the United Arab Emirates. After some consideration however, Toope revealed to *Varsity* that these plans have been halted, and that no meetings are taking place: "It's all on hold for now, there are no conversations taking place about those plans."

"I have never met with the Crown

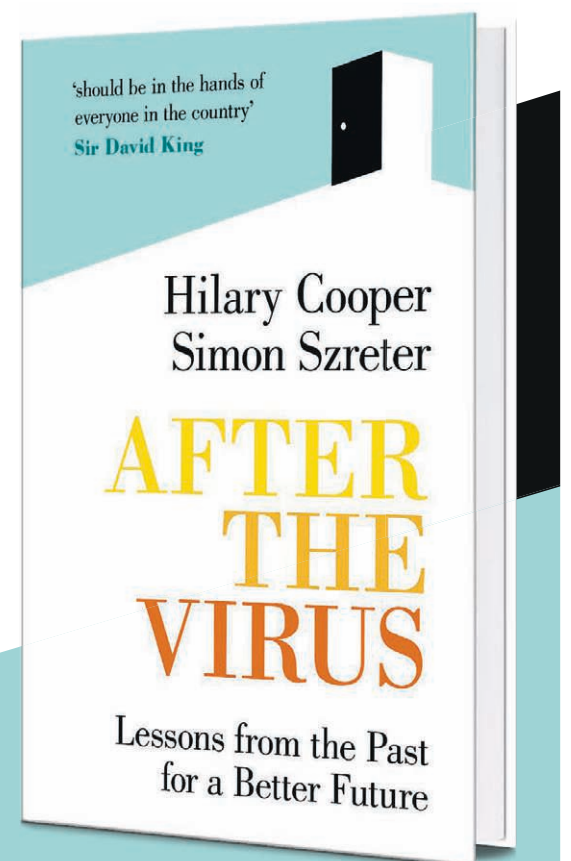
"It's all on hold for now, there are no conversations taking place

Prince and in fact I'm not meeting with anyone from the UAE at this point."

The proposal was opposed by many who had ethical concerns surrounding the UAE's conduct regarding human rights abuses, the lack of rights for women and the LGBTQ+ community, lack of freedom of expression, and the arbitrary confinement and torture of academics including Matthew Hedges. They also referenced the imprisonment of Princess Latifa, the daughter of Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al Maktoum, Dubai's ruler, and her sister Princess Shamsa's abduction from the

► Continued on page 16

After the Virus is a provocative manifesto for change post-COVID-19. Shining a light on the deep fractures in our society, Hilary Cooper and Simon Szreter reveal why the UK was unable to respond effectively to the pandemic and what we can learn from our own history to forge a fairer, more resilient future.



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News

Disability hate crimes on the rise in Cambridgeshire

Research shows rise in disability hate crime in Cambridgeshire, with reports of both violent and online abuse increasing over the past year

Lorna Kimmins
News Correspondent

Disability hate crimes are on the rise across Cambridgeshire, according to research by disability charities Leonard Cheshire and United Response.

The figures, compiled to coincide with Hate Crime Awareness Week (9th-16th October), reveal that 80 hate crimes towards disabled people were reported in Cambridgeshire in 2020/21 - up from 75 in 2019/20. Of these 80, 50 were violent crimes, marking a significant increase

from the 33 reported last year.

In addition to the rise in face-to-face hate crime in the county, online hate crimes towards disabled people have tripled from three in 2019/20 to nine in 2020/21.

Despite this rise in reporting of in-

stances of disability hate crime, only three reports in the region resulted in charges or referrals to the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), the same number as last year.

The data was obtained by Leonard Cheshire and United Response via

Freedom of Information requests sent to Cambridgeshire Constabulary, which was one of 39 police services in England and Wales to provide information for their investigation.

Commenting on the findings of their research, Leonard Cheshire and United Response said: "Many disabled people we spoke to said they wouldn't report their hate crime to the police, so our findings are likely to scarcely scratch the surface of the true scale of these horrific incidents.

"The stories we've heard suggest many police officers do not have a good understanding of disability. So we're calling for a specialist disability liaison officer in every police force. We want the government to make disability hate crime easier to report too."

The charities also stress the long term impacts of hate crimes on victims, such as a fear to leave their own home. They added that "the government's National Disability Strategy promised a disability awareness raising campaign. That should be an opportunity to educate everyone, including young people and those in school, about disability hate crime."

When asked about what needs to be done to ensure disabled people feel more confident in reporting incidents of hate crime, a spokesperson for Cambridgeshire Constabulary told *Varsity*: "Awareness of disabilities and communication with disabled people is one of the focuses of the Action Against Hate coordinator for the force. They seek to educate our officers and staff, and bridge gaps between disabled people and the police.

"Initiatives such as PLOD (Police Link Officers for Deaf people) & Deaf Comms champions and the Pegasus scheme are examples of work currently being undertaken."

The spokesperson asserted that "Cambridgeshire Constabulary are working hard to tackle hate crime, we understand the effects it can have on victims, their families and the wider community.

"We want our communities to have the confidence to report such incidents and be reassured that we will take any allegation seriously and follow up all lines of enquiry."

Cambridgeshire Constabulary also helped to host the 'Celebrating Us' music and poetry event at Peterborough Cathedral on Tuesday evening (12/10), during which the force's Action Against Hate coordinator spoke about the work they were doing to reach out to disabled people in the region.

The Cambridgeshire data contributes to an overall increasing trend in disability hate crime across England and Wales: 9,252 crimes were reported across all participating regions this year, representing a small increase from 9,188 in 2019/20, with online crime in particular rising by more than 50%. Only 1% of these incidences resulted in CPS referral or charges.



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Features

Tales of a broke, brown babysitter

Deputy Features Editor **Nabiha Ahmed** reflects on how her job as a summer nanny has been an opportunity to learn and teach about different socio-economic backgrounds



▲ DEMELZA OKWAN (@DEMELZIAIA ON INSTAGRAM)

I spent most of my life before university in a limited list of places: home, school, the chicken shop, the East London Mosque, and my nan's. By extension, I was primarily around people similar to me: Muslim, non-White, inner-city Londoners coming from low-income backgrounds who — maybe, except my nan — have a universal appreciation for 'Hot & Tasty' boxes.

I knew coming to Cambridge would teach me about ways of life that both contrasted and intersected with my own. The gong at formals evoked that same anxiety induced by stampedes of schoolboys charging their way through me to their lesson. The unsolicited quoting of Latin proverbs in supervisions left me dazed, not unlike my how nan's Bengali ones do. What I didn't know, however, was that I had access to these lessons before I even came to Cambridge.

Except, they existed ten minutes from my home in London — in the form of a little boy who wore a tweed jacket and was obsessed with Lego.

On my first day nannying, I was welcomed at the door by a lady and her son sitting on her hip. She invited me into what can only be described as 'if Wembley was a house', and we politely went over the babysitting basics: her son's allergies, bedtime and whatnot. That is until he asked something along the lines of:

'Do you have hair underneath your headscarf?'

Pause. Mum looked at me to assess any offence. The boy was now standing at my feet, his neck craned back and his eyes fixed on my escaped baby hairs.

“
To him, I
was a new
skin colour,
a new reli-
gion and a
whole new
way of life
”

I smiled and told him I was indeed not bald.

We eventually got used to being each other's only company for the majority of the day. 'Are you from Muslim?' He asked whilst observing me through the mirrors of the Westfield bathrooms. 'Are your parents the same colour as you?' He questioned on the hottest day of the year, realising that I didn't need the sun to be tanned. 'Do you want this brownie, you know, because you're brown?' He laughed, shoving his meal deal snack in my face.

At the tender age of five, he had never known many Muslims, working-class, or non-white people. The majority of his life was also experienced in a limited number of places. Private school, his Wembley-sized house, Waitrose and grandma's holiday home in France.

He wasn't, however, yet at the mental capacity to understand how his privilege played out in wider society. He'd scream after I refused to buy him a more expensive 'prize' in museum shops. Or he'd become a behemoth if I said that he couldn't play with his Lego until he ate some of his dinner. There we would be in all our glory: a bourgeois five-year-old boy telling me he hates me for not buying him a California roll, and my skint self — too busy to reply because I'm bending the wire of my knock-off phone charger in that one position so it would work.

At five I only went to free museums with my nan, both of us probably at the same reading age and equally as unable to decipher any of the captions. And in an Asian household, children refusing to eat dinner wouldn't be solved us-

ing a £200 Lego Ninjago set, but a £2 sandal from Shoezone. I explained this to him (except the Shoezone part, of course) in that child-friendly, 'when-I-was-your-age' manner. But he looked at me blankly. He expected to have all his wants fulfilled. It was the only way of life he'd ever known.

Sometimes, he'd make me feel like that girl in reception who felt too visible in a class of white kids again. But mostly, he'd take me back to Cambridge. Why do you wear that scarf? Where are you really from? I could almost hear his words coming out of the mouths of people I knew at university. He didn't only see me as a new babysitter. Like some of my flatmates, to him, I was a new skin colour, a new religion and a whole new way of life.

Yet in spite of the rude stares from fellow commuters when he'd fall asleep on me on the tube, or parents who'd look at me like I was a kidnapper during school pickups, we were alike. We both have messy kitchens, except my mum can't afford a daily cleaner. We both have strong attachments to our

“
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university
”

parents; he wailed whenever his mum was at work, and I'd secretly shed tears when I first moved away for university. We both were competitive, losing at Bananagrams being enough to get us in a mood. We both know what it means to have loved ones, to lose loved ones, to be loved and to feel loss.

I think he enjoyed being around his broke, brown babysitter. 'Can I ask my mum to give you money?' he'd plead after hearing about my Sainsbury's birthday cakes, or my dishwasher-less kitchen. 'Is this one Halal?' he'd ask whilst pointing at the beef jerky we'd pass in the snack aisle of his local Waitrose. 'I saw Nabiha's hair today!' he'd say triumphantly to his mum once she'd come home — sometimes I'd show him it to distract him from the fact he didn't have a California roll at hand.

But I was defined beyond being just broke and brown. I was a good babysitter. In fact, I deduced this from his mumbling of, 'Why don't you just stay?' on my last day.



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Mourning the mature women's college

Lucy Cavendish student **Natalie Abbott** reflects on her special college community and her excitement for the coming year



▲ NATALIE ABBOTT

Like a number of mature students at Cambridge, I don't have A-Levels. Instead, at the age of 21, I undertook an 'Access to Higher Education' course at a local college. Upon researching potential universities, I discovered that the University of Cambridge accepts access courses and that the mature colleges in particular are passionate about them. I decided to apply, but it wasn't the University and its grandeur, or even the course that appealed to me — it was the ability to become a member of a mature women's college. From the moment I found the Lucy Cavendish website, I felt like I'd discovered an important secret that I wanted to keep safe. Everything I read appealed to me, but especially the idea of a small tight-knit community, almost like a sisterhood. I felt determined that this was the place that I was going to call home for the next few years, and after applying directly to Lucy, that's exactly what I did.

From the moment I arrived at Lucy, it felt like I was exactly where I was supposed to be. I loved the college atmosphere, and there really was something for everyone. I got involved with access events and the college SU, worked in the college bar, and DJed at some of the iconic Lucy bops. The makeup of the student body — with one SU rather than a J/MCR — made it easy to cross the divide between undergraduates and graduates and as a result, many of the great friends that I made were graduate students.

After an exciting first year however, things started to change. We were informed that the college was considering changing its entry criteria. I remember rumours flying around as to why this was being considered — the two main ones being a lack of funds and a lack

of direct applications. The college held consultations about this prospect and opinions were mixed. These consultations felt like a formality for many, as it seemed the decision had already been made, but I didn't want my college to change. I believed that Lucy had something special and I didn't want that to disappear.

The announcement was made, and the official line was that Lucy was diversifying and widening participation for more people from under-represented backgrounds. For a long time, I was really upset by this decision. Not because of the focus on those from underrepresented backgrounds, but because this could still have been a focus within the parameters of the old entry criteria. I was extremely proud to work with the LGBTQ+ and Women's Officers in my first year on a consultation about the transgender admissions policies at Lucy, and although it was a battle, it seemed like actual progress could be made — yet this seemed to fall to the wayside in light of the 'big announcement'. Another demographic that could have been focused on were student parents. While I have been at Lucy, there have always been student parents, but the lack of student accommodation for anyone with a partner or children seemed short-sighted to me. The size of the change also made it quite scary. It would have been more comfortable to change to just a mature college, or just a

women's college, but it felt like a really big leap to make all in one go. However, the decision was made and a leap it was. The only solace I felt I had was that I would have graduated by the time the changes came into effect.

“
I am sure that it will be easier to accept the loss of what once was
”

As we all know, the pandemic turned university experiences upside down. This has meant that my final year, and Lucy's final year as a mature women's college, did not take place in person. When I found this out, it felt like an anti-climactic end to my time at Cambridge. However, this was not to be the end of my Lucy journey. I applied for an MPhil course at Cambridge for 2021 entry. I did not apply directly to Lucy this time, instead hoping to be accepted to a mature college and, eventually, I was. I started to envision myself as a member of another college. And then, one day

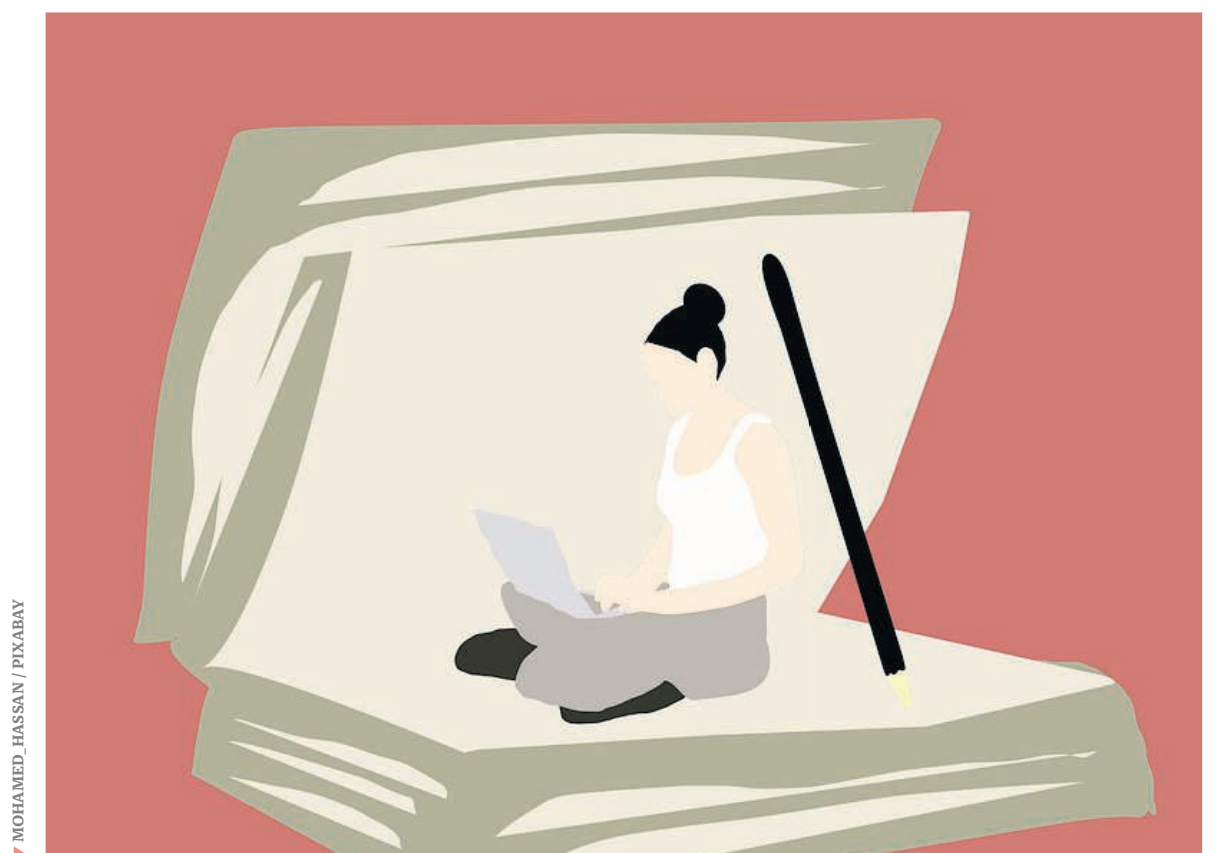
in May, I received an email offering me a scholarship. However, there was one condition: this scholarship was specific to Lucy Cavendish and to accept it, I would have to change college — back to Lucy. After some consideration, and some contemplation about the future of Lucy, I decided to accept the opportunity.

I cannot say that I have fully accepted the changes at Lucy yet, but I am starting to come to terms with them. The college seems to be working hard towards its goal of widening participation, with 60% of the incoming undergraduates coming from “backgrounds that are either disadvantaged or under-represented at Cambridge.” Despite my feelings about the decisions that were made, there is no denying the benefits that already exist because of them. As time goes on, and I see these benefits in person, I am sure that it will be easier to accept the loss of what once was.

