

SLATER NEWSLETTER



SKY'S THE LIMIT

SPRING 2021 ISSUE

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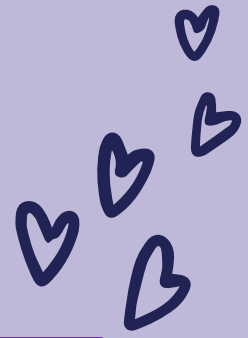
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THE
POLITICAL
CRISIS IN
GEORGIA



compact and claustrophobic... in the one small corner... and offered shelter... people. In the years after the... returned in *naomhóga* to strip their former... of beams and slates, and anything else that... might be useful in their new lives.

CANVA STORIES
20.20

This year has been unlike any other. It has been hard and continues to be challenging. But one thing is clear, we can't do our work alone. We look forward to open communication, welcoming student dialogue, and working in collaboration. We at the Slater Center, the Slater International Student Executive Board, and our international community have a common interest; To serve students as best we can in the midst of whatever challenges may face us.

We stand and will continue to stand with our community. We call you in to join us and meet with us, as we continue to work together. We hope you enjoy this iteration of the student newsletter and we wish you and your loved ones the best in the months and years ahead.

-Tana D. Ruegamer
Slater Director

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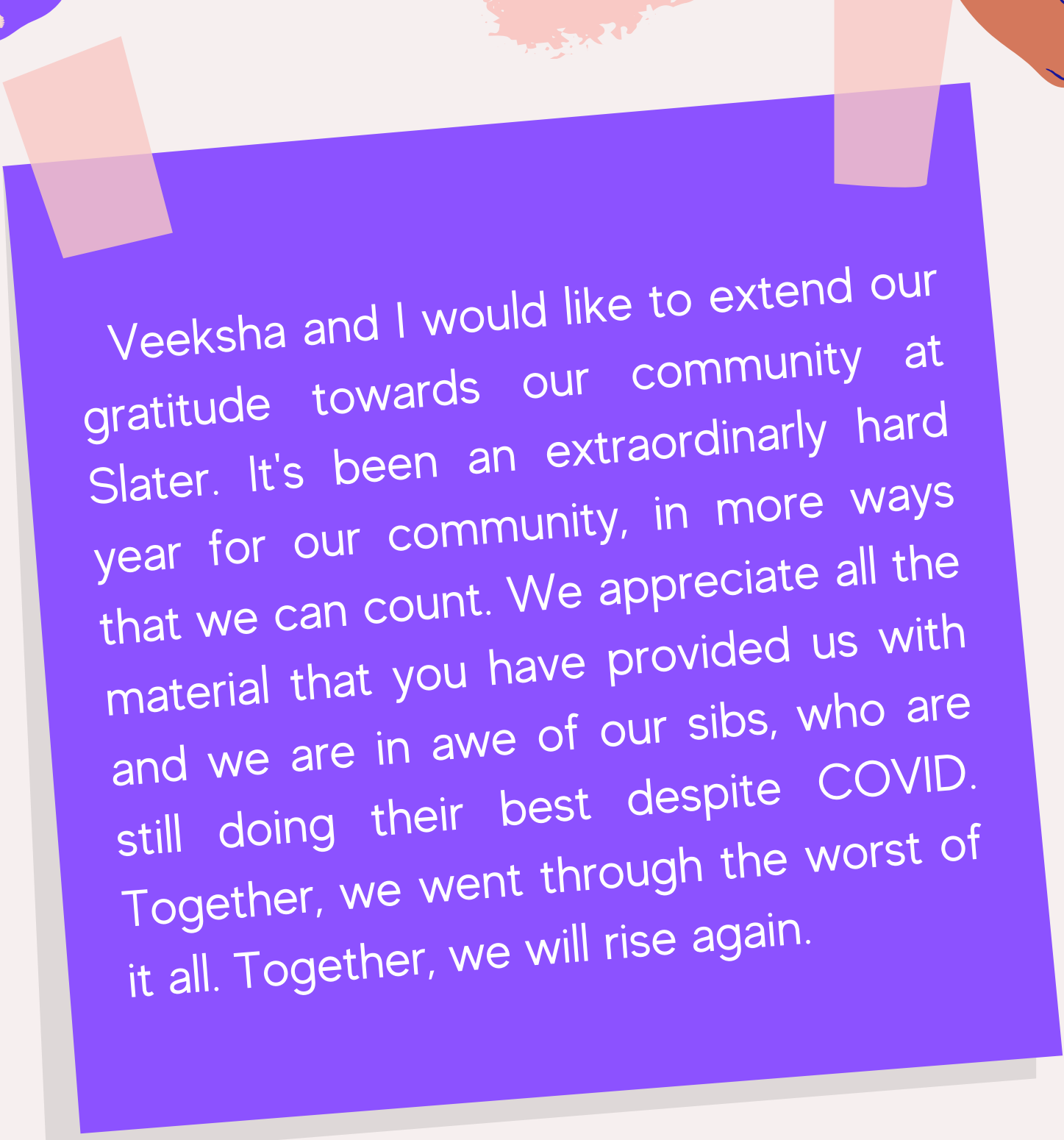