So here I am, ready to start again at Lucy Cavendish. It will be a fresh start with a few familiar faces, and as hard as it has been to mourn the mature women's college, I am excited to be there for the start of something new.

On September 8th 2020, Varsity reported that Lucy Cavendish has 'updated their admissions policy to welcome standard-age female undergraduates from this year's entry, and are widening admissions to non-female students from 2021.

“
I believed that Lucy had something special and I didn't want that to disappear
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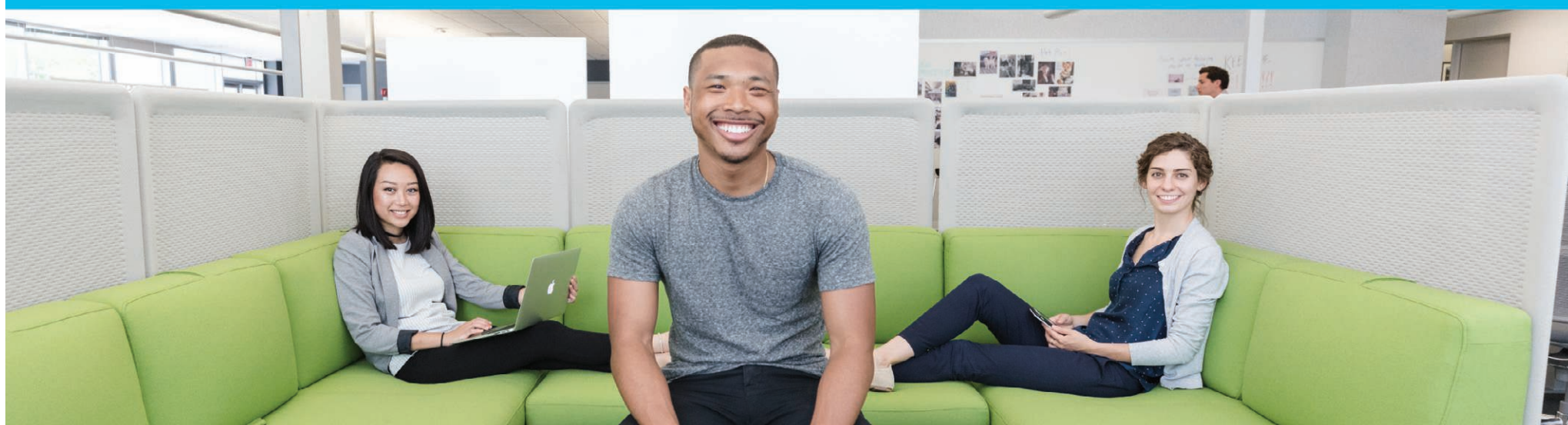


▼ MOHAMED_HASSAN / PIXABAY



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Opinion

The Black Advisory Hub: new, needed, and never finished

Tyra Amofah-Akardom, reflects on the process of creating the Black Advisory Hub launched this year, which was designed to support Black students at Cambridge



▲ LUCAS MADDALENA

When my co-researchers and I proposed the Black Advisory Hub, I didn't expect to be speaking at its launch event just under 18 months later, on Friday 14th May 2021. The Hub was initially created as part of the Action and Participation Plan: Participatory Action Research project (APP PAR), which explores the specific obstacles that negatively affect Black British students and disabled students with mental health conditions. These two groups have the widest awarding gaps at Cambridge, meaning that they are leaving with lower degree grades than their counterparts — a vital issue to be addressed.

There are many factors which co-researchers noted as contributing to the awarding gap, and my research group decided to focus on the support systems that Black students at Cambridge have access to, which we agreed are currently limited. The number of Black undergraduates at Cambridge has increased rapidly over the last few years, but the resources we need have not necessarily followed. Many Black students rely on student-led groups and societies such as the African Caribbean Society (ACS) and

the SU's BME Campaign for community and support. To be clear, it is not a problem that support comes from students, but what is often overlooked is that these

In my experience, being a Black student at Cambridge requires the navigation of a complicated space

students often face the same issues. The onus should not be placed on Black students to try and solve anti-black racism at Cambridge. It must be a collaborative effort between students and staff.

The complex structure of the university also makes it challenging for Black students to access the support they need. With so many different colleges, faculties and departments students may feel overwhelmed, not knowing where to turn to for support and receiving different answers from different people. In my experience, being a Black student at Cambridge requires the navigation of a complicated space, where our Blackness can simultaneously make us visible and invisible. It is not uncommon to be the only Black person in a room, meaning our experiences and identity are often ignored; but when they are highlighted, it can be done without sensitivity, reinforcing how we are perceived as 'Other'. When this is replicated across different settings in the university, you become uncertain as to how to cope with it. In light of this, we envisaged the Black Advisory Hub as a centralised support space, making it easier for Black students to access. It was not about replacing the support systems that Black students across the years have established and contributed to, but rather supporting them and promoting their work, as well as shining a light on opportunities that Black students may not have heard of.

Our proposal for a Black Advisory Hub was not free from challenges and hesitation. Part of our research involved gathering thoughts and feedback from current Black students; how did they feel about the creation of the Hub at Cambridge? Many students were enthusiastic, but some were apprehensive. Some were worried about potentially hostile responses from other students. These worries were totally valid and further exemplified why the initiative was needed. After all, the university community needs to understand how anti-black racism can affect the experiences of Black students, in order to dissuade unhelpful accusations that a Black Hub is self-segregating.

There was also the issue of what the Hub's focus should be. In our research, some students emphasised the need for academic support. Others valued careers support and establishing networks. The crucial role of staff was also highlighted, considering how they could use the Hub to better help the Black students that come to them for support. It was clear that more research was needed, so a scoping research project was conducted. This concluded with us identifying three key development stages for the

Hub: Bronze, Silver and Gold. The establishment of an online Hub completes the Bronze phase, and during the launch event, Professor Toope expressed his desire to launch the Hub into the Silver phase, with further work enacted to help transform it to the most useful source of

Our proposal for a Black Advisory Hub was not free from challenges and hesitation

support for Black students.

My favourite question from the launch event was concerning the future of the Hub; a student asked whether the long term plan for the Hub is to close as it would have served its purpose and will no longer be needed. To be honest, I think there will always be a need for the Black Advisory Hub. The goal of the APP PAR Project is to help narrow and eventually eliminate the awarding gap that exists between Black students and our counterparts. But the Black Advisory Hub has a role much bigger than this. The website lists four main areas of support available for Black students: welfare, academic, financial and career. The experiences of Black students at Cambridge are being heard now more than ever. After years of Black students speaking up, it feels as if we are finally being listened to and steps are being taken to support us during our time at Cambridge.

We often speak about the importance of understanding access work as needing to occur beyond the application stage. The awarding gap is proof of how crucial this is. Other projects as part of the APP PAR have focused on issues such as the shortcomings of the supervision system, the importance of decolonising the curriculum and the transition from school to university. The Black Advisory Hub is one action out of many that must be taken to not only help close the awarding gap, but also to ensure that Black students enjoy their time at Cambridge and the barriers that we face are lessened and if possible, eliminated.

Virginity testing: is the end in sight?

Olivia Millard

In early August this year, General Andika Perkasa announced that the Indonesian army would terminate mandatory “virginity testing” for female recruits. Such a statement signals progress for the longstanding global campaign against the practice but there is still a long way to go. It is unclear if and when the ban will be put into effect; the Indonesian police, navy and air force will still require negative results from these examinations, and apart from the inaccuracy and misinformation surrounding these tests, virginity testing continues to take place around the world, enforcing harmful stereotypes of female sexuality. The so-called “two finger test,” has been used by the Indonesian army since 1965, but was only exposed in 2014 by Human Rights Watch. It was, and remains, condemned domestically and internationally as degrading, discriminatory and pseudoscientific. Under the guise of an “obstetrics and pregnancy test” as part of the recruitment medical, the test is performed to supposedly determine whether female applicants’ hymens are intact, based on the flawed belief that it can only be broken by intercourse. In an interview with The Guardian in 2015, a spokesman for the Indonesian military, Fuad Basya, stated: “We need to examine the mentality of these applicants. If they are no longer virgins, if they are naughty, it means their mentality is not good.” This reasoning is also used to justify the virginity testing of women marrying Indonesian military personnel, with virginity being seen as an important quality to ascertain a “good” future wife or female soldier. In a joint statement released in 2018, the World Health Organisation, UN Human Rights and UN Women called for a “collaborative response” to end the practice — which “has no scientific or clinical basis” and “can be detrimental to

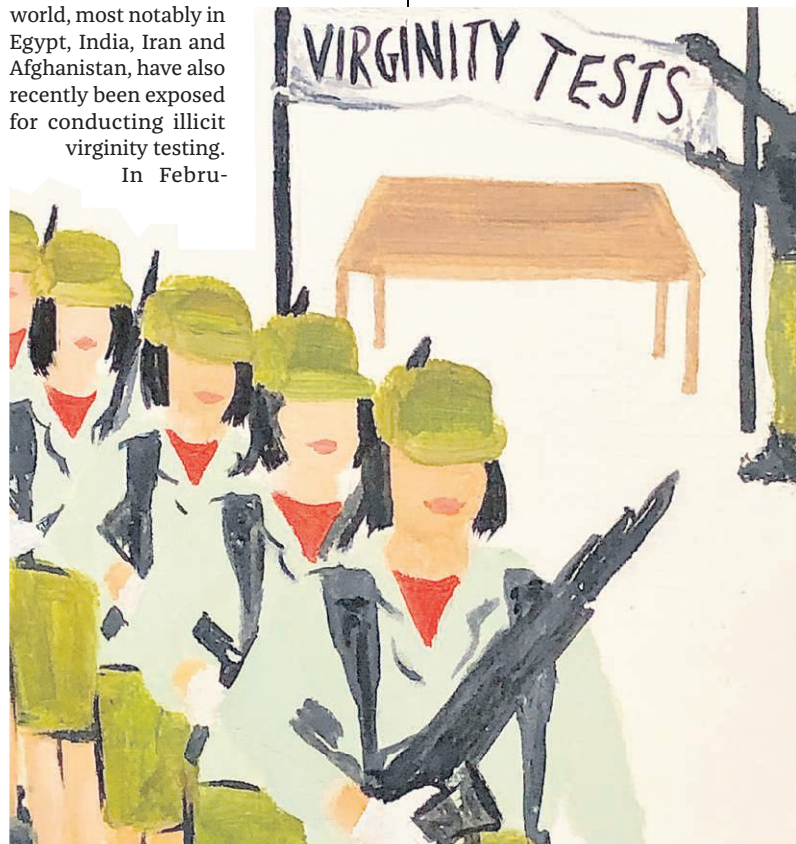
women’s and girls’ physical, psychological and social well-being.”

Not only is the test a traumatic and humiliating medical examination, it also indicates the concerning persistence of an archaic belief system which directly equates a woman’s value with her virginity. Societies have searched for a physical sign to determine virginity since time immemorial — it’s now known to be scientifically impossible. Despite this, virginity testing is still practised in at least 20 countries. Prisons and detention centres around the world, most notably in Egypt, India, Iran and Afghanistan, have also recently been exposed for conducting illicit virginity testing.

In Febru-

ary this year, it was reported that many of the female student activists detained in Tehran for participating in peaceful protests against the Iranian regime were being subjected to virginity tests while in prison. In one particular instance, after resisting the examination, 21-year-old student Parisa Rafiei was sentenced to an extra 15 months in jail in addition to the seven years she is currently serving.

In the US, rapper T.I. provoked a wave of public criticism in 2019 when he openly admitted on the *Ladies Like*



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◀ MEG REYNOLDS

Us podcast to taking his daughter to annual tests ensuring her virginity. Having acknowledged that the hymen can indeed be broken by activities such as horse-riding and riding a bike, he assured the interviewer that “she don’t ride no horses, she don’t ride no bike, she don’t play no sports,” stating that he considered the tests to be accurate. This demonstrates how the practice not only enforces the notion that sex outside marriage is only acceptable for men, but also perpetuates the idea that female sexual activity should be held under public scrutiny.

The UK is not exempt. In 1979 The Guardian exposed a so-called “gynaecological examination” carried out by immigration authorities on a 35-year old Indian teacher who had travelled to the UK to marry. Her status as an unmarried woman was doubted, and she was subjected to a virginity test. After a wide public outcry, the examinations were stopped, but the practice wasn’t totally eradicated. Only last year, the BBC discovered 21 clinics around the UK offering both virginity testing and “hymen-repair surgery”, an operation costing between £1,500 and £3000.

It remains to be seen whether there is meaning behind General Perkasa’s words; will the army really terminate the procedure? Needless to say, virginity testing is a global issue, spotlighting questions of female bodily autonomy, sexual health and women’s rights. The UK government has outlawed the process — certainly a step in the right direction — but in reality this move addresses only the tip of the iceberg. Long-lasting change can only come from fighting detrimental beliefs about female “purity”, a concept which intersects significant social, cultural and religious beliefs.

Insulating British homes is imperative

Reuben Brown

We know by now that Boris Johnson’s politics are big on rhetoric and scant on substance. He is a media man: a long-time opportunistic journalist who knows how to win attention. At the U.N. general assembly last week he waxed lyrical about his “Promethean faith in new green technology”. But there’s no use in green tech if you can’t figure out how to implement it — let alone install the solutions we already have.

On the other side, Extinction Rebellion (X.R.) offer urgent moralism about the threats of our climate collapse. “Tell the Truth”, “Act Now”, “Go Beyond Politics,” cries their website banner. The speeches I heard in Trafalgar Square at their “Impossible Rebellion” at the beginning of September were indistinguishable from what I heard two years before in the same place — the world is falling apart and we have to do something about it. But do what, exactly?

With COP 26 on the horizon, it’s time to get real about the nitty-gritty of reaching net-zero.

Enter Insulate Britain. Against the Prime Minister’s speculative sloganeering (“Jet Zero”, “Levelling Up”, “Global Britain”, the list goes on...), and X.R.’s vague doomsaying, the new kids on the block (or on the M25, I should say) inject a refreshing pragmatism into the climate

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We need to
recognise
how the cli-
mate crisis
intersects
here with
the U.K.’s
housing
crisis

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debate. One simple, specific — if unsexy — demand: insulate the nation’s housing stock to cut the 15% of U.K. carbon emissions generated by heating homes.

The reality, however, is of course more complicated — and needs a level of scrutiny greater than blocking the South East’s most important roadways during a supply chain crisis which is squeezing the cost of living around the U.K.

Britain’s housing stock is the oldest and draughtiest in Europe, and the vast majority of our homes are heated by individual gas boilers. Taken together, it means that we waste a shocking amount of energy keeping our homes warm in the winter. To reach net-zero emissions, we have to stop using gas in our homes, full stop. This will likely mean a transition to heat pumps and district heating networks; there are a host of creative solutions, but it’s no use investing in all the new technology without plugging the old leaks first. Insulating Britain is the crucial first step.

What will this mean in practice? First we need to recognise how the climate crisis intersects here with the U.K.’s housing crisis — which, rather than just being about the number of new homes built, also confronts the quality of our existing homes. The All-Party Parliamentary Group for Healthy Homes and Buildings’ 2018 White Paper is a damning report on the state of British housing. 1 in

3 homes in the U.K. suffers from mould, and a third of people live in housing that fails to meet the government’s Decent Homes Standard. 9,000 deaths a year are caused by cold houses — often due to a lack of insulation. Needless to say, these symptoms most acutely affect those on lower incomes, who cannot afford high gas bills (set to drastically increase this winter).

I learned these figures early in my architecture degree, and asked my lecturer — what can we do? There are plenty of solutions, and architects and builders have the expertise to implement them (for a particularly effective and heart-warming example, see 2021 Pritzker Prize laureates Lacaton & Vassal’s retrofit of 530 flats in Grand Parc Bordeaux). But without proper legislation and oversight, the despicable conditions of British housing, and the inexcusable level of emissions they produce, will continue.

To begin, the A.P.P.G. report offers a set of sensible recommendations: namely, the establishment of a single government department responsible for improving British homes and buildings. Rather than follow this directive, however, the government’s neoliberal response has been to allow renters to sue their landlords for repairs: a time-intensive and possibly expensive process that hardly helps those who can’t afford to live in a safer home, while ensuring

that nothing genuinely improves beyond the minimum level required by law. Meanwhile, Michael Gove acts as Secretary of State for “Levelling Up” (quotations added), Housing and Communities, whose “responsibilities for this role will be confirmed soon”.

Since his job isn’t yet confirmed, how about I suggest a broader view — one that incorporates public health, economics, and the environment together. A 2015 Building Research Establishment briefing paper estimates that the costs of improving British housing to an “acceptable level” would reach some £35bn. It’s a steep bill, but we have to think long-term. The costs to the N.H.S. from unsafe housing reach £2.5bn a year, and the wider costs to society are as high as £18bn — not to mention the enormous economic threat posed by the climate crisis: every pound spent today avoiding the worst-case scenarios will pay dividends twenty years from now. Equally, rolling out deep retrofitting works across the U.K. will provide thousands of high-quality, skilled jobs.

Put together, it’s a blindingly obvious programme the government should have rolled out ten years ago — and yet a bunch of activists in orange high-vis still have to sit on the motorway for them to see it. Boris might find it boring, but it’s the boring work that’s going to count in the end.

Science

Music as a medicine

Aneesah Bari explores the power of music and how music therapy can benefit individuals in a range of different settings

Music has a powerful capacity to both evoke and resonate with our emotions. Whether you have a dedicated playlist of songs to cry to, a go-to karaoke song for you and your closest friends, or a song that brings on a wave of nostalgia for a fond childhood recollection, the most memorable moments of our lives – or even just the day-to-day simplicities – often have a personal soundtrack that underlies them. Psychologists and other researchers have long recognized the dynamic potential of music, and, since the 20th century, have operationalized this potential in the field of music therapy.

While the solo belting sessions that some of us engage in in the shower may well feel therapeutic, 'music therapy' refers to the therapeutic use of music in a much more formal sense (so no, unfortunately on this particular occasion, we will not be exploring the versatile

impacts of bathroom singing practices). More specifically, to take the definition from the American Music Therapy Association, music therapy is a field that employs "the clinical and evidence-based use of music interventions to accomplish individualized goals within a therapeutic relationship by a credentialed professional who has completed an approved music therapy program". Admittedly, this definition might seem a bit lengthy and vague to those new to the practice, so it might be helpful to conceptualize the practice simply as an alternative form of therapy. Credentialed music therapists undergo years of extensive training to establish both musical proficiency and a clinical foundation with a background knowledge of psychology, counselling, physiology and a whole host of other topics related to wellbeing and health. These professionals then materialize this knowledge into tailored musical interventions that meet

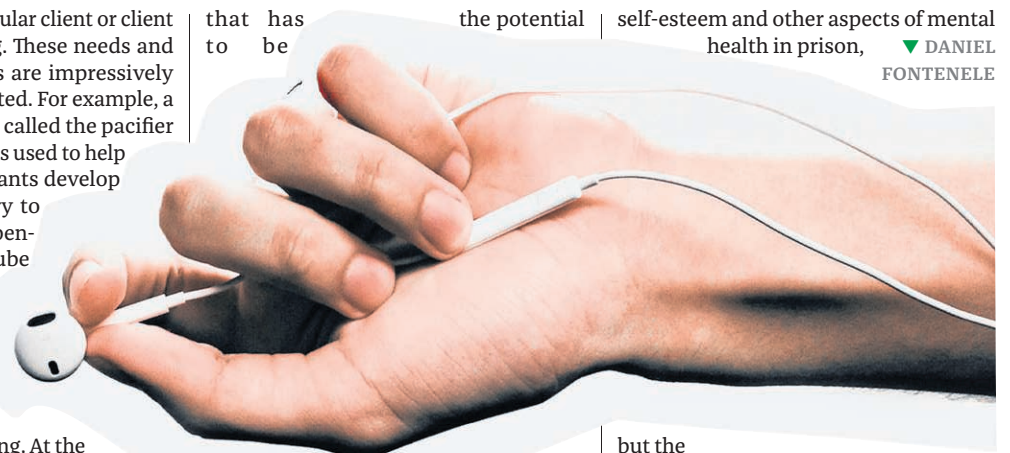
the needs of the particular client or client base they are serving. These needs and groups of individuals are impressively diverse and multifaceted. For example, a music therapy device called the pacifier assisted lullaby (PAL) is used to help prematurely born infants develop the reflexes necessary to be able to be fed independently of a feeding tube and therefore leave the hospital, using musical cues to develop the sucking reflexes that allow for bottle-feeding or breastfeeding. At the opposite end of the age spectrum, music therapy has been shown to improve cognitive function and other factors in individuals with dementia.

Arguably one of the largest applications of music therapy, however, is its use in improving mental health, whether

that has to be

the potential

self-esteem and other aspects of mental health in prison, **DANIEL FONTENELE**



deeply dehumanizing. Hierarchies and conduct rules are also established between incarcerated individuals, many of whom report, for example, having to maintain a sort of emotional rigidity in public spaces to avoid derision from others. What's more – this rather jarring social environment is exacerbated by the fact that connections to the outside world become limited or even severed. In general, individuals who are incarcerated have to adjust themselves to an entirely different landscape, and for many (if not most) individuals, the adjustment takes a toll. Several researchers have noted that mu-

but the use of music as a therapeutic medium also helps to mitigate some of the sharp contrast between the prison context and the outside world, for example, by serving as a metaphorical 'bridge'. The same transcendent capacity that music harbors that might have allowed you to nostalgically 'transport' yourself away during the preceding year's lockdowns to, perhaps, a fond recollection of your last pre-pandemic party, can serve as a way to allow individuals in prisons to temporarily 'escape' from their present circumstances and feel more connected to the broader social context that they have been removed from. Therefore, by gaining the opportunity to forge these connections through music therapy, individuals in the prison context might gain an opportunity to feel a renewed sense of connectedness to the people, places and memories that these individuals are necessarily removed from.

As we all slowly come to grips with a global pandemic that has, in some ways, made us all feel more disconnected, to take an empathetic tone, the benefits of music therapy in the prison context are surely ones that can resonate on some level. They constitute impactful findings in an even more impactful and interesting research domain, one that hopefully inspires us all to reconsider the ways in which music can be utilized as a powerful medium for change. **KOBU AGENCY**

sic therapy helps contend with some of these challenges. Music therapy can not only promote general improvements in anxiety, depression,



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Five ways your exercise routine could be changing your body

Senior Science Editor **Sambhavi Sneha Kumar** explores how exercise can shape key parameters in the body, beyond the obvious such as increased energy expenditure

Visiting the Freshers' Fair this year, as always, highlighted the sheer range of opportunities we have to stay fit. Whether signing up to try a new sport, joining a new gym, or simply going for a run, it's likely that there is a form of exercise that everyone will enjoy. There are undoubtedly many well-documented positive results of regular exercise: improved cardiovascular fitness, increased energy expenditure which can make it

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Both aerobic and anaerobic exercise may have beneficial effects on individuals suffering from different types of anxiety

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easier to maintain a healthy bodyweight, and increased release of mood-boosting endorphins, to name but a few. However, recent research is revealing many new, surprising and exciting effects of exercise that might just convince you to actually

go to those free taster sessions...

A perfectly normal effect of ageing is the associated substantial loss of skeletal muscle mass and strength, one of the reasons why activity and certain tasks become much harder with age. Much of this process cannot be prevented by any sort of intervention; for example age related changes in the nervous system generally leads to progressive cycles of loss and replacement of the motoneurons innervating a motor unit, until eventually regenerative capacity is lost leading to ultimate death of denervated muscle fibres. Of course, it can be difficult to ascertain how much of skeletal muscle 'ageing' is due to chronological progression and how much is due to accumulating effects of other lifestyle choices and pathologies with time. For the latter, exercise can have a beneficial effect on how our muscles 'age'. For example, maintaining body fat levels within healthy ranges through exercise prevents a condition known as sarcopenic obesity, which is when increased adiposity later in life worsens muscle function. This is independent of any muscle loss. So, exercising to stay fit when you're young will likely help you to maintain the optimal functioning of your muscles much later in life.

Whilst we may see shelves of heavily marketed bottles of kefir in Sainsbury's, most of us probably don't spend too much time thinking of our gut mi-

crobiota on a day-to-day basis. Our gut is estimated to contain over 100 trillion bacterial cells, with a completely

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Exercise can induce compositional and functional changes in the human gut microbiota

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distinct genome from our own, acting almost as an independent organ with key roles in physiology and pathological defence. The role of our gut microbiota in metabolism is becoming increasingly recognised, so it is perhaps unsurprising that it is intertwined with exercise too. Recent research has shed light on the crosstalk between skeletal muscle and gut bacteria. Interestingly, exercise can induce compositional and functional changes in the human gut microbiota that are reversed as soon as the exercise routine is stopped, and seem to be dependent on the

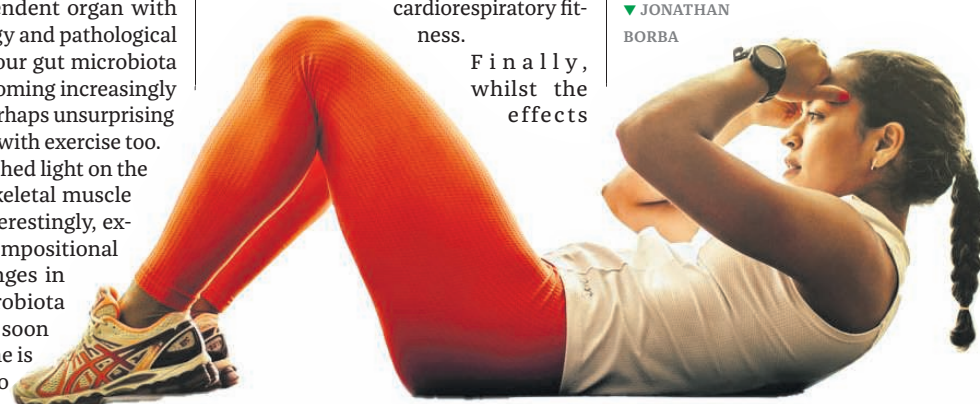
body fat percentage of the individual. Based on mouse models, it has been established that exercise training increased concentrations within the gut of short chain fatty acids from the microbiome, which act as a source of energy for tissues and have also been suggested to reduce inflammation and improve insulin sensitivity. This implies that exercise can affect metabolism of the gut microbiota in such a way that may lead to positive long-term health benefits. This was eventually extended to work in humans which demonstrated that the gut microbiota and its metabolism in both lean and obese study participants was altered in response to exercise, and this in turn had positive effects in the context of the physiological adaptation to exercise, for example, by improving cardiorespiratory fitness.

of exercise on boosting mood are relatively well-known, evidence is also emerging that both aerobic and anaerobic exercise may have beneficial effects on individuals suffering from different types of anxiety, reducing symptoms. However, further well-conducted randomised controlled trials are required to strengthen this conclusion.

A healthy level of exercise is, undoubtedly, great for our health. The benefits of exercise for our mental and physical wellbeing are huge, and it is likely that there are many more that have yet to be uncovered. As the new academic year begins to pick up pace, remember to take the time to take care of your health, and don't be afraid to try something new.

▼ JONATHAN BORBA

Finally, whilst the effects



Apply to be the next President of the Varsity Society

Applications are now open for election to the office of President of VarSoc, the Varsity Student Society. The President is responsible for running our student society, organising social events for the team and will play a major role in the selection of the paper's Editors for the remainder of this academic year.

Any current member of the Society may stand for election. They must be proposed by a person who is, or has been, Editor or Deputy Editor of the paper and seconded by another member of Section Editor or higher status.

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Applications close 5pm 22 October 2021. The election will be held the following week.

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Interviews

► Continued from page 7

streets of Cambridge in 2000.

However, it was not these concerns that led the Vice-Chancellor to reconsider the deal.

"We took this whole set of issues to a panel in the University, as well as the General Board", the Vice-Chancellor explained, "to make sure that they were supportive of launching the conversation."

It's always a question of fine balance: of course you have to assess the opportunity that's being presented to make a difference in the world and the risks to reputation of a whole series of important values for the University. The group looked at it step by step. We're aware of the risks in dealing with many states around the world but we think it's worth having the conversation."

Eventually, revelations about the UAE's use of Pegasus spyware led to the decision that the deal would not be pursued.

"The revelations caused us to decide that it's not the right time to be pursuing these kinds of really ambitious plans with the UAE. There are existing relationships across the University on a departmental and individual academic level but there are no conversations about a big project."

When asked if he would consider pursuing the deal at some point in the future, Toope said: "We're going to have to bring this back to collective thinking. No one's going to be rushing into this. There will be no secret arrangements being made. I think we're going to have to have a robust discussion at some point in the future. Or, we may determine that it's not worth raising again. I honestly don't know."

The research we were trying to focus on was to try to upgrade the education

system in the UAE which is really underperforming, to work on questions of climate and the energy transition and to work on a sharing of cultures — Islamic cultures and Western cultures, to

"We're already over half way to meeting our £500 million target"

try and find ways of connecting across cultures. Are those important enough things to think that we might be able to mitigate the risks? The answer is: I don't know quite frankly."

With a year still remaining in his tenure, the Vice-Chancellor is confident that he has undertaken everything he set out to do: "I'm feeling that most of the things that I'm interested in are well launched." In particular, the Vice-Chancellor applauded the progress made towards the funding target of the Student Support Initiative. "We're already over half way to meeting our £500 million target. We've moved ahead to launch the foundation year and we'll be welcoming the new cohort next year to the University." The initiative, which was announced in October, 2018, includes three core principles: financial support for undergraduates, new postgraduate scholarships and student life and wellbeing.

The University has long withstood criticism concerning access and participation, an area which the Vice-Chancellor has sought to address throughout his tenure. In 2018, the Financial Times

revealed that one in five Cambridge's colleges had admitted less than 10 students of mixed race over a five-year period. At the time, the University called for greater support, claiming that no more could be done without involvement from parents and schools. Professor Toope applauded the efforts made to correct this injustice, acknowledging that this year the University would be "welcoming a record number of Black undergraduates."

"We've tripled the number in just over three years and that's a testament to these great students, but it's also a testament to the University intentionally reaching out and saying there is a place for you at Cambridge."

Beyond opening the University to talent from more diverse areas, Vice-Chancellor Toope affirmed the success of the Cambridge Zero Carbon Campaign. In October last year, *Varsity* reported the announcement that the University would remove all direct and indirect investments in the fossil fuel industry from its £3.5 billion endowment fund by 2030. Whilst some applauded the move, others, including representatives from Extinction Rebellion (XR) Cambridge, contested the delayed deadline.

As the Vice-Chancellor prepares for his final year, he acknowledged the "tremendous support" from his colleagues. At times, Professor Toope was subjected to pointed criticisms by current colleagues and academics, accusing him of failing to protect the freedom of academics as well as denouncing what they claim to be unnecessary political correctness, such as the short-lived 'Report+Support System,' which was removed one week after its initial implementation in May this year. In response, Professor Toope claims his "views on free speech have been completely mischaracterized, certainly in the press, or parts of the press."

Professor Toope denies the osten-

sible divide between progressive and conservative members of his team: "I think setting this up as 'a woke vs. the so-called defenders of tradition' is a false dichotomy that I don't see honestly as

"I can't pretend that some of the things that have been said in the press are not hurtful"

the University of Cambridge. I feel that

the vast majority of colleagues want both — for it to be an institution that fundamentally supports free speech and one that wants to support healthy relationships amongst staff students and good work practices and tolerant behaviours."

"I can't pretend that some of the things that have been said in the press are not hurtful but it does make it easier to bear when you know there are a lot of people who are very strongly supportive as well."

In wake of the criticisms, the Vice-Chancellor has received over 300 messages of support since announcing his departure from the role next year. Here, he pauses: "it's a privilege to be at the helm of an institution that is so important to the United Kingdom but also to the world." The Vice-Chancellor welcomes the opportunity to spend more time with his family and his friends after the conclusion of his tenure.



▲ The UAE deal is on "hold for now" (LOUIS ASHWORTH/VARSITY)

Comment: Medwards or Moordale?

Emaan Ullah

While lacking in pantsuits and trendy Veja trainers, the new Murray Edwards President, Dorothy Byrne, appears to have a lot in common with Hope Haddon — the former Headmistress of Moordale Secondary School in *Sex Education*.

They're both powerful women, keen to impart their received wisdom onto the minds of the young. They do, however, have different ways of doing this. Hope plays it cool with an 'I'm on your level' approach in order to ally herself with students before subjecting them to lessons on sex and fertility, while Byrne announces she wants to revive the conversation around childbearing via a *Sunday Times* news piece. But their goals are united: to communicate their vision for the future onto the impressionable youth — especially girls.

Irrespective of how noble their goals may be, Byrne and Hadden are flawed in how they try to score them. Hadden both alienates and condescends her students, and while she has little time for gender non-conformity,

she seems to have buckets of it for the investors — constantly cited as the reason for why the 'sex-school' needs to 'clean up its act'. Byrne similarly brushes aside the fact that a message around heterosexual, female reproduction will simply fall deaf on the ears of many who aren't.

Hope's consistent ignorance of the needs of Cal Bowman, one of the few non-binary students at Moordale, seems to be somewhat reflected in these seminars. If you've come here from Page 1, you'll know that some students feel like these classes "alienate many of Medwards' male, non-binary, and gender minority students." And yet they both press on, safe in the knowledge that their experiences entitle them to lecture others about how to go about their life choices.