Veeksha



EDITORS'
NOTE

Julia



Veeksha and I would like to extend our gratitude towards our community at Slater. It's been an extraordinarily hard year for our community, in more ways than we can count. We appreciate all the material that you have provided us with and we are in awe of our sibs, who are still doing their best despite COVID. Together, we went through the worst of it all. Together, we will rise again.

**WHAT
IS
HAPPENING
IN**



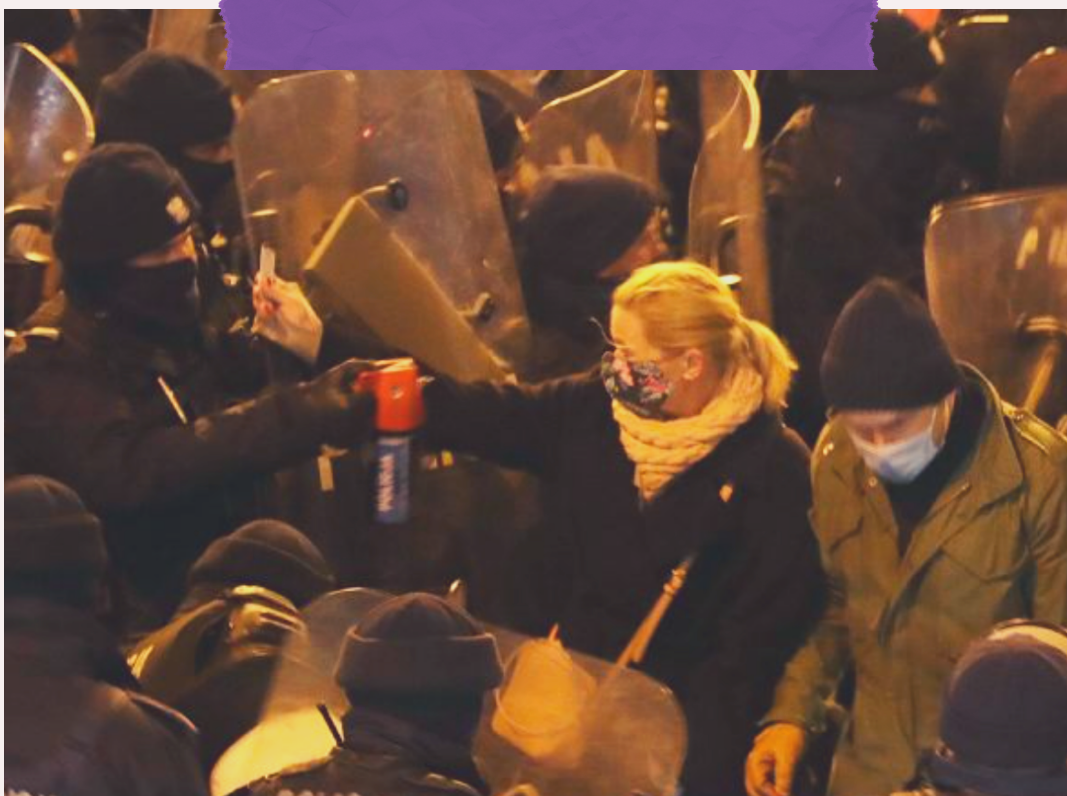
EUROPE?





Poland Faces the Largest Protests in the Country's Democratic History

On October 22nd, 2020, the Constitutional Tribunal, one of Poland's two high courts, has ruled abortion in almost all cases to be illegal. This came as a shock to women across the country, as Poland already had one of the strictest abortion laws in Europe. Allowing for termination of a pregnancy only if: It resulted from a criminal offense (rape or incest); the pregnant person's health was at serious risk, or in the case of significant fetal deformations and no later than by the end of the twelfth week of pregnancy. The latter accounted for 98% of all legal abortions in 2019 and is being outlawed by the Constitutional Tribunal's verdict.



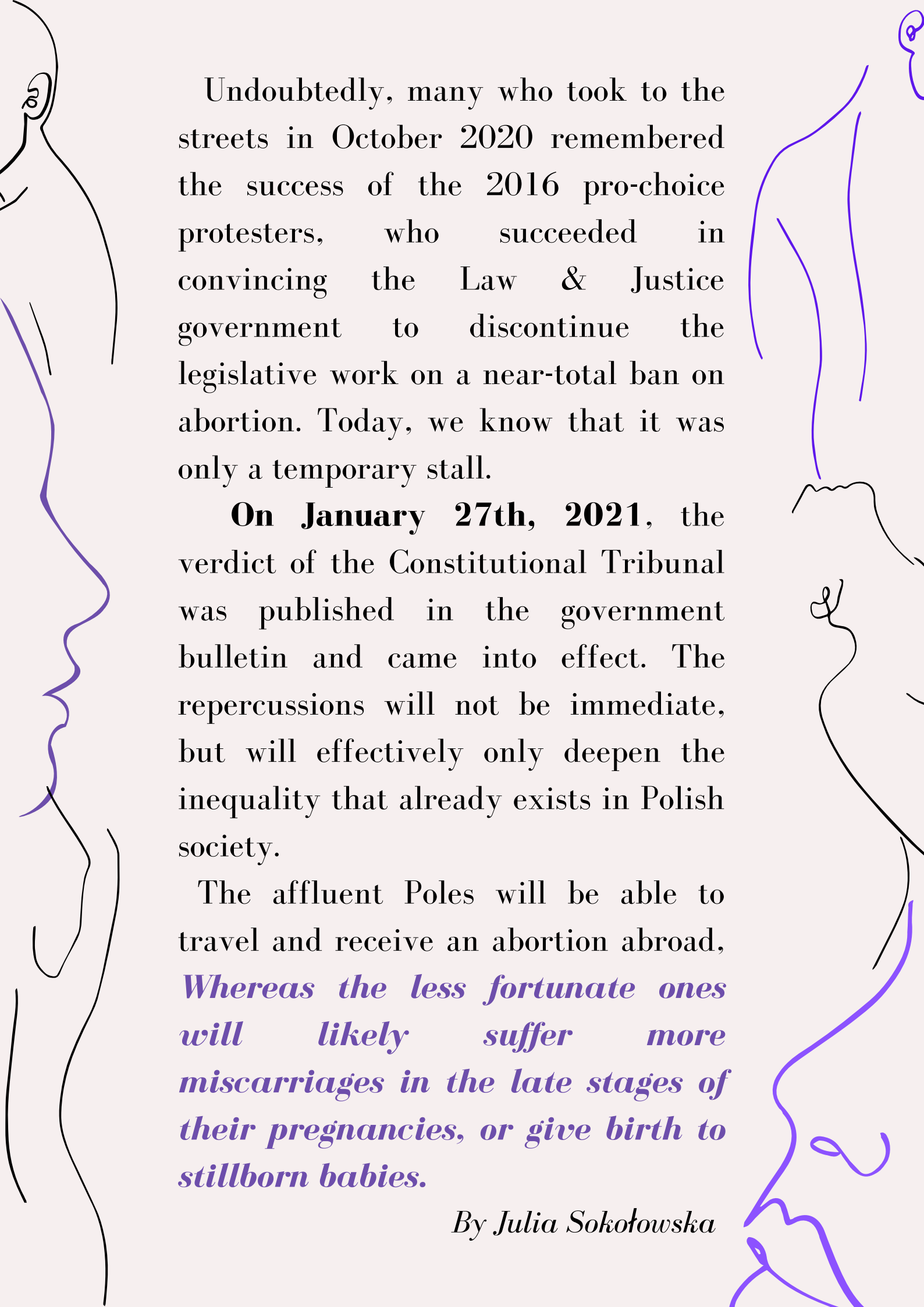


Polish women and their supporters were devastated by the ruling and took to the streets despite the COVID-19 pandemic to show the government that they will not allow being stripped of yet another right. The scale of the protests, especially in Warsaw, was beyond anything that Poland has seen in 30 years of its democratic history. On October 30th, over 100,000 protesters took to the streets of Warsaw. Across the country, it is estimated that as many as 1.5 million Poles voiced their dissatisfaction with the ruling by protesting, or as they called it 'strolling', against being deprived of their constitutional rights.