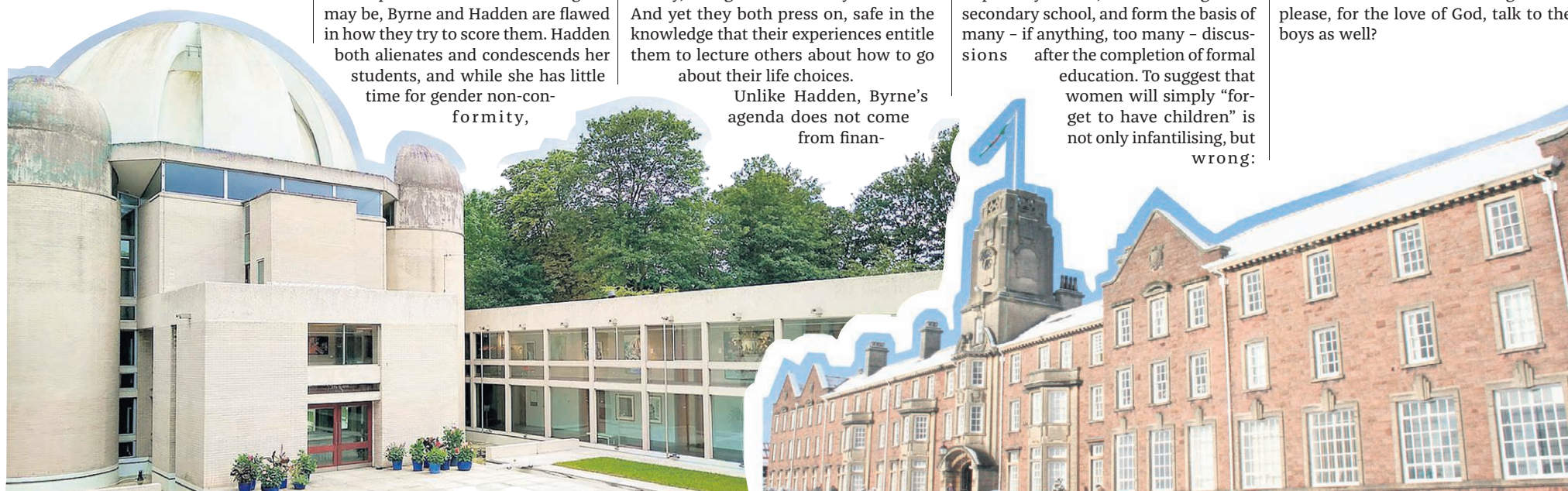
Unlike Hadden, Byrne's agenda does not come from finan-

cial pressure above, but her child below. Since she 'put her career first', she only thought about children when it was too late. Not late enough it seems, as thanks to IVF, she was able to have a child at 45. Byrne justifies her proposal by pointing to the supposedly alarming decline in the national birth rate, which fell from 1.92 in 2011 to 1.53 in 2021. To Byrne, this news requires a conversation — fertility can't be a 'forbidden subject'.

Except it isn't. Women are well aware of their status as a 'ticking time bomb'. Lessons on sex education commence in primary school, follow through into secondary school, and form the basis of many — if anything, too many — discussions after the completion of formal education. To suggest that women will simply "forget to have children" is not only infantilising, but wrong:

believe us, there's no danger of forgetting.

Though Moordale is a 19th century red-brick school in what looks like America, but is probably somewhere near Staines, and Medwards is a post-war concrete mass that resembles R2-D2, their leaders are united in the inefficacy of their endeavours. While Hadden aggravates her students to the extent where they retaliate and get her fired, Byrne is striking at the wrong target in the wrong way. We're happy to talk about fertility, but perhaps don't pretend we're children when doing it — and please, for the love of God, talk to the boys as well?



I crossed the Mediterranean in search of safety

Juliette Guéron-Gabrielle speaks with Zain Alabidin Al Khatr and his translator Lorga Borges de Souza about Zain's journey from Sudan to Germany

Could you tell me about your journey from Sudan to Germany?

Zain left Sudan because it was dangerous for him there. He cannot speak about why he left because it is still dangerous for his family in Sudan. Zain headed towards Libya. The only way to get to Libya was through human traffickers. He had to go through the desert and mountains and arrived at a prison-like place. About 200 people were kept in small rooms. The place had guards. They were only given small quantities to eat.

Zain lived in Libya for 19 months in total, including two in Benghazi. Those two months were the worst of his life. He saw people being kidnapped. Arms were being sold like fruit in a supermarket. You could easily buy a gun and kill anyone you wanted to. Zain noticed that there were no journalists around, so he started writing. He didn't want to die without anyone knowing what had happened to him.

And after two months in Benghazi, you decided to try to cross the Mediterranean?

One day in Benghazi, Zain was kidnapped. He was about to be shot, until a taxi driver came by and saw the whole thing. Because they were being watched, the human traffickers did not shoot Zain. That was the moment Zain knew he had to leave Benghazi.

After that, he went to Sidra — a city dominated by the oil industry. Zain was working as a painter, trying to survive day by day. He decided alongside his friends that he needed to leave Libya because it was dangerous, especially for migrants like them. He and his friends managed to hire a taxi and decided to go back to Sudan.

When in the taxi, they got a feeling that the drivers had something else planned for them and that they needed to get out of the taxi. So, they got out in a small village. The first thing they asked is if they were other Sudanese people. They were other Sudanese people, and they gave them something to eat and somewhere to sleep. They stayed there.

Through his contacts, Zain learned someone was looking for a painter, so he started renovating

the person's apartment. After they had finished the renovation, his employer said he didn't have money to pay for it. Zain knew he had to accept that because if he didn't, he might get killed. Zain said it was okay and asked to be brought home. On the way home, the car got into an accident. The owner of the apartment died and Zain ended up in hospital. So, after one month of living in Sidra, Zain realised he had to leave the country. He was unsafe.

There was no other solution than going to Europe. When Zain decided to cross the Mediterranean, he knew he was deciding to die. He thought dying was easier than staying in the position he was in. He set off on the 1st of August and got to Sicily on the 3rd of August. The boat was saved by the Italian marine in 2016. In 2016, they were still saving people. It was

easier than what people are going through now.

From Italy, he took the train to Mu-

nich. When he got to Munich, the police stopped him on the train. They brought him to a refugee camp. He stayed there overnight. The next day, his fingerprints were taken. The police told him he could apply for asylum at a camp called Osnabrück.

When he got to Osnabrück, he was starving. He had one euro left. He chose to buy a notebook to take notes about his journey instead of food. He could not have done that in Libya because people did not let him enter the supermarket. And in Libya, having a paper in hand would have meant being hunted down, because people would have thought he was a journalist.

After seventeen days, Zain was transferred from Osnabrück to another refugee camp. That was very sad for him because he already had friends in Osnabrück and knew places where he could write. After that, he was sent to yet another location — a small village in Germany where he finished his book. In 2019, the book was published. After he finished his book, his asylum was not extended. The last chapter of his book is his asylum being denied and him being con-

fused, really lost.

How do you think the asylum process could improve? What are the most urgent steps?

The European Union needs to establish legal and safe ways to reach Europe. They have to stop allowing people to go through Libya and then die in the Mediterranean. And they need to make people aware that getting here does not mean that your life is going to be magical and safe because Germany, like other countries, has racism and other bad things that people will experience.

How was the experience of arriving in Germany and living there for two years? Did you feel like you had finally found safety or were you confronted with racism and other negative experiences?

Zain had both positive and negative experiences in Germany, but it was a good experience as a whole. Life is difficult wherever you are, but in Germany it was easier to find some kind of success and safety.

What do you want to do in the future?

Zain has three goals. First, to graduate from his course: he is training as a mechanic and hopes to graduate within three months. Then, he wants to connect people through sports. He is a football instructor here. Lastly, he wants to finish his second book, which is about his current life in Germany. Another one of his short-term goals is to visit the UK!

Why did you keep on writing throughout your journey? Did writing help you maintain hope? Or did you do it so people would know?

He wanted people to understand what migrants go through. He was writing not for himself, but for other refugees. And for the European Union — so that they would legalise crossing the Mediterranean. That is still his goal. He wants to spread his story and other stories, so that people stop being so passive and start doing something.

Any last message?

Zain's last message is for the people of Europe. People are coming here for numerous reasons. People are trying to survive, to find peace, safety, a future, because they don't have that in their home countries. So people should be more welcoming and more respectful to migrants. They should see beyond their usual images of refugees.

Interviews

'I'm evangelical about research', says Covid-19 Clinical Trials Investigator Dr Mark Toshner

From "manic work" to "astonishing human achievement": Dr Mark Toshner chats clinical trials and vaccine development with Interviews Editor *Stephanie Stacey*

Dr Mark Toshner is "evangelical about research", although he admits that it's often "not enormously glamorous". He's been involved in major ground-breaking clinical trials throughout the pandemic, helping to collect data on the first Covid-19 patients that arrived in Cambridge and working as a principal investigator for the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine study.

Toshner, a consultant physician and Cambridge lecturer, currently spends most of his time working on a project called HEAL-COVID – one of the first studies aiming to reduce the frequency of longer-term complications of Covid-19.

Pre-pandemic, he worked primarily on experimental and translational medicine – seeking to "translate" models of disease and large-scale data into "workable therapies" – with his major focus lying on a rare lung condition known as pulmonary hypertension.

As Covid-19 swept the world in early 2020, Toshner found himself "dragged into a number of pandemic studies".

"Just because I've got generic clinical trial skills that can be repurposed towards different things, I ended up sort of by accident doing a lot of work on things that wouldn't normally be my area."

The daily life of a principal investigator – a role Toshner held in the Cambridge branch of the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine study, as well as for the ongoing HEAL-COVID research project – "is not enormously glamorous."

Compared with his previous research work, Toshner tells me: "I spend a lot more time in meetings than I ever did."

The paperwork, too, is extensive. "There's a lot of paperwork involved in trying to make sure that the governance of this type of study is absolutely rock solid." This includes detailed documentation on everything from staff training to data-input and ethical compliance.

Despite this, being part of such significant trials has been "phenomenally exciting", not least because "the sort of resources we had were a once in a lifetime opportunity."

"There was a lot of manic work" at the beginning of the pandemic, Toshner says, especially when it came to

setting up the vaccine trials: "We were trying to set up a study within a time frame of days or weeks when we would normally have years".

Accomplishing this "extraordinary" feat required "the sort of Herculean effort and the sort of infrastructural focus that, by definition, very few studies are ever going to have".

“It’s the equivalent of setting up the moon landing and nailing it within just a few weeks”

To put this into context, Toshner tells me that, at one point, 88 people were working together to set up the Oxford vaccine trials. A normal clinical trial, he says, would have just "two, maybe three" people doing this work.

It's hard to overstate the scale of the achievement. The research community went from having no understanding of the disease, to analysing its genetics, understanding its basic biology and developing workable therapies and vaccines all within the space of just 18 months.

This, Toshner says, is "the equivalent of setting up the moon landing and nailing it within just a few weeks".

He is keen to stress that such progress would have been impossible without large-scale international collaboration: "It was an astonishing human achievement that involved an amazing cast of characters from all around the world pulling in one direction."

Throughout the pandemic, Toshner's research has involved both great highs and terrible lows, from the joys of the vaccine success, to the stress and trauma of treating extremely sick and dying patients.

Toshner tells me that he can very clearly remember the anxiety he felt upon recruiting the first infected Covid-19 trial patient in Cambridge, back in early 2020. This research was stressful because, not only were the investigators navigating the suffering of very sick patients, "you are intentionally exposing yourself to the virus for an interaction that you know isn't clinically needed".

"Although you could see that there would be a downstream benefit, what you actually had to do was to open a door and go into a room with a patient who had Covid."

Nevertheless, he says, "I really feel very privileged to have been part of some of these studies. At a time when most people felt powerless, we genuinely felt that what we were doing might be important. To have been able to contribute to that is something that I'll always treasure."

Although Toshner emphasises that the speed and intensity of the Covid-19 trials was a "real one-off", he's optimistic that "some of the tangential side effects might

“I really feel very privileged to have been part of some of these studies”

change how we do things in other areas".

In particular, he says, the regulatory authorities – who are responsible for approving medical research and treatments to ensure safety, efficacy and quality – "have done an astonishing job of changing some of their processes to be faster without compromising their safety". This has involved "better and more open dialogue" between regulatory authorities and researchers, both equally motivated to streamline trials and ensure comprehensive ethical compliance and scientific integrity.

According to Toshner, "the regulators are the unsung heroes of the pandemic".

On various occasions, he notes, the UK was one of the first nations to license new Covid-19 therapies, and very rarely did British regulators "put a single foot wrong". UK regulators avoided licensing controversial therapies such as hydroxychloroquine, but streamlined the acceptance of those treatments that met the necessary ethical and scientific standards.

Although his heavy workload left little time for learning a new language or baking sourdough, Toshner tells me that

he did manage to learn personal, as well as scientific, lessons from the pandemic.

Covid-19 offered "the best excuse to just take the leash off of my workaholic tendencies", Toshner says, "and there was a little part of me that was delighted by that."

"My main takeaway from this is that I need to actively and constantly be careful to ensure that I make time for the people that are important in my life".

He keeps a white board in his office, listing his most important tasks in order of priority: "For the last for the last year, the white board just says: go home and see your kids."

Overall, Toshner is positive – both about our eventual route out of this pandemic and about the future of scientific research.

"I really hope I haven't presented a negative view of research", he tells me. "The wonderful thing about research is that you can ask a question nobody knows the answer to, design a study to try to answer it, and along the way you might – if you're lucky – improve people's lives."

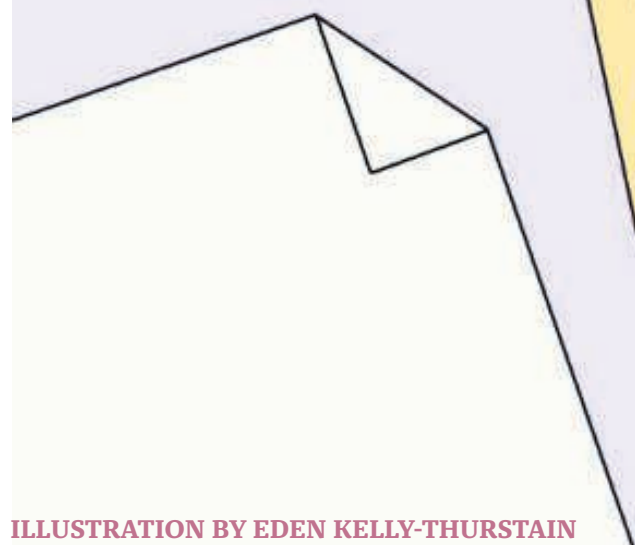
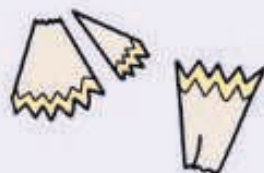
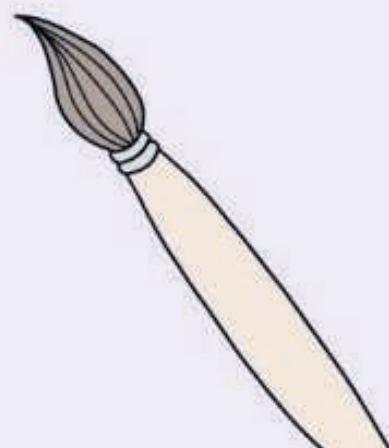
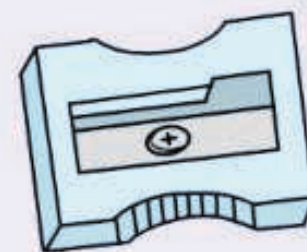
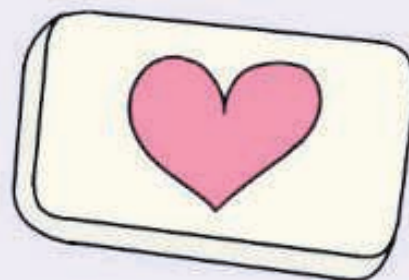
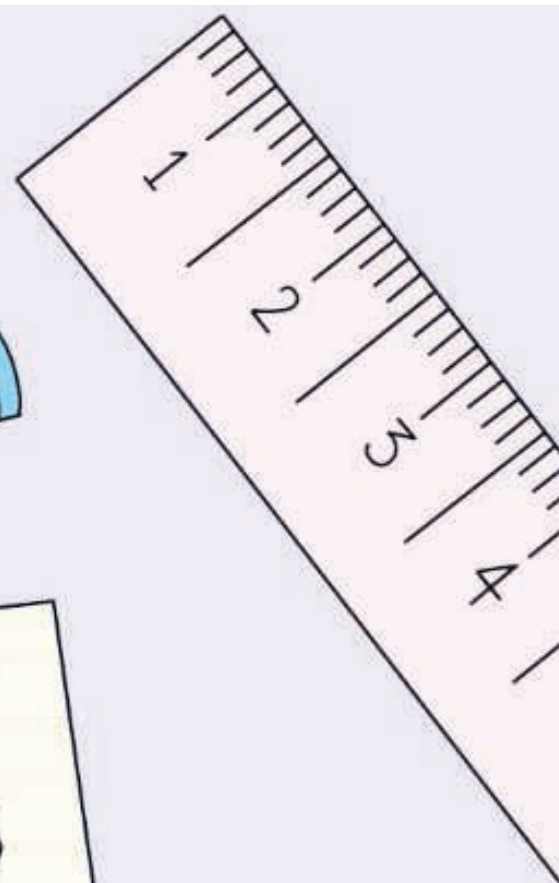
"Although the actual process of research can sometimes be a bit like banging your head against a brick wall,

I feel very privileged that this is the field I chose to work in, and that at this point in the pandemic my work was of some small value."