In October, there was still hope and purpose to the protest, as the ruling would not come into effect until it was published in the government bulletin. The protesters believed that by publicly voicing out their opinions, they could prevent the government from publishing the verdict. The hundreds of thousands of teenagers, young adults, and also senior citizens - some of whom were Holocaust survivors, sparked serious anxiety among the conservative Law & Justice (PiS) government. After a week of protests more and more police force were delegated to 'secure' the pro-choice gatherings. Under the government's orders, the police arrested, beat, and pepper-sprayed the protesters, including some opposition Members of Parliament, for no apparent reason other than publicly displaying their opinions.

The unprecedented behavior of the police, which was under pressure from the Law & Justice government to silence the protestors, sheds light on yet another reason why the Polish people decided to take to the streets, despite the COVID-19 pandemic. The ongoing disrespect of the rule of law by the governing party, which ironically has the word 'law' in its name. Ever since ascending to power in 2015, the Law & Justice government were keen on dismantling the country's courts and erasing the division between the judiciary and the government. A process which to date has included merging the position of Prosecutor General with the post of a Minister of Justice, the nepotism-driven appointment of prosecutors and judges in district courts, and unconstitutional addition of divisions to the Supreme Court. A recent addition to this agenda was the, legally questionable, appointment of two senior Law & Justice politicians and former Members of Parliament, Krystyna Pawłowicz and Stanisław Piotrowicz, as judges of the Constitutional Tribunal. How could a verdict of the Tribunal be accepted, if 2 of its 15 members were not even selected, according to the non-partisan and independent criteria for such a post?





Undoubtedly, many who took to the streets in October 2020 remembered the success of the 2016 pro-choice protesters, who succeeded in convincing the Law & Justice government to discontinue the legislative work on a near-total ban on abortion. Today, we know that it was only a temporary stall.

On January 27th, 2021, the verdict of the Constitutional Tribunal was published in the government bulletin and came into effect. The repercussions will not be immediate, but will effectively only deepen the inequality that already exists in Polish society.

The affluent Poles will be able to travel and receive an abortion abroad, *Whereas the less fortunate ones will likely suffer more miscarriages in the late stages of their pregnancies, or give birth to stillborn babies.*

By Julia Sokołowska

Georgia, my home country, located in the South Caucasus has been no stranger to hardships and challenges over its centuries-long existence. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union and gaining independence in 1991, we have gone through a civil war, revolution, occupation, and political instability. In this sense, 2020 was no exception - we found ourselves dealing with a health crisis, political turmoil, and economic hardship. And as if these internal challenges were not enough, the intensified external threat to our security and sovereignty coming from our Northern neighbor made things even worse.



GEORGIA

Last March, when I was going back to Georgia, I had an expectation that it would be hit hard and fast by the pandemic. To my surprise, however, that was not initially the case. In February, when countries around the world were just beginning to limit travel, Georgia announced a lockdown and took a number of strict and timely measures that did pay off for a while. For us, the summer of 2020 looked no different from previous ones - people were going to the beach, eating at restaurants, and dancing in clubs while the number of Covid cases still remained low. I remember proudly sharing articles of prestigious publications that praised this tiny country for handling the pandemic so well, while rich and resourceful nations struggled every day. Of course, my “proud days” did not last long; **in September, the Covid outbreak began in my city.**

"Soon the number of daily cases increased from tens to hundreds to thousands, schools and businesses were forced to close and the lockdown was announced once again."

Adding to the health crisis, was the **political turmoil** that followed the 2020 parliamentary elections. As soon as the ruling Georgian Dream party announced its third victory, the opposition quickly voiced their outrage claiming that the elections were plagued by vote-buying and intimidation at voting polls.

Despite international organizations and Western countries calling for the opposition to join the parliament, the boycotting parties organized a number of large protests in major cities of the country, ignoring Covid-related restrictions and *driving the country further into crisis.*



Despite the increasing political polarization, deepening economic recession, and worsening health crisis, a decade-old problem remained the most important one for the country.


Following the Russo-Georgian War of 2008, **Russia occupied two sovereign regions of Georgia:- Abkhazia, and Samachablo** that make up 20% of our internationally recognized territories. Since then, however, Russia has continued to occupy more of Georgia by the process of ***borderization***, which includes constructing illegal fencing and earthen barriers and placing them further into the sovereign territory.



In 2020, **borderization** only intensified as the Covid outbreak served Russia as a smokescreen for its actions.

Almost every week, **Georgians residing in villages near the occupied regions find themselves on the other side of the “border” with their orchards and farms uprooted, and their family members kidnapped or arrested.** Just last week, a Georgian citizen was sentenced to 12.5 years in prison for “illegally crossing the border of South Ossetia.” Hundreds of others are detained every single year for the same reason, even though these “borders” change overnight.

The worst part of all this is that Georgia is very much limited in how it can respond. We heavily rely on the actions of international organizations and Western powers, who on their part, only issue standard statements “*condemning Russia’s actions*” and calling on each other for support.



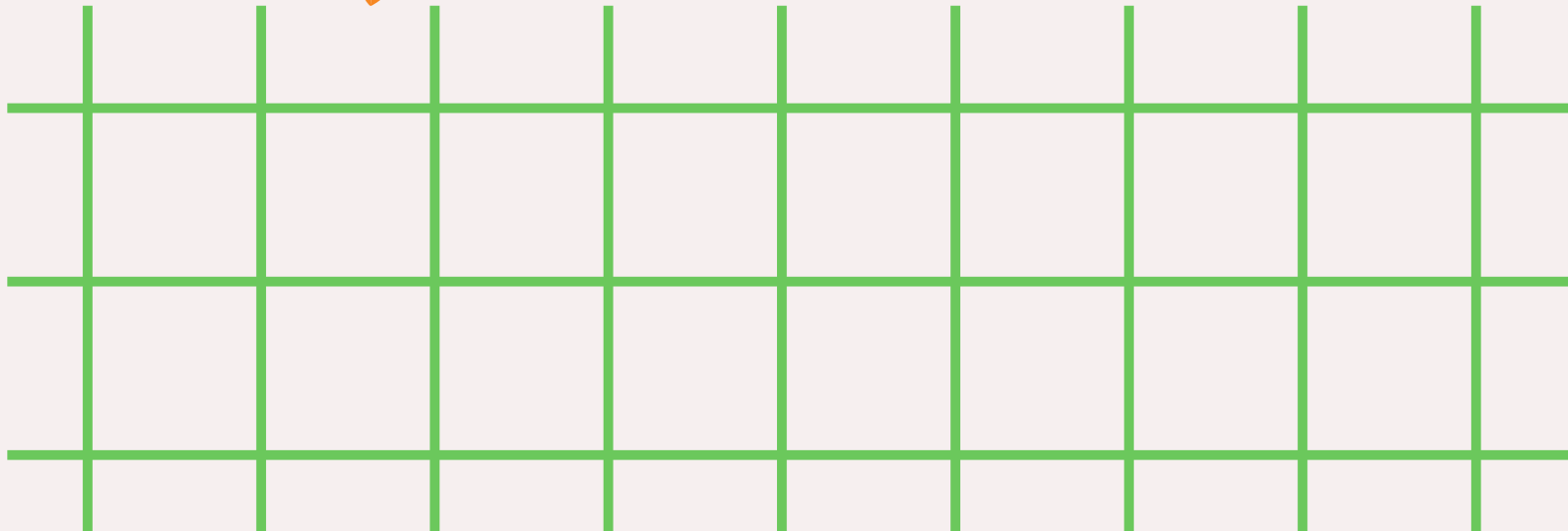
I was never much of an optimist and I think, 2020 made me feel even more hopeless. When I was going back to Georgia last year, I remember being extremely worried about the threat that Covid-19 presented to the safety of my family. When I was leaving Georgia last week, **I saw the stations of Russian occupying forces just 100 meters away from the main highway.** At that point, I realized that this threat coming from that direction is a much more urgent and pressing one, as the “treatment” to it is yet to be found.