◀ The Oxford/ AstraZeneca vaccine (ARNE MUSELER)

Vulture



Lifestyle

A Student's Search for Umami

Sam Perry explores the unique Cambridge food scene, and highlights the best things that it has to offer in the first instalment in his series

Methodology

I was initially very hesitant to pen an article purporting to be able to give any comprehensive sense of what students eat in Cambridge, but on approaching the end of my second year, a realisation dawned on me. While there were many useful restaurant reviews like those done by fellow Varsity writers, the guide my 18-year-old self would have wanted, as he wasted away hours on variously flawed map applications, did not exist.

There are, of course, Cambridge food guides, but I have found that they tend to fail to do justice to the diversity within Cambridge that makes its food scene so special, often focussing on chain restaurants or those with large PR budgets and #ad campaigns. Like Pseudo-Denys then I set out, not to solve the lack of a comprehensive Cambridge student eats guide, but to fail better.

There are, of course, Cambridge food guides, but I have found that they tend to fail to do justice to the diversity within Cambridge that makes its food scene so special

A corollary of this being my task is a number of caveats, the first of which is that 'student eats' are not synonymous with cheap eats, a concept that preserves the damaging hegemonies at play in much of the restaurant world. Instead, the establishments in this article will provide good value rather than a straightforwardly cheap meal. Some restaurants in this list may therefore be more expensive than a maintenance loan would allow for regularly, but where this is the case I have tried to direct the reader to tips and tricks that make these experiences more budget friendly.

There will also be a focus within this article on vegetarian/vegan options as I'm aware of the significant student population who, even

if not vegetarian/vegan, are making a conscious decision to eat meat more sparingly as response to the climate emergency. In doing so I hope also to broaden the conceptions of where vegan food can come from and what it can look like, while omnivores can rest assured that vegetarian/vegan dishes act as a useful barometer of the care taken by those in the kitchen toward all dishes. In order that my list dies not by 'a thousand qualifications', it is here that I will start.

Central

The best, and perhaps only, kept secret on Kings Parade is Ittou, a Japanese ramen restaurant, hidden away down an alley below the shops of Kings parade, that prides itself on its homemade ingredients. Offering everything from tonkotsu to vegan ramen, the care taken with the menu is reflected in the service which makes ordering more conversational than strictly transactional. My Takoyaki and Miso ramen were both exemplary, the former piping hot and creamy, the latter with a rich broth, sweet with mirin that is soaked up by homemade tofu skin and cut through by the pickled mooli.

Closer to Magdalene I also want to draw attention to Thanh Binh, a Vietnamese Restaurant serving an array of Vietnamese dishes and offering its best value with a lunch menu, available between 12 and 2 between Monday and Saturday. The presentation of each dish is immaculate, with a hibiscus leaf lying above the freshly squeezed passion fruit juice like a water lily, leaving the seeds of the fruit clustered at the bottom to swim up your straw as tapioca does in bubble tea. The starters and mains are all warm and comforting, with a beautiful Lâu Chay (vegetable hot pot) for those vegans who prefer taro, potato, okra and lotus seed to mock chicken and mock duck (also on offer). Desserts at Thanh Binh fall into two categories, puddings and ice creams, the former category ranges from Tapioca, red bean and banana while the ice cream extends from ginger to avocado and then durian, a flavour I, as of yet, haven't noticed at Jack's Gelato but admittedly can't rule out.

On the topic of Jack's, the quality and ingenuity of whose gelato is well-attested by their running until 11 at night through the year with seemingly permanent, if fast moving, queues. A wealth of vegan offerings, a daily changing



menu at both Bene't Street and All

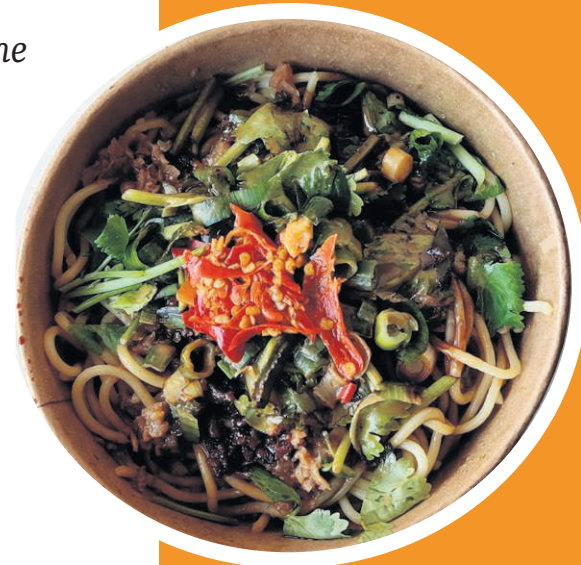
Saints Passage locations and the 'Request a Flavour' google form, in combination with its popularity means there is both nothing more and too much to say concisely about Jack's. Quite apart from the Yuzu Beet sorbets then, it should also be noted that the hot chocolate available at Jack's throughout Michaelmas and Lent are fantastic. Served at what has been decided to be the optimal temperature of 67 degrees, although dissenters from this stance can request temperature amendments to their tastes, their various hot chocolates rely heavily

Quite apart from the Yuzu Beet sorbets then, it should also be noted that the hot chocolate available at Jack's throughout Michaelmas and Lent are fantastic

ily on the quality of Jack's own produce, oat milk and chocolate gelato, as well as top notch ingredients from Pump Street or Estate Dairy.

Honourable Mentions: Bridges, Chai Walla, Salathong, Taste of Cambridge, Aromi

Thank you to Yuchao Fan, Lily Zhang, Jia Zheng Ong, Roshni Ranasinghe-de Silva, Kirish Rajaseelan, Zi Ling, Angelo Thavaratnarajah, Amaka Udeagbaja, Joshua Abu, Chang Ji, Nell Ivimey-Parr and Marcus Hicks for both their new recommendations and confirmations of my own experiences.



Places we've been so far...

- Central
- Market
- Mill Road

Stay tuned on varsity.co.uk/lifestyle to see where else Sam Perry's search will take him.

...the search continues, at the Market and Mill Road

Market

The Cambridge Market is a blessing for those attending central colleges or who find themselves travelling across Cambridge in the late morning to mid-afternoon. Favourite among the many varying options are Africfood, a stall offering nutritious and filling Nigerian food in many different formats including mixed boxes, the vegan variation of which includes jollof, boiled black-eyed beans, yam and fried plantain on top. Bird Thai Noodle Bar, known also as just the Thai food truck, and the seemingly permanent queue which demonstrate its popularity, offer a quick and well-priced lunch, with Zi Ling of CUSEAS recommending the no.2 (Fried chicken with rice) in particular. Jian Bing House offers sterling Bánh mì and Scallion Pancakes as well as the Jianbing from which the stall derives its name but my favourite is the Hot Dry Noodles, vegan as each menu item can be. For £5.50 you get a bowl of noodles with a spicy soy and sesame based sauce, all topped with chilli, coriander and chives to cut through the richness, resulting in an immensely sustaining and warming lunch. Mormor's Swedish Kitchen is a new addition to the Cambridge market landscape and while at present offering

a limited menu, a Kardemummarbullar (cardamon roll) goes down a treat before a particularly gruelling library session or as a reward for the completion of one. Azuma is a purveyor of Malaysian and Japanese cuisine, also seemingly always behind a large queue that is worth navigating for dishes like Bak Kut Teh and Nyonya (Malay-Chinese) Curry rice that are not available elsewhere.

Honourable Mentions: Arepa Station, Shelley and Sarah's, Eastern European Cuisine, Pinchito

Mill Road

Often lauded as the best escape from the student bubble, the reality of Mill Road is much more complex, and that it is so is evident from the first restaurant one comes across on doing battle with Mill Road. While I'm sure that the small plates, and the tasting menu at newly opened 'Fin Boys' deliver on its promises, it serves as a paradigmatic example of the kind of new 'bubbling food and drink scene' in Cambridge. The role that food plays in this transformation is evident from Eliane Thoma-Stemmet's article, on the subject in which she is told by one shopkeeper that "It's becoming a food place. The old

shops can't last anymore." While the lifespan of the Costa Coffee mentioned in Thoma-Stemmet's article was short-lived, supermarkets now take up space on both sides of the bridge on a street blessed with international supermarkets far superior.

Understanding this shift from shops and services to cafes and restaurants does not mean one should not visit the excellent restaurants Mill Road has to offer, but rather, it is worth being aware of this when on returning you need some groceries and are confronted between a choice between Ocean, Cho Mee,

the hospitality industry most pressingly on Mill Road, with many of the restaurants in this list adopting signs in the window advertising the need for staff. Mill Road then acts less and less as an escape and more of a sign of the depressing reality of living in Nadine Dorries' cultural landscape.

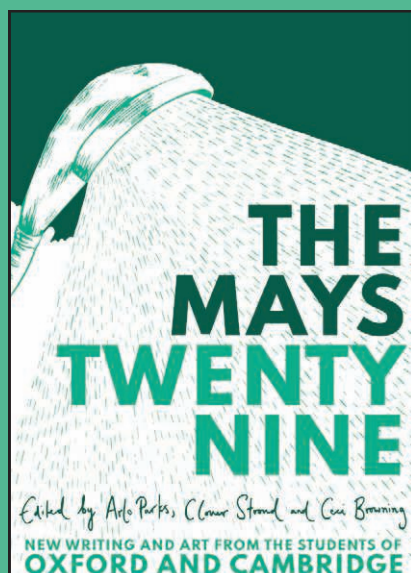
With that being said, Noodles Plus + serve excellent Xiao Long Bao at 6 for as many pounds, radish and vermicelli filled steamed buns that bring immense umami satisfaction, 15 dumplings for as little as five pounds and some outstanding noodles with scallion oil and soy sauce for the same price. Bibimbap House performs particularly well when tasked with Bibimbap and Kimbap (often compared to Japanese maki inasmuch as it is vegetable in rice in seaweed), leaving room for Little Seoul Restaurant on Regent Street whose Bulgogi shines. Shakshuka from Bedouin is a delight, as is the Betenjal bel tahina (Grilled Aubergine flavoured with chilli, garlic, coriander, tahini, pomegranate and toasted sesame).

Honourable Mentions: Eclipse, Modigliani, Tradizioni, Little Petra, Edge café, Café Blue Sage, Liutaio Music Restaurant, Kingston Arms, Carlos BBQ, Garden kitchen, Tom's cakes, Urban Larder.

◀ ALL PHOTOS BY SAM PERRY

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Arts

Train Rat: A Short Story

In our first original composition of the term, **Priyanka Voruganti** shares a short story about a girl struggling to cope with the aftermath of a sexual assault

Content Note: This article contains detailed discussion of sexual misconduct

It was in the half second of the rat's body turning to shards that the train began to pick up once again. Powerless to the moving of it, and to the subsequent destruction of the poor creature, Greer felt responsible. She tried to brace for impact. Obviously ridiculous, but shouldn't there be some sort of indication that something had just occurred? Like a bump in the course, a sharp snap of a neck? She tried to listen for a squeal. They had been stopped at the station for an exact two minutes and forty something seconds before the train lurched onward. Greer noticed that every stop took about this amount of time, as she had made a habit of clicking on a new song just as the train settled into a lull, just to see how far she could get before the vehicle jolted forward. Sometimes,

“

If those who did see the poor creature scurry under the train were eventually convinced of the rat's survival, then wasn't that the truth of the matter?

”

the momentum of her body paralleled the crescendo of whatever she was listening to, the rhythm of the world suddenly and miraculously syncing up. Sometimes, it didn't align, and she was left with a nasty feeling, a disorientation that shook her to the core. Greer had seen the rat scurry onto the track from the left and fail to emerge on the other side. So clearly, something had happened. Unless, by sheer luck, the rodent had figured out a way to perfectly fit his body between the train's wheels, flattened himself into the very middle of the monolith. Unlikely. Greer tried to release the morbid thoughts of substituting rat for person, rat for old lady, rat for someone like herself. Would she be able to fit under, snug and warmed by the exhaust of hot air of the train? The ticket collector appeared then, looking expectantly at her vacant face, as if

catching her in the act of something insidious. A ticket was handed to him. A hole was put inside of it and the thick paper was pinned to the top of Greer's seat. More nondescript towns were passed.

This was Greer's usual route. The air began to thin, as it always did when they descended from city to suburb. The sun dipped further, casting an amber glow on the dead shrubbery peeking out of the tracks. Greer twitched in her seat, trying to appear busy. She had nothing to do though, as the last few months of her life had been filled with unending time, growing more and more elastic as the days passed. Everyone was always doing something on this train, she noticed, the older men in worn suits spilling the yogurt their wives had packed for them on grey chin stubble, the white goop sometimes grazing the newspapers or kindles resting in their laps. They were the loudest of passengers if children weren't present in the car, emphatically sighing with boredom or coughing through some malignant phlegm forever stuck inside of their wrinkled throats. They often talked as if addressing a crowd to invisible devices in their ears, laughing to the

other end about what pathetic thing Susan had done in the office that day, who had pulled the largest numbers (Greg, against all odds), whose wife was the most unbearable. There was nothing romantic or even mildly mysterious about the journey. Greer recalled the plot

fixated on the subjects of the crime. Depressed and widowed, or something along those lines, the protagonist drearily searched for excitement in the passing landscape, clinging onto whatever mildly peculiar observation was made. Greer decided that if she was to ever

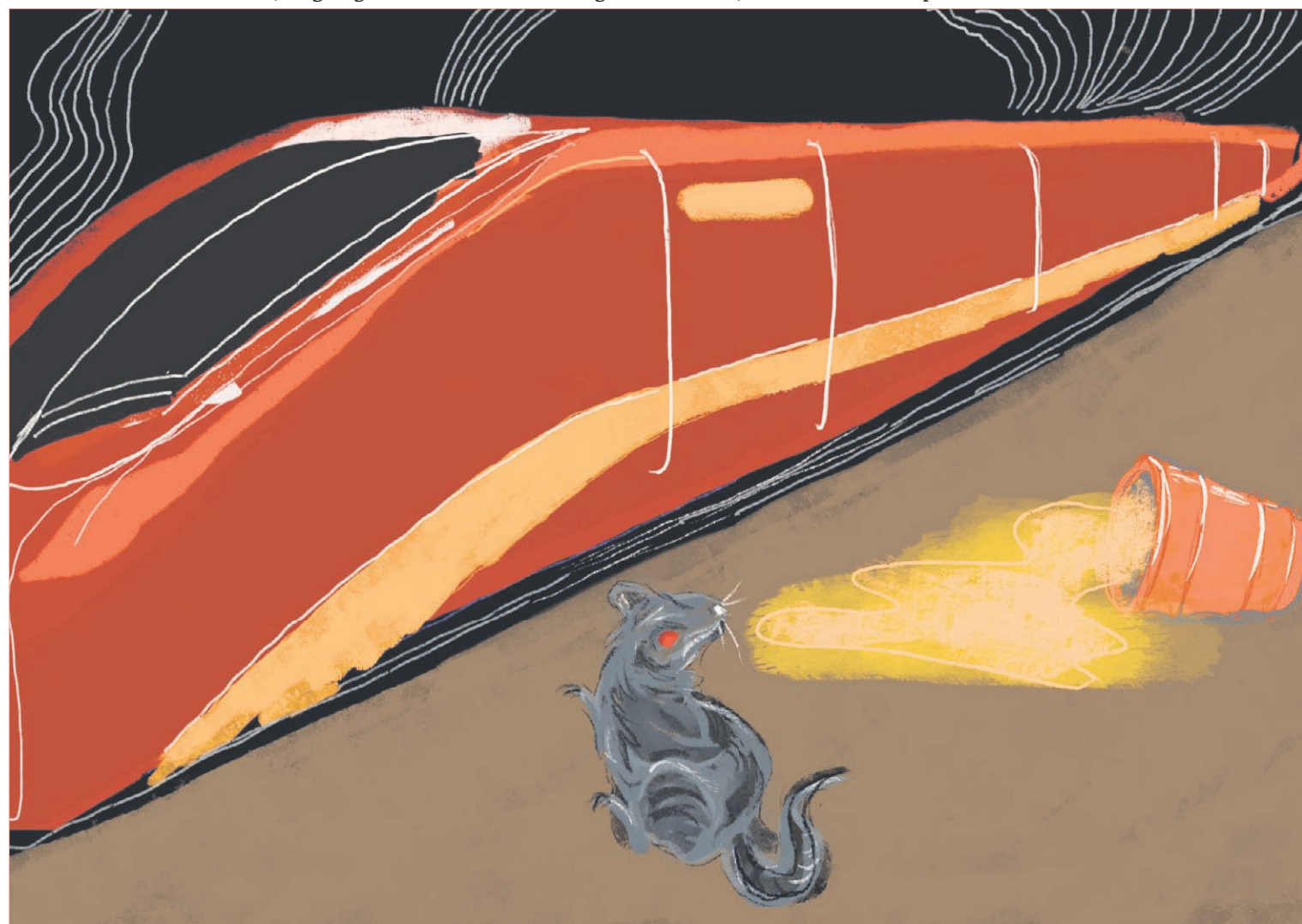
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Greer tried to release the morbid thoughts of substituting rat for person, rat for old lady, rat for someone like herself

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of a famous book that had been turned into a box office movie, the story of a woman who frequented a certain train journey, witnessed a murder through the window, and became

witness something like that while journeying home, she would forget about it, would purge the sight from her memory to avoid a desperate domestic involvement. She didn't



▲ ILLUSTRATION BY AUDREY LIM



need exterior dramas to enliven the hour-long ride home. She had enough emotional trauma to sift through as is.

And so, the train sputtered on. Leaving the rat to... what? Greer attempted to create a psychic connection with every passenger on the train. Proselytizing every working man, all the cleaning ladies, and most importantly, Greer's demographic, the dejected young women who go into the city each day to job-hunt or dawdle or meet up with random men—she tried to force them all into believing that the rat had survived. It was mind meddling. She was gorging into their brains and setting something in place—that the rat had lived. Who had witnessed the incident, anyways? And if those who *did* see the poor creature scurry under the train were eventually convinced of the rat's survival, then wasn't that the truth of the matter? There must be some loophole for willing these sorts of things into reality, Greer felt. The stakes had never been so high before. The man two rows down from her picking at a scab on his forearm suddenly became the noisiest thing ever. She was having trouble concentrating hard enough to enter the heads of the train-goers over the sound of the scab-picking. She glanced sideways at him. Early twenties with fuzzy, dark eyebrows. He was a college student, for sure, heading home for the weekend to his three-

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The train car is filled with light again, and no one can say with confidence what occurred in the dark
”

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Nothing means anything without existing in hindsight
”

story home with a basement movie-theater, casserole waiting on the kitchen island. It was everything Greer once had—the college, the trips back home on the weekend. The existence of a life out there, in the city, and a life back home. It was places to be and people to meet. His name was Josh, or Theo, maybe, though Theo felt more purposeful, and this person was most definitely not named with purpose. He looked like the most purpose-lacking person Greer had ever seen. He looked like someone she had once known, back when she had his life.

Josh was picking at a scab and intermittently sucking down hard on his vape. He was frustrated—everything frustrated him nowadays. The scab, not getting an adequately satisfying head rush, not having things go his way. Josh felt stifled by the world, blue-balled by outcomes he felt he had been promised.

His girlfriend was negligent in the relationship, didn't take care of him in the way he wanted her to, in the way that his fraternity brothers made girls out to be, and didn't make enough of an effort -

fort to make him feel good. Maybe that was the issue, the not feeling good. Josh hadn't ever really felt good, in all of his life, and college just exacerbated the unending dissatisfaction. Every morning felt like a failure, the sun slating in through the window too bright, his body too sweaty, his brain in a perpetual pulsing motion of rage and annoyance. He was so angry. Josh picked and picked until red shone through, until red accumulated on the spot where a crackled scab once was, until red spilled over. Josh suddenly noticed eyes on him—a girl some two rows up, her body twisted around to gaze at his mess.

Greer knows how this goes: Josh smiles at her, laughs in a charming kind of way as he points to his bloody scab—I'm a normal guy, see. I pick scabs. I'm like you. Greer laughs back, then shuffles back into a comfortable position in her seat. She sips her drink quietly, letting the warm beer slosh around in her mouth before spitting it back into the cup. She stares at the people around the room, marvels at the size of the house that the frat

had been allocated. The next part is the waiting game, the pause before an onslaught of applause and commotion, the moment of absolute quiet before everything gets loud. That's what Greer meant by willing the rat into survival, she meant that people are quiet if after, suddenly after, they are very loud. She meant that it's all relative. It's all decided moment-to-moment. Nothing means anything without existing in hindsight. In hindsight, Greer knows not to turn back around, but she does. She twists her head back around and there he is, staring back at her with that charming, little smile. She smiles back, this time more assertively, beckoning him to join her. He does. He walks over and sits next to her. They make small talk. The lights seem to thump in the room, seem to mingle with the rattling of the train car. Greer doesn't know where she is, how she's gotten here. The beer obfuscates her surroundings—a rat, scurrying in the corner of the kitchen. Did these

and stares out, avoiding his gaze. She observes the passing landscape—trees, road, more trees, maybe even a crime scene, but she's not paying much attention to her surroundings. She's frozen as Josh slips his hand down her pants, frozen as the train enters a tunnel and descends into darkness, frozen as it climbs deeper and deeper into the pulsing lights of the party, the warping of people's voices, the pain, the pain of what he's doing. And then the train car is filled with light again, and no one can say with confidence what occurred in the dark. Because it wasn't seen. Because it's all relative and because, sitting there as the train reaches her stop, Greer is alone, with something gnarled and tight lodged in her throat. What occurred in the dark. Because it wasn't seen. Because it's all relative and because, sitting there as the train reaches her stop, Greer is alone, with something gnarled and tight lodged in her throat.



▲ ILLUSTRATION BY EMMA HULSE

boys not clean up their space? Then a conductor, a conductor handing out solo cups to stumbling girls in corners. Everything melds. Josh tips her cup up to her lips, tells her to drink up. She does. She leans her head back

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Fashion

Banning fur doesn't deserve praise

Alice Boud argues that fashion's new 'ethical' approaches are too little, too late

Kering, parent brand to Gucci, Balenciaga, Alexander McQueen and other well known fashion houses has announced a company-wide ban on the use of fur. Fashion house Oscar de la Renta promised to stop selling fur after Billie Eilish made it a condition of her wearing the label to the 2021 Met Gala. This surge of companies banning the cruel, violent and frankly out-of-date practice of breeding and killing minks, foxes and rabbits for their fur has once again brought the topic of ethical fashion to the forefront of the industry. However, since faux-fur alternatives have been popular and even the norm for years, fashion brands should not expect ethical and sustainability credentials from banning the use of fur. They must do more to combat the ethical issues inherent in the fashion industry, before we can believe in a brand's commitment to animal and environmental welfare.

While the BBC reported in 2020 that Europe's fur industry had taken a significant knock following mass outbreaks of COVID-19, and the pandemic made the future of the industry even more uncertain, the demand for fur has been declining rapidly for years. Fur farming has been banned in the UK since 2003, and many young consumers have grown up in a world where the wearing of animal fur is seen as distasteful, if not unacceptable. This younger generation is driving change in the industry, with companies forced to appeal to those who will soon become their primary clients, shown by Billie Eilish's highly public threatened boycott. Increased awareness of the harm that factory farming fur does to the

“
Why should we be praising fashion brands for something that is essentially a business move? Banning fur has become a highly performative display
”

environment is also putting pressure on the fashion industry to change their practices.

In most cases, the banning of fur is to avoid backlash or boycott. Images of blood-stained anti-fur protesters crashing runways and luxury stores became frequent in the 2010s, often embarrassing the labels and subjecting them to ethical scrutiny. However, it is perhaps the threat of clients turning away, put off by a brand using fur that has had

more impact. Fashion brands will usually act in their own commercial interests, using a fur ban to cover their backs and ensure they appeal to the widest market possible — why should we then praise them for something



▲ INSTAGRAM/@JAKKELONDON.

that is essentially a business move?

Banning fur has become a highly performative display of ethics done for profit, as brands claim to care about sustainability and animal welfare while ignoring the more complex and deeply rooted issues in the industry. This reflects a growing trend for using buzzwords and publicity stunts to capitalise on the growing market for sustainable and ethical clothing. While high-fashion companies might do this by banning fur, fast fashion companies may release small collections of 'sustainable' clothing while continuing to over-produce and contribute to a throwaway culture. For example

H&M's 'Conscious Collection' — in their words, 'at least 50% of each piece is made from more sustainable materials'. Here only a fraction of a fraction of their output is sustainably made, while

the brand continues to produce cheaply made, unethical clothing for the majority of their sales.

Banning fur is now one of these easy ways for brands to appeal to the ethical fashion market. Not only does it distract from ethical issues, but it shows the hypocrisy of their attitude towards animal welfare. While fur is now widely no longer socially acceptable — we seem to hold fluffy animals in higher regard — most high fashion brands are still happy to use leather, wool, and other materials that cost animal lives, and contribute to producing alarming amounts of fossil fuels.

Why praise these brands for stopping the production of fur then, when there are others who have been consistently committed to animal welfare? Good quality alternatives have been around for years, and are now more readily available than ever. Luxury London-based brand Shrimps, founded in 2013, became famous for its faux-fur outerwear, and has continued to provide cruelty-free alternatives to fur and leather. Launched in 2015, Jakke, also a London label known for colourful faux-fur coats, uses no animals whatsoever in its clothing production. Even as far back as 2001, fashion house Stella McCartney was commit-

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The announcement of Kering to ban the use of fur therefore falls a little flat
”

ted to making products without leather, fur or feathers.

The announcement of Kering to ban the use of fur therefore falls a little flat. Brands should be focused on sustainability and animal welfare in a way that not only seeks to score points with consumers, but that shows true commitment. Much more needs to be done to develop effective and sustainable alternatives to fur, leather and wool, so that animal cruelty and factory farming can be removed from the industry. In 2021, we need to demand more from the biggest fashion companies, and they need to be prepared to do more than what has become an ethical publicity stunt.

▲ Billie Eilish at the MET Gala INSTAGRAM/@OSCARDELARENTA

On wardrobe anxiety... nothing to wear?

Fashion columnist **Eleanor Antoniou** explores the all-too-familiar plight and pressures of choosing what to wear in the morning



relax or regain confidence. As I step through town, self-consciousness consumes me, and my confidence drains further as I pass other students on the street, all seemingly dressed so much better than me.

For so many of us, what we are wearing impacts our self-confidence, whether at a club, a formal or a supervision. Even in the library I feel like I work best when I am confident in my appearance and my clothes. On the days when anxiety seeps into our wardrobes, the pressure of choosing the perfect outfit can become overwhelming. This feels especially true as we crawl out of the pandemic and try to return to a more normal Cambridge term. As someone who loves fashion, I'm excited about dressing with purpose again, but at the same time, the thought of in-person lectures

with purpose again, but at the same time, the thought of in-person lectures

I am perched on my bed surrounded by clothes which have been thrown haphazardly, scrunched and inside out. The sartorial mess reflects my frazzled state of mind as the piles of clothes become mountains in my mind, insurmountable and overwhelming. Looming over me is the dreaded question I have grown accustomed to facing every morning: what on earth am I going to wear today?

Frantically, I have tried on outfit after outfit, becoming increasingly panicked as I stand in front of my mirror, wardrobe doors flung open, my clothes ripped off their hangers, sprawled and rejected on my bed. It feels like the kind of day where I need the perfect outfit in order to function, to give myself the essential boost of confidence to go outside. As I try on different versions of myself and scrutinise my reflection, it simply feels like nothing fits right, and I lose confidence even in my usual favourites, which become distorted in the mirror. Eventually I end up on the bed too: crumpled, like my clothes, by wardrobe anxiety.

The time ticks by incessantly. I need to leave! Dispirited, I return to the original outfit I'd been planning to wear, because otherwise I would have been late. But after the panic of trying on everything I own, it's impossible to

organised, act more confident, have more fun - I just need the right outfits for every occasion.

“It can be challenging to decide how to present ourselves each day and how much we want to tell the world about ourselves”

sion.' In this way, university transforms into a fashion show, and walking across Sidgwick site is like modelling on the runway, where we each display our Cambridge identities. It can even feel as if we are in competition with each other to dress the best, from costumes at bop to our everyday lecture looks. Paradoxically, even though we all strive for individuality in our outfits, the easiest choices for me are the ones that best allow me to blend in with the other humanities students: I want to look and feel like myself, but I also want to fit in at Sidgwick.

This means that outfit planning can become an unwelcome obsession, as my mind fixates on potential new looks. When I see others in outfits I want, or see items I love in the shops, these clothes stay in the back of my mind, and potential new purchases turn into projections of the person I could be: with that dress, or those jeans, I'd surely be the ideal version of myself and I'd never have this fashion anxiety again.

Of course, no new clothes can make anxiety disappear entirely. Deep down I know that I love the carefully curated items in my wardrobe, but on days of low self-confidence, I still doubt my reflection. How we dress showcases our identities to the world, and so it follows that it is difficult to choose an outfit sometimes: it can be challenging to decide how to present ourselves each day and how much we want to tell the world about ourselves through our fashion choices. This is especially difficult when we are already feeling overwhelmed, each trying to define our identities at university and looking to the millions of uni lookbooks for inspiration.

As I realise this and readjust to my Cambridge routine, I'm trying to remember to be kind to myself: not every day has to be one where my outfit is immaculate. Fashion is beautiful because it can be so personal, but there are bound to be days when our clothes will not reflect how we are feeling accurately enough. Maybe some days are simply meant to be pyjama days, and that's completely okay.

▼ ALL ILLUSTRATIONS BY AISH MITTRA

“The pressure to look our best is worse in Cambridge, where so many of us are perfectionists”

and supervisions feels stressful. On Zoom, only our top halves were revealed and, like so many others, most of the time last year I wore my pyjama bottoms underneath. Now my entire outfit matters again, and I can already see myself having moments of panic when nothing I own will look good enough.

Perhaps this pressure to look our best is worse in Cambridge, where so many of us are perfectionists. As a woman, I also fall victim to the social pressures of looking perfect everyday. Coming back to Cambridge each term can feel like a chance to reinvent ourselves through our clothes: 'this term I will be more



Music

If This Was A Movie...

The Rise of the Visual Album

Sianna King looks to Halsey and Kacey Musgraves to explore the rise of the visual album

When Halsey announced that her upcoming fourth record was to be produced by the legendary Trent Reznor and Atticus Ross of film score-producing industrial rock outfit Nine Inch Nails, it certainly raised some eyebrows, but when she declined to release a single in advance of the record, and instead put out a series of trailers for an accompanying 50-minute film, answers began to fall into place. Musically, *If I Can't Have Love, I Want Power* swings between the cinematographic and the experimental, with the gap between bridged effortlessly by Reznor and Ross' production. They pushed her to take unlikely moves into hip-hop and drum n' bass on certain tracks, with intriguingly effective results, and their trademark eerie soundtrack style leaves fingerprints all over album highlight "Bells in Santa Fe". Most noteworthy of all, though, is that Halsey transforms herself into a bona fide pop-rock star throughout this record. The guitar-driven "You Asked for This", "Honey", and "Easier Than Lying" would sit more comfortably on, say, Against the Current's last EP, *Fever*, than alongside Halsey's past chart-topper "Without Me".

That said, this move won't surprise those who've followed her closely over the years. She has long expressed a desire to release a rock-inspired record (2015's "New Americana" reminded listeners that she was "raised on Biggie and Nirvana"), and those influences must have stuck), as non-album singles "Nightmare" and "Experiment on Me" flirted openly with pop-rock, but those were mere blueprints compared to the lyrically accomplished and atmospheric album that *If I Can't Have Love, I Want Power* has turned out to be. Its centrepiece is surely "I am not a woman, I'm a god", which blends all of the album's various styles above pulsing synths and an anthemic chorus, with a heavy dose of irony holding it together. *If I Can't Have Love...* will be competing with *Manic* for the title of Halsey's best project yet, but the two could not be more different sonically, and that's a compliment to her wide-reaching talent and ambition.

At the other end of the musical spectrum, after having found mainstream success and the prestigious Grammy Award for Album of the Year for *Golden Hour*, country-pop star Kacey Musgraves' latest foray into genre-blending music covers very different ground to Halsey's heavier project. On *star-crossed*, Kacey dips into light dance rhythms and finger-picked pop balladry, and even covers "Queen of Latin American folk" Violeta Parra's "Gracias a la vida". Indeed, at times she blends the three

styles together: the title track combines Spanish guitar, dreamy psychedelia and soaring cinematographic elements, with a beautiful result. In advance of the album, Kacey Musgraves declared that it would be a "modern tragedy" in three distinctive acts, and while the lines dividing these acts are somewhat blurred, the record's content makes for a devastatingly sad listen, as she empties her heart in the wake of her divorce from fellow country singer Ruston Kelly. It's deeply affecting to hear the same Kacey Musgraves who, on *Golden Hour*, proudly declared, "I ain't Wonder Woman... I'm only human," now sadly lamenting, "If I was an angel... Everything would be better." It's this antithesis which renders *Golden Hour* now forever inseparable from *star-crossed* – they are opposite sides of the same coin. "Golden hour fades to black",

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Star-crossed is an immersive album that remains irresistibly atmospheric from start to finish
”

and that's the true tragedy here.