By Tatia Bolkvadze



ENTRENCHMENT TO MY MOTHERLAND

As I gaze out of our car window, on the way to my maternal familial home (Sai Vaibhav in Mumbai), I feel the nostalgia of the city that is dearest to my heart. I reminisce in those good old days of being in Mumbai from the endless bargaining at the vegetable vendors, to Ghatkopar's famous Jayshree Pani Puri-wala, to the 'Gurukrupa' Restaurant's specialty, Pav bhaji. I rejoice in the feeling of being back home with my family, as our car enters the main gate of Sai Vaibhav. My neighbor Aunty, back from the Mandir in our vicinity, enters the building and is elated to see me. I too feel overjoyed to see her familiar face after so long. She waves from the distance and after walking closer, she asks me about my journey. I reach my home and find my Nani Maa (maternal grandmother) frying hot puris and



preparing aamras in the kitchen. I immediately brush my cheeks against her, feeling the sheer goodness of the lavender-like scent that she emanates.

Our neighbor comes home, without ringing the doorbell, with homemade kachoris. *Our house doors are quite literally always open for each other to walk in anytime.* In Indian culture, neighbors are considered to be a part of one's family. As I sit by the windowsill and I am immersed in the 60 feet road traffic and the synchronous chirping of sparrows, my cousin brother excitedly says, *“Let's go meet Fiyonee and Jigna Aunty.”* I feel a sense of unity and togetherness in this building, despite not being here lately.

As a young girl, I always identified myself through the means of my roots in Kutch, Gujarat, India, which I take immense pride in. However, I underestimated Mumbai's role in shaping my cultural identity. I identify as a part of the Kutchi Dasa Oswal Jain community in Mumbai, India.

Mumbai is the economic capital of India and home to the Bollywood film industry. It has an intrinsic charm as goes with its classical tagline, **‘The city that never sleeps,’** and it is seen as the quintessential Indian dream to live here. Mumbai is home to both the poorest of the lot, in the Dharavi slums, to social elitists living in up-market localities. ‘Bombay’ as fellow Mumbaikars know it, is famous for its lip-smacking chaat, cutting Chai, and the grandeur of Ganesh Utsav (especially Visarjan- when the Ganesha idol is immersed in water). Lord Ganesha, who



personifies wisdom and intellect, holds a special place in my heart. I look forward to Ganesha Poojas, as performing his darshan paves the way for clearance of obstacles in the journey of life. I yearned to stay in Mumbai till August this year to see the adorned Ganpatiji Murtis.

I eased into my Bombay routine the day that I arrived. The next morning, as the clock strikes ten, our *nariyal pani-wala* arrives and my family members drink coconut water. Then one by one, leave for work or school. Around noon, Nani Maa and I set off to buy groceries for home. We chuckled at how local Maharashtrian grocery store owners understood and spoke Gujarati so well, despite it not being their native language.

Through the significant Gujarati Jain population in the Ghatkopar suburb, non-Gujarati store owners got accustomed to hearing it and eventually acquired it as part of their sociolect. I awaited for my Nana, coming home from the office and eagerly prepared for our visit to Bandra later today. I sit with my grandparents at Bandra bandstand and we spent time observing the sunset view and the beach. The serene sunset is in stark contrast to the hustle and bustle of the Bombay crowd and the cacophony of surrounding traffic. Following this, we leave for dinner at our much-loved restaurant ‘Soam’, serving predominantly Gujarati and Marwari cuisine at *Chowpatty*.

As a result of migrants from Gujarat and Rajasthan, Gujarati and Marwari cuisine has a strong influence on Mumbai’s foodscape. As a weekend treat, my Nana and Nani (maternal grandparents) used to take me for Gujarati *Naatak* nights, filled with endless humor and Gujarati slang. I anticipated going this coming weekend, and indeed my grandparents got tickets booked for us online. Near the theatre hall entrance, there are street vendors selling *bhutta* and Bombay *bhel*, which we gladly bought. We meet an elderly couple, whom we dropped back home after our Gujarati theatre fun for the evening.


Nana-Nani

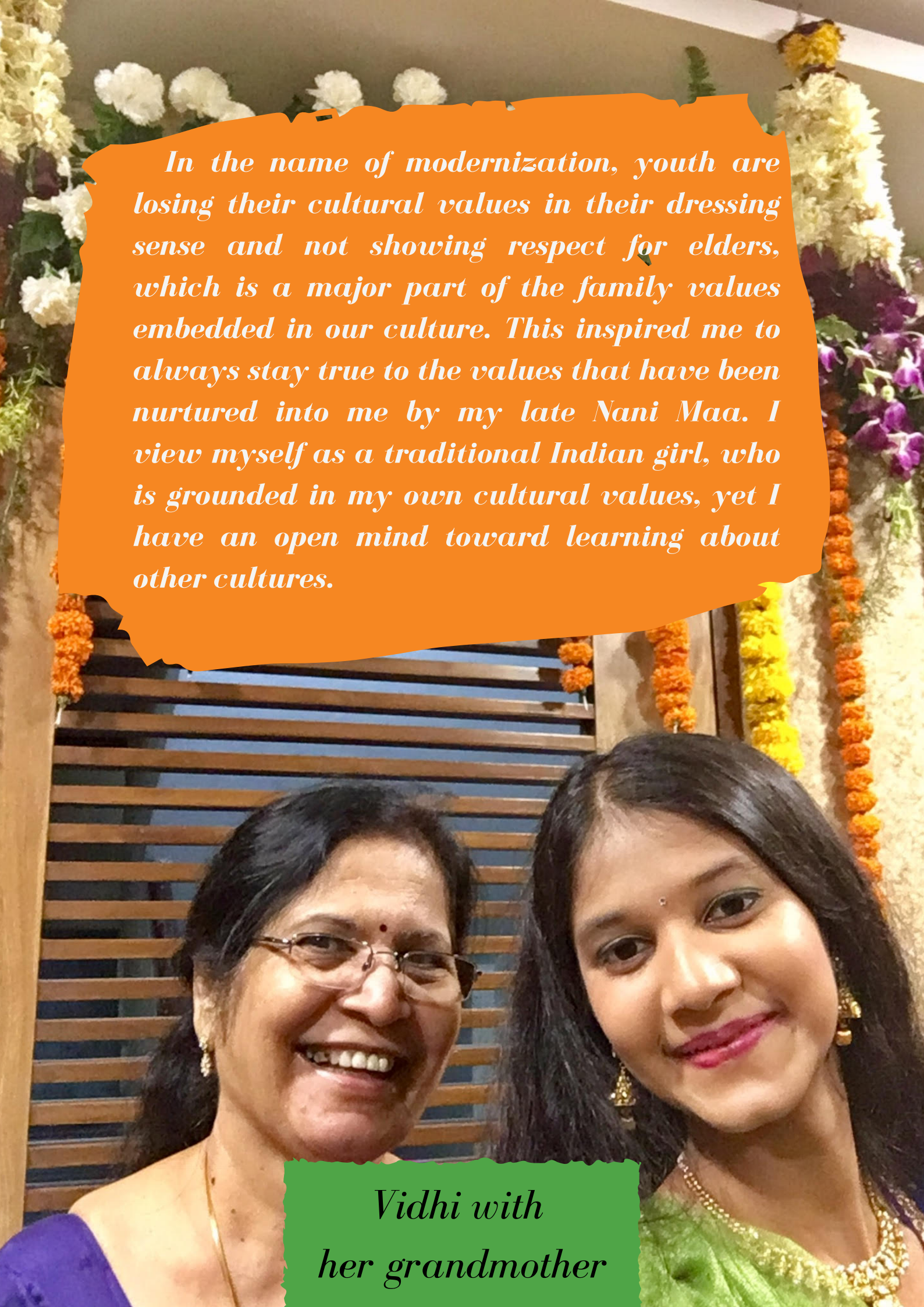


were always willing to drop off a senior citizen back home - through which I got the opportunity to forge new social connections or strengthen existing connections within our community.

Oftentimes, the older generation would be dropped off in the town and then we would head back toward Ghatkopar. After dropping the senior couple back home, we circle around Queen's necklace by Chowpatty for the characteristic Bombay "vibe." As we reached home, my Nani chops Alphonso mangoes (a local fruit delicacy grown in the western state of Maharashtra) for my mother and me. I savor the mesmerizingly, beautiful moonlight cast over Neelkanth Valley and observe my Nani, in the foreground, whilst chopping Alphonso mangoes. Pure delight alongside with 'Naturals Ice-cream', top of the list of dessert places for Mumbaikars.

Having lived as an Indian expatriate in Singapore has brought me closer to "home." My Indian expatriate experience has made me cognizant of my country's role in defining me as an individual. As a girl from Mumbai, I am always on the lookout for creating a mini-Mumbai for myself whilst abroad - which I have been able to carry out, through the means of meeting up with friends also hailing from Mumbai.