The 'divorce album' is a well-worn trope in country music (the joke goes that if you play a country song backwards, you'll get your wife, house and dog back), and as a result, *star-crossed* was always going to be harshly scrutinised and compared to those that came before it, especially as they have historically been so strong. Miranda Lambert's 2016 *The Weight of These Wings* was one of the albums of the decade, and Carly Pearce's 29 has become one of the most acclaimed country projects of 2021. It works in *star-crossed*'s favour, then, that it turns out not to be country at all, despite Kacey's bizarre insistence that it has "more of a foot in country than *Golden Hour*."

Where lead single "Justified" falters for its unconvincing rhymes (bland couplet "If I cry just a little/And then laugh in the middle" is disappointing at best), the simplicity of Kacey's turn of phrase sometimes works to her advantage. Ballad "hookup scene" is equal parts unpretentious and beautifully touching: "So if you've got someone to love/And you've almost given up/Hold on tight despite the way they make you mad... 'Cause

I wish I would've known I didn't have it so bad". When she is at her most vulnerable, this collection is at its most impactful. For all its lyrical shortcomings, though, *star-crossed* is an immersive album that remains irresistibly atmospheric from start to finish – it's a vibey gem underpinned by synths, ethereal harmonies and drum loops that features just enough interesting production choices to veil the less imaginative lyrical moments. Where *Golden Hour* succeeded because of its immediacy, *star-crossed* is a grower, and that's probably for the best.

What ties these two very different records together is the fact that they are both visual albums – each was released in parallel with a fifty-minute film, in which they expanded upon their musical visions. These projects have both been praised as "ambitious", "arty", and "accomplished" since their release, and it would indeed seem that Halsey and Kacey Musgraves' creative flair and watertight attention to detail has translated well onto the screen. However, their overall success is exceptionally limited by the fact that – unless every listener is willing and able to subscribe to multiple streaming platforms at will – these films can be described as anything but accessible.

The sensational rise of streaming services has come hand-in-hand with the rise of the visual album. In this online era, in which people rarely purchase albums and often struggle to put a face to the songs on their playlists, artists' identities are growing increasingly distanced from their musical product, and in response, some have doubled down, turning to visual media as another form of self-expression. But this comes at a price. Given the sheer domination of these pay-monthly services across all forms of media, any excuse to outplay the competition is blindly grasped at by music executives, and exclusive releases of all varieties are poached by Apple Music, Spotify, and Tidal. Visual albums are not immune to this trend: Beyoncé's industry-shaking *Lemonade* was initially a Tidal-only release, and Billie Eilish's latest *A Love Letter to Los Angeles* is exclusive to Dis-

ney+.

It's no surprise, then, that Kacey Musgraves' new *star-crossed* film is exclusive to Paramount+ in the US, and while Halsey initially sidestepped this by releasing her film exclusively in cinemas, most fans likely don't live near one of the IMAX venues chosen, and the film has now predictably been acquired by another US streaming service, HBO.

Financially, these deals are logical – *star-crossed* and *If I Can't Have Love...* are higher-budget projects, and only the promise of profitability would have permitted their release. But it still begs the wider question: who exactly are the artists trying to reach? And why isn't the answer 'as many people as possible'? While some lucky fans will have been able to watch and re-watch the films at will, many won't, and the broader implications of this for the future of music are more than a little concerning. After all, who knows how long it'll be before more artists begin to release not only films but also entire albums exclusively on, say, Apple Music, if Apple threaten (sorry, offer) them with enough money. Audiences will have to either pay five pounds a month for every subscription service, or not hear new music at all. And if even Kacey Musgraves and Halsey, who have composed these two passion projects wholly from the heart, can't escape this business backdrop, then creating music for the sheer joy of it might well be a concept on the verge of extinction. These days, it seems it's marketability over all else – or else.

Regardless of the dry corporate dialogue which has accompanied it, the rise of the visual album in popular culture has undoubtedly injected new life into twenty-first century music, and of course many will have enjoyed the films *star-crossed* and *If I Can't Have Love, I Want Power*. However, as singer Miranda Lambert so astutely pointed out in her own *Marfa Tapes* film earlier this year, "Everything doesn't have to be a business decision". Truer words have never been spoken – I just can't help but wish for a future in which both record labels and streaming services agree.



ILLUSTRATIONS BY FLO BROCKMAN

Film & TV

Exploring black cinematic narratives

For Black History Month, **Anika Kaul** promotes an increased knowledge of, and exposure to, black cinematic narratives beyond the mainstream



In the current cinematic climate, it would seem apparent that the industry features more variety than ever before. With a newfound fixation on political correctness, tolerance and inclusivity, one would be remiss to complain about a lack of diversity. However, following a closer study it is clear that the majority of popular black narratives in the Western world adhere to a repetitive rhythm, primarily operating on concepts of stereotyping and tokenism.

Beyond the ability to namecheck Spike Lee, Jordan Peele, Steve McQueen and perhaps at a stretch Ava DuVernay, most audiences would perhaps struggle to name many famous black filmmakers. Only a handful are known, and unfortunately this is because many of the popular black narratives in mainstream cinema are helmed by Caucasian casts and crew members. *The Help*, *Green Book* and *Hidden Figures* – three of the most popular films of the century centring on the black experience – all fall into the category of contrived melodramas, often featuring problematic characteristics such as a white saviour complex, white guilt and white fragility. In these cases, the white characters are still somehow spotlighted, despite the films being promoted as instruments for racial equality and promoting the persecuted.

It is imperative that, if stories of the black experience are to be popularised, they be narrated authentically. This Black History Month, an exploration of black-centred films directed by black filmmakers – beyond *Moonlight* and *Get Out* – is a must.

Touki Bouki

Djibril Diop Mambéty's 1973 film is an incisive yet poetic report on colonialism and migration. Upbeat yet dark, Mambéty uses disturbing images of slaughtered animals as metaphors in order to draw comparisons between the lead characters and cattle – with

both seen to lack any semblance of free will or dignity. Mambéty's picture won the International Critics' Prize in Cannes, as well as being ranked the 62nd greatest non-English film in the BBC critics' poll conducted in 2018.

Daughters of the Dust

Daughters of the Dust is a 1991 independent film written, directed and produced by Julie Dash, and is the first feature film directed by an African-American woman to have been distributed theatrically in the United States. The film traces the intergenerational trials and tribulations of the Peazants, a Gullah family who are the direct descendants of enslaved Africans who attempt to preserve the traditions of their ancestors. The plot is presented in a nonlinear fashion, with Dash opting to focus on lush visuals and strong and nuanced performances, resulting in a dream-like experience filled with deep emotion.

Black Girl

Written and directed by Ousmane Sembène, *Black Girl* is a 1966 French-Senegalese film often considered the first Sub-Saharan African film by an African filmmaker to receive international attention and acclaim. The film centres on Diouana, a young Senegalese woman who moves to France to work for a French couple. In her new country, Diouana anticipates a new and exciting cosmopolitan lifestyle, however upon her arrival in Antibes she experiences harsh treatment from the couple, who force her to work as their servant. She becomes increasingly aware of her constrained and alienated situation and starts to question her life in France, with the director indicating that white supremacy manifests itself in smaller daily cruelties just as much as in colonial rule.

Tongues Untied

Tongues Untied is a groundbreaking 1989

American documentary film directed by Marlon T. Riggs. The film seeks to "...shatter the nation's brutalizing silence on matters of sexual and racial difference." The film blends documentary footage with personal narration in an attempt to depict the specificity of black gay identity. Riggs refers to a "silence" throughout the film, which describes the inability of black gay men who are unable to express themselves because of the prejudices of heterosexual society, as well as white gay society. Riggs brings awareness to the issues black gay men face, such as hyper-sexualisation and fetishism, and delves into how they are excluded from gay communities due to Eurocentrism and prejudice. The film was selected to be shown at the 66th Berlin International Film Festival in February 2016, and is often praised as one of the most compelling and insightful documentary films of all time.

Pariah

Dee Rees presents a film with a plethora of

intersections; of femininity, sexuality, gender, and status, all within the space of just 86 minutes. Rees focuses on the story of Alike, a teenage girl living in New York. The film explores her struggle to assert her sexual, familial, racial and social identities, as well as the relationships that are formed and broken on her journey of self-discovery. For all intents and purposes, *Pariah* is a fairly typical coming-of-age independent drama, but one of few films to explore the black lesbian demographic, so despite a lack of extreme originality in terms of technical filmmaking, it is symbolically revolutionary. Additionally, with a stellar performance by Adepero Oduye, the film is further elevated. In recent years, the films containing black narratives created by black filmmakers that succeed at award shows have, of course, been exceptionally brilliant. However, they are few and far between, and so in order for change a wider exploration of and appreciation for black cinematic narratives is required.

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Theatre

Feminist Theatre, Medieval Women and Shoulder Pads: 'Top Girls'



Assitant Producer [Lotte Brundel](#) talks to Molly Taylor, director of the ADC's Week 2 Mainshow Caryl Churchill's 'Top Girls'

Do you love 80s music and fashion? Are you eager for more surrealist feminist theatre in Cambridge? Have you ever wondered what would happen if a female pope, a Japanese concubine-turned-Buddhist-monk from the thirteenth century, a nineteenth-century Scottish adventurer and a successful working woman from the 80s got together for dinner? Then look no further, as Caryl Churchill's hit play *Top Girls* is coming to the ADC Theatre in Cambridge from the 19th-23rd of October.

Last week I met with Director and Cambridge student Molly Taylor to find out what drew her to the play, and why you should almost *certainly* book a ticket to come and see *Top Girls* next month.

Q: So Molly, could you please briefly tell our readers what the play *Top Girls* is about?

Molly: Wow, you're definitely starting with a really tricky one! So, I would say *Top Girls* is a play about employment, women in the workplace and, on a wider level, women and their place in the world. It's sort of about the balancing act that a lot of women play between juggling work and childcare, and the sacrifices that they must make in order to do this. In short, it is about the intergenerational experiences that connect women. The first act is about women across history, the second women in the workplace, and the third is about women who get left at home and, in a way, left behind... So, it's a nuanced look at the price of female success.

Q: What was it about Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls* that made you want to direct a version of the play at the ADC?

Molly: Well, *Top Girls*, I think, is very attractive as a play, especially after having dealt with restrictions, because of the prospect of having such a large cast. The play is full of complex female characters who aren't always likeable but are all exciting, and the idea of directing such a big group of complex

characters was so thrilling to me. In a world where COVID-19 has shrunk theatre down to its very bare essential parts it feels exciting to come back with a massive female-centric play, especially considering what women have

COVID-19 has exposed the crucial fact that when children are left at home and someone needs to teach them, it is usually women who rise to the task – often our careers are seen as the more disposable ones. The recent joke 'gas-

living a lot of the honest truth. She's very direct in a play where lots of the characters have been talking in circles. I also think Angie is a devastating character: so lovable and naive, but also completely brutal and totally different from anyone else in the show.

If you're also asking who I'd most like to play in *Top Girls*, it would have to be an 'Act 1 character', so possibly Pope Joan – a figure from the Middle Ages who disguised herself as a man and became the Pope (reportedly), or Isabella Bird – a nineteenth-century Scottish adventuress and traveller – as they are both such strange parts!

Q: Finally, in *Top Girls*, the main character Marlene hosts a dinner party and invites five famous/fictional women to join her; if you could have dinner with any five famous women, who would you choose?

Molly: Oh god, five famous women from history! That is difficult. Okay, I'd definitely choose someone from my degree – English – so probably Margery Kempe. She wrote *The Book of Margery Kempe*; she's a medieval English writer and a really funny woman. She used to go around 'wailing' to God a lot, to the point where her husband used to pretend he didn't know her. I suspect she'd be quite irritating at a dinner party though, so I'm not sure... Probably also Emma Thompson, I think she's so cool. Maybe Hannah Gadsby, she's an Australian comedian who did this amazing stand-up called 'Nannette'. I would love to have a chat with her; she's really changed how I view comedy. Also, I'd probably choose Cleopatra who had herself (reportedly) delivered in a rolled-up carpet to Julius Caesar, in order to seduce him and secure her rule. She was so rich; I love her so much. Finally, probably my mum. ●

Top Girls is on at the ADC Theatre Cambridge from the 15th-23rd of October, you can book tickets here: <https://www.adctheatre.com/whats-on/play/top-girls/>

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Mainstream discussions
are no longer purely based
on the binary of male/female
”

gone through during COVID-19, juggling home working and childcare. It's also a play where each of the acts offer different challenges – in a way it's like directing three mini-plays! It's an epic format, and offers a sense of fantastic surrealism, but it is also grounded in real human experiences.

Q: *Top Girls* originally premiered in 1982; despite the changes that have occurred since then, do you think theatre that discusses gender, and especially women's place in the workplace is still important today?

Molly: Obviously since the 80s we've had a more nuanced discussion about gender – mainstream discussions are no longer purely based on the binary of male/female. But there are still a lot of discussions to be had about women and the multiple roles they often have to juggle, especially when pursuing a career.

light, gatekeep, girlboss' indicates our continued interest in gendered success, especially in the workplace. Marlene (the main character) is a bit of a 'girlboss' herself, doggedly pursuing a pretty limited idea of success. Marlene has a very glamorous job, but it becomes apparent that in order to achieve this a lot of people have been left in her wake. *Top Girls* is a play that shows how success for some people can mean failure for others, and gender often plays a part in how we measure that success.

Q: If you had to pick, who would you say is your favourite character in *Top Girls*?

Molly: Probably my favourite character is either Joyce or Angie – the two family members who Marlene leaves behind in her hometown in order to pursue her career. I really enjoy how Joyce exposes Marlene's past, de-

A photograph of a sophisticated bar interior at Graduate Cambridge. The bar is U-shaped with a white countertop and a dark wood base. Behind the bar, shelves are stocked with various bottles of spirits. Several blue upholstered bar stools with brass bases are arranged around the bar. The ceiling is ornate with a patterned design and recessed lighting. Large windows with red curtains are visible in the background.

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▲ Unsplash/Tzenik

For one in need of an idyllic and relaxing afternoon, what better than punting? Columnist *Amy Meyer* thought just this, and found her afternoon to be anything but...

Punting: perhaps the most iconic Cambridge activity, and feature of many a serene postcard you might send to your nan just to remind her that you do actually go here. Images of punts gliding smoothly along the Cam must illustrate every college website and prospectus, and our newly-arriving freshers would be forgiven for thinking, therefore, that it qualifies as a Relaxing Activity.

Oh, my sweet summer children, let me tell you a story.

It is a beautiful summer's day towards the end of Easter term. The sun is shining, the birds would be chirping if not for the murderous peregrine falcon that has recently begun to frequent my college. My college friends and I are mostly finished with exams, and we decide, naïve fools that we are, that punting sounds like an excellent idea.

We begin the day in Mainsburys, optimistically buying breadsticks, hummus, a Spanish olive trio, raspberries,

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I immediately fail at my task, and we spin in circles for a good few minutes while I scream to the amusement of literally everyone”

and an inordinate amount of Pimms. Essentially, we are planning for a middle-class hen party; we have forgotten, in our hummus-fuelled haze, that those middle-class hen parties HIRE TOUR GUIDES WHO PUNT FOR THEM. It does not occur to us that this might be a problem. We are five strong independent women perfectly capable of punting ourselves.

I cannot stress enough how much we are not.

We queue for a punt, during which time we open our mini panda-shaped biscuits, put them back in the bag and fail to realise that it is not sealed. There are soon mini panda-shaped biscuits everywhere. This sets the tone of the day nicely. We encounter a puppy named Dougal with whom we are all immediately obsessed, but we fail to take any photos, distracted by the rapidly increasing feelings of impending doom. Dougal got in the boat in front of us, and presumably had a much calmer and less perilous time. Oh, to be Dougal; small,

fluffy, able to swim, and not expected to be in charge of steering.

There are five of us, which amounts to about two and a half able and/or willing punters. I am selected to go first for the flimsy reason that I have 'done it before' — a trip which involved spinning in increasingly desperate circles in front of King's chapel and paying extra because we failed to turn round within our one-hour window. I watch, with some resentment, as my friends settle themselves in the boat, before I take the pole and attempt to set us going.

I immediately fail at my task, and we spin in circles for a good few minutes while I scream to the amusement of literally everyone. Dougal is well out of sight by the time we make it under the first bridge and witness a man topple spectacularly into the water. We carry his image in our minds like a

talisman: whatever we do, it cannot be that bad.

Or can it?

We stressfully continue our endeavour, at one point failing to turn the punt round for so long that we become a spectator sport for a group of fellow students sitting on a college wall. I am the one to free us, and this earns me a cheer; it is undoubtedly one of the proudest moments of my life. Steering is impossible. The punt is going backwards more often than it is going forwards. No one has time to drink the Pimms. We are all too tense even to think about cracking open the Spanish olive trio.

We make it, somehow, to Clare Bridge. Our punt continues spinning around, à la Kylie Minogue, until suddenly it stops. We wanted this to happen. We did not want it to happen like this. We quickly discover that we are in fact wedged, Suez Canal style, under one of Clare Bridge's three, frankly unreasonably small, archways. A normal bridge has one big archway. A normal bridge would not lead to this situation. Should there be an afterlife, I will be tracking down Clare Bridge's long-dead architect, and I will be having words.

As we struggle to free ourselves without even the aid of a tiny digger, a tour guide — potentially with a middle-class hen party free to enjoy their olives and Pimms — breezes past. “This bridge has been standing for 800 years,” he tells them, “if these students don't destroy it now.”

We do not destroy the bridge. We heroically unwedge ourselves and immediately turn back. I am resentful that we were not greeted with the same ovation the Ever Given received upon finally docking at Felixtowe — and we definitely weren't as late

back as she was.

Back on dry land, we are finally free to enjoy the glamorous picnic we intended to delicately sample while processing gently along the backs, perhaps trailing our hands in the water and fanning ourselves. It has instead been potentially the most stressful experience of the entire eight-week term. Bizarrely, it is still a genuinely good way to unwind; you won't be thinking about your supo work when you're trapped, seemingly irrevocably, under a very old, very photogenic architectural feature. I extend my apologies to Clare Bridge, and also to any tourists who, searching for their own picturesque photo of the relaxed punting idyll, instead got five moderately weak, very dependent women screaming and throwing Pimms cans around. And also to that man who fell in.



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Sport

Sports fans face moral breaking point

Alexander Grantham
Staff Writer

Content Notice: This article contains brief discussion of murder and bodily mutilation

For most of Mike Ashley's fourteen years in charge of Newcastle United, fans wanted to see the back of him. Protests, walk-outs, and chants of "Get out of our club" became the norm at St. James' Park, but fan rebellions against Ashley's ownership for a long time fell on deaf ears. In November 2018, the club's official supporter group blocked the entrance to Ashley's Sports Direct flagship store, demanding for their voices to be heard.

One month earlier and 1500 miles away, Jamal Khashoggi, a dissident Saudi journalist unofficially exiled from his own country for daring to criticise its regime, walked into the Saudi Consulate in Istanbul. He never walked out. Murdered and dismembered under the suspected orders of Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia Mohammed bin Salman, the following years witnessed the global shining of a scrutinous light on Saudi Arabia's political activity.

Mohammed bin Salman is also Chairman of the Public Investment Fund (PIF), which is the sovereign wealth fund of Saudi Arabia and the very organisation that has just claimed 80% ownership of Newcastle United, making them the Premier League's richest club. Following the announcement last Thursday (07/10), the customary protests outside St. James' were replaced by wild celebrations, as the chair of Newcastle United Supporters Trust Greg Tomlinson declared that "fans have hope and can dream about their football club again". Ashley was gone and fan voices were heard. But as festivities on the Tyne lasted long into the night, it was easy to forget that Khashoggi's voice is one that will never be heard again.

Newcastle's completed takeover is the latest example in an increasingly prevalent and troubling trend known as "sportswashing", with Amnesty International describing the recent deal as a "PR tool to help cover up its [Saudi Arabia's] abysmal human rights record". Though the term is a new one, the use of elite sports to improve a country's reputation on the world stage dates back not only to the days of Benito Mussolini's 1934 World Cup and Adolf Hitler's 1936 Olympics, but also to the golden age of Rome where tyrant Nero established and entered his own version of the Games in an effort to improve his standing with the recently conquered Greeks.

In the modern era, Saudi Arabia is not the only culprit of using sport to distract from a chequered human rights record. Qatar's freshly announced (30/09) ten-year deal with Formula 1, beginning in 2023, to host a Grand Prix in the streets of Doha is yet another attempt to establish the tiny peninsular country as a key destination for sports fans. In the same summer as Qatari royal family-owned Paris Saint Germain signed football's biggest superstar in Lionel Messi, Amnesty published a detailed report finding "clear evidence of Qatar's long standing failure to prevent, investigate and remedy the deaths of migrant workers" whilst building stadiums for next winter's World Cup.

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As F1 fans undoubtedly look forward to watching the promised twists and turns of 2023's season, it will likely be difficult for them to remain mindful of Qatar's human rights abuses when the glitz and glamour of elite motorsport takes centre stage. But can we blame them for this outlook? After all, it's not the fans that are responsible for scheduling a Grand Prix in Qatar, it's the management of Formula One, backed by its wealthy controlling partners Liberty Media. Meanwhile, it was FIFA, not the fans, that controversially granted Qatar the 2022 World Cup back in 2010, football's corruption-strewn international governing body. If the power brokers of world sport are actively supporting sportswashing, what on earth can a fan, armed only with a Sky Sports subscription and maybe a season ticket, do to make a difference?

There are two extremes to this ar-

gument. On the one hand, fans can choose to become sporting ascetics, refusing to tune in to the Qatar Grand Prix, 2022 World Cup, and all Premier League matches involving Newcastle United. If this is what one must do to call themselves a sports fan with morals, why not take it even further? Why not refuse to acknowledge any Premier League team with an official link to a betting company, making Norwich City the de facto winners of a tournament of one. Why not chisel the PSG crest off the gleaming image of Kylian Mbappé on your new copy of FIFA 22 like an extremely socially-conscious competitor in *Squid Game*? Also, what is the point of fans boycotting such events if the sportspeople involved in them refuse to do so? If Britain's richest-ever sportsperson and prolific social activist, Lewis Hamilton, will take to the tarmac in Qatar, in spite of the nation's reputation, why should an armchair F1 fan renounce it?

The other extreme is blissful ignorance, turning a blind eye to the human rights abuses in Qatar and Saudi Arabia as you cheer on Hamilton during the newest Grand Prix in the F1 calendar, all whilst wearing your freshly printed Newcastle United shirt without a care in the world. That's what some would have you believe sports fans are ready to do. The patronising view that, as Magpies fans celebrate Ashley's departure like their avian namesakes, they've been distracted from the grim, moral reality of Saudi ownership by the shiny gleam of wealth and promise of better days to come.

Somewhere amidst these two extremes, however, lies an answer to the question of whether it's possible to be an ethical fan in this modern era of sportswash-

ing. A middle ground of informed acceptance of both the good and the bad that comes with Qatari and Saudi dealings is beginning to be tread by both fans and those in power. A statement by United with Pride, Newcastle's official LGBTQ+ supporters group, acknowledged that "Saudi Arabia [...] is one of the least tolerant for LGBTQ+ and gender rights anywhere in the world", but hoped the deal would provide "an opportunity for [Saudi] decision makers [...] to witness how other cultures treat their minority groups". Concurrently, an official statement from Amanda Staveley, the main talking head behind the PIF takeover, included the telling line: "We know only too well that the whole community wants a club of which it can be proud - both on the pitch and off".

Few will forget the scenes that played out back in April, as fans across Europe united in vocal opposition to the proposed European Super League. Like the ESL, sportswashing's success depends on posi-

tive PR, but if football and F1 fans alike can pressure these regimes into launching social change, then there's no telling what can be accomplished.

Between the two poles of a silent boycott and blissful ignorance, there

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It's not the fans that are responsible for scheduling a Grand Prix in Qatar
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ultimately resides a common supporter that needs to stay politically informed and use the terraces to amplify both their own voices and those of the silenced. In this hopeful outcome, perhaps it's possible to be an ethical sports fan after all.



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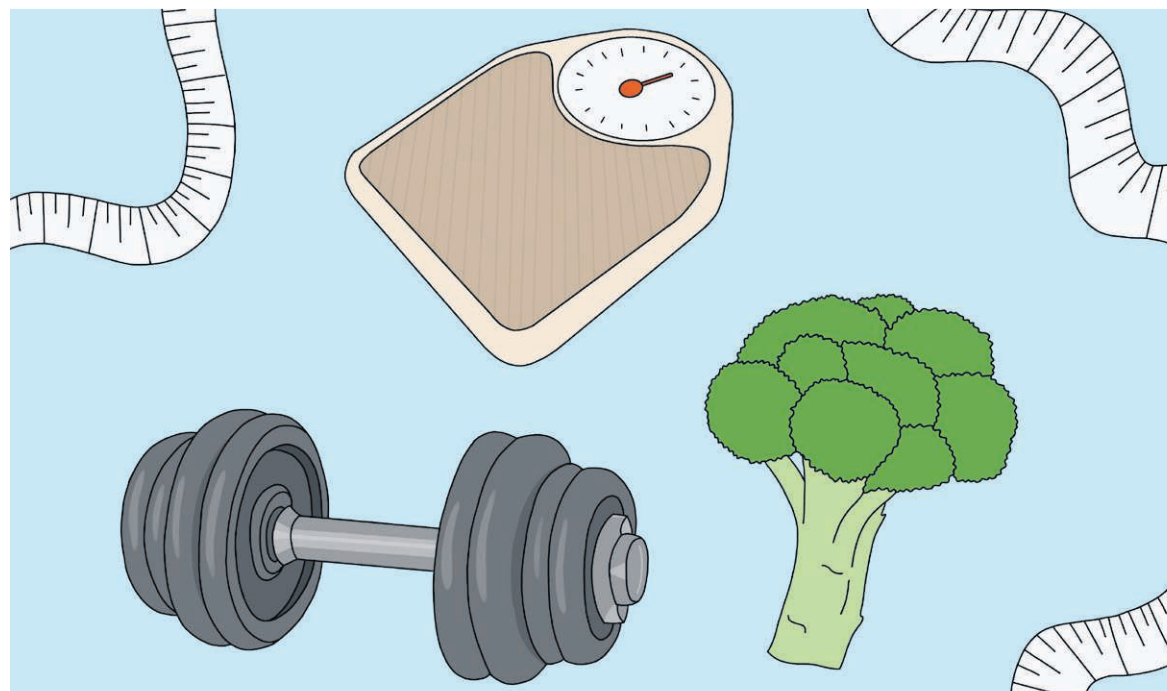
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Sport

Navigating the growing toxicity of gym culture

Sarah Walton-Smith discusses her experience of seeing detrimental fitness 'advice' on social media



EDEN KELLY-THURSTAIN

Fitness culture, specifically surrounding the gym and weight training, has been on the rise in recent years. Refreshingly for women, the desire to be strong and build muscle has overtaken the cardio crazes of the 80s and “heroin-chic” beauty standards of the 90s. As for men, the goal of being “chiseled” has been blown out of proportion, with the focus no longer toned definition but significantly large muscles.

This shift certainly has some positive aspects. The benefits of weightlifting, such as protecting bone health and muscle mass and boosting metabolic rate, have been widely researched. Yet with this greater interest has come the rise in a gym culture that can be as ob-

sessive and restrictive as the fitness trends of previous decades, potentially even worse due to the negative impact of social media and fitness influencers. How can we navigate this toxicity and develop a healthy relationship with fitness? Part of the answer lies in exposing the on-line sea of unhelpful fitness advice and replacing it with an approach to exercise that prioritises balance and choice.

Discussions concerning a regimented gym diet encourage unhealthy attitudes towards nutrition. Many influencers advise that we track our macronutrients, consume very large quantities of protein, and eat exclusively “clean” foods, which they claim helps them “feel [their] best”. This inevitably links restric-

tive eating to an idea of wellness, when in reality forcing yourself to cram down masses of protein and limiting yourself to whole grain carbs promotes anything but a healthy balance.

Such an obsession over food can be mentally draining, as well as impractical for busy students who simply cannot afford to buy 500g of chicken breast everyday. It's far more realistic to try and eat a balanced plate per meal, whilst still enjoying takeaways and alcohol. Defying the influencer's orders, you don't have to measure out every gram of rice in order to fuel your body for the gym. Even if your nutrition is poor for a period, it's not the end of the world and definitely not worth stressing over.

Social media and fitness influencers have also created highly unrealistic beauty standards surrounding weightlifting. With the aid of filters, Photoshop, and even good lighting and posing, it is incredibly easy to take a picture that gives you a tiny waist and big, defined muscles in the ‘right places’. Meanwhile, it's just as easy for us to consciously, or subconsciously, compare ourselves to this ideal, with influencers convincing us it is the norm.

In reality, it takes years of consistent training and food tracking to achieve an influencer's ‘ideal’ figure, but also fitness looks different on everyone; genetics play a huge part in how weightlifting will affect your body. It's important we remind ourselves that following an influencer's gym routine will not necessarily give us the defined abs they claim it has given them.

Not only do we have to negotiate the constant pressure to weight lift for aesthetic purposes, there is a concerning amount of online humiliation disguised as ‘gym motivation’, which actually takes the form of body shaming and dismissing other forms of exercise. I recently came across a TikTok account boasting ‘gym quotes’, which included insulting men with a “dad bod” physique and calling cardio a “red flag”. When did weightlifting become so judgemental? What if some people don't want to focus exclusively on hypertrophy and aesthetics?

Some of us go to the gym to condition for a sport, or for its mental benefits, or simply just to move our bodies after a day sitting at a laptop. The gym is not an exclusive club for compound lifters only. Others prefer different forms of exercise to weightlifting, and this should be considered okay. Gym culture needs to celebrate, rather than dismiss,

people who choose to workout in a way that they enjoy, whatever that may be.

Yet even if we manage to overcome diet culture and its shaming tendencies, social media still manages to ruin our confidence surrounding the very structure of our workouts. Constant contradictions appear about which exercises we should be doing, how often we should work out, what positioning best activates the muscles; the list is endless. For example, if you type into Google: “are deadlifts good for you?”, the top two websites that appear argue opposite opinions. How are we supposed to decipher these online paradoxes? Surely doing whatever feels good for you and your own body, whenever you feel you can fit it in, is enough, but this judgement feels increasingly harder to come by.

Although not all fitness influencers are responsible for promoting such toxic messages, the swamp of social media makes it hard for us to keep our heads above the water. So-called die-hard fitness freaks, who ultimately amass a large following, promote a way of living that is simply unsustainable and unhealthy, as well as unachievable, for a full-time student who is trying to balance exercise, work, societies, and socialising all at once.

It is okay for fitness to be one of many priorities rather than the single most important one. It should be there to add enjoyment and health to your life, not to obsess over and exacerbate society's unhelpful body standards, which are constantly shifting anyway. Don't let social media make you question whether the way you exercise is good enough; fitness is personal, and only you know what makes you feel the most physically and mentally happy.

City's move to Sawston nears completion

Ben Phillips

Liam Kline Senior Sports Editor

Cambridge City FC, who play in the eighth tier of England's football pyramid, have been homeless since 2013, after vacating their 91-year-old ground of Milton Road at the end of the 2012-13 season. The original stadium, located within 1km of the city centre, was one of the largest outside the Football League and was also at one point estimated to have a capacity in excess of 20,000, while the highest recorded attendance was 12,058 against Leytonstone back in 1950. Part of the original ground, how-

ever, was sold for redevelopment in 1985, resulting in a replacement stadium of 2,300 capacity.

To add to this nomadic lifestyle, it was announced in 2012 that club President Len Satchell had purchased 35 acres of land in Sawston, a village seven miles south of Cambridge, with the view to build a new 3,000-seater stadium. The Milton Road site was sold for housing development, forcing the Lilywhites to ground-share until planning permission was granted and construction began on the new ground, most recently with local rivals Histon FC at the Glassworld Stadium.

City's core fans have endured a turbulent time over the past few

years with off-field issues and finances. The new stadium took four years of planning before it was finally given the go ahead in 2018, but there is now finally light at the end of the tunnel as construction fires on all cylinders.

The club hopes to welcome spectators to their state-of-the-art ground in as early as February next year. Aside from the main field, the stadium will house an artificial 3G pitch that will be available for external use. Additionally, various function rooms will be open for hire, making it the ideal venue for conferences, seminars, and other events. With such modern facilities, City's stadium will serve as a great

community hub for not only people living in South Cambridgeshire, but also groups looking to travel down to Sawston.

Chris Cox, City's Media and Communications Director, commented on the excitement of the build: “Our new stadium will give us a place to call home. A place for new and existing City fans to come together and be part of a new community in Sawston”. Despite rising steel prices, the floodlights have now been erected in the ground and Cox remains hopeful of a timely moving-in date: “We hope to be in the ground by early 2022 and celebrate this new beginning with a big event in the summer and showcase what being

part of our City family is all about”.

In an outcome that could see the Lilywhites settle into their Sawston home before the end of this season, manager Robbie Nightingale's side may well enjoy a much-needed boost in the league table. Currently 13th in the Northern Premier League Midlands Division, City have struggled to maintain a winning form. A recent three-game win streak, however, displayed a burst of quality that offers promise for the future. City will play host to Shepshed Dynamo in their next league fixture at 3pm tomorrow (16/10), a team who sits just two points above them in 10th place.