At my residence in Singapore, I have thrived within a microcosm of India. Through the grandparents sitting by the poolside (reinforcing the Indian joint family tradition) and the enthusiasm with which festive occasions are celebrated, India's spirit felt alive. It amazed me, during each trip back home, to see how Mumbai (and India as a whole) was getting increasingly globalized and benefitting the city and fellow citizens economically. However, I was dismayed to see how, as a result of rapid globalization, youth were slowly neglecting their roots and not remaining grounded in terms of cultural values. 



In the name of modernization, youth are losing their cultural values in their dressing sense and not showing respect for elders, which is a major part of the family values embedded in our culture. This inspired me to always stay true to the values that have been nurtured into me by my late Nani Maa. I view myself as a traditional Indian girl, who is grounded in my own cultural values, yet I have an open mind toward learning about other cultures.

*Vidhi with
her grandmother*

My First-Year at College Amidst a Pandemic



As the First-Year Liaison for the Slater E-Board, Tarishi Gupta '24, and Fatima Djalalova '24 spoke about these experiences, Tarishi beautifully noted that:

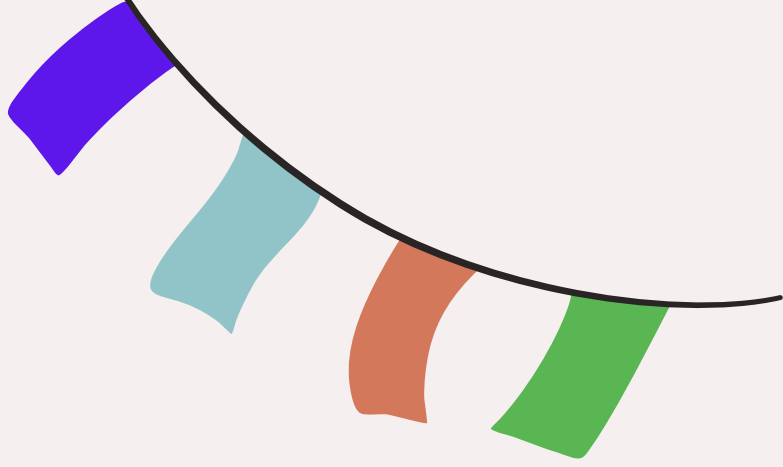
“International students can relate to each other so much because we all come from different backgrounds, but at the same time we have similar experiences like flying alone, different foods, different cultures, and just sharing that with each other makes us appreciate it even more. This made me love the international community.”

Her words sparked an interest to reach out to international students to ask about their feelings about Wellesley, traveling to the US, and home. This led to a series of heart-warming conversations, some of which are highlighted in these interviews.

Q: "Can you share your experience coming to Wellesley during the pandemic?"

A: "It was very nerve-wracking because visas were only issued to students, so I had to travel alone and I had never flown alone before. But I got a lot of support from the college. They postponed the arrival date for me, and they allowed me to come to the hotel, even though I came later than everybody else. I got check-ins from the Dean and Slater, which was very welcoming. I felt very welcome."

- *Tarishi Gupta '24, India*



Q: "What do you miss the most about your country?"

A: I miss the parties and how loud the people are. Certain languages are louder than others. Spanish is a very loud language. If you hear my friend and I speak Spanish, you would wonder "why are they so loud, why do they raise their voice, why do they yell, why do they laugh so hard?" But that's just how - at least Latin American people - go about speaking.

And I miss my household. The stereotype about Latino households having many children and family members is kind of true. My house is always very loud.

So I miss that about my family and about my friends too, and the pre-pandemic times, going to parties and dancing to reggaeton music.



Q: "Can you share a little about your experience of coming to the US? Were there any difficulties that you've encountered?"

A: The admissions process itself was difficult, because I did not come from an international school. Going to school abroad was not common in my community, so having to figure it out on my own was difficult. I was very happy when I was admitted to Wellesley. So getting in was the hardest part. But the visa process was also just so complicated and stressful. I remember I got my visa a week before coming to the US, and I was not sure I would be able to arrive on time. It was my first time coming to the US, and I was doing it alone. So it was a bit scary, but also super cool.

-Alicia Padilla '24, Mexico



Q: “Can you share a little about your experience of coming to the US? Were there any difficulties that you’ve encountered?”

A: Something that has been complicated for me as an international student was trying to open a bank account. That was kind of challenging especially since it takes time, plus the mail takes time to arrive, so it was a bit worrying. Also, it is just arriving at campus mid-year, and walking around, and being a little lost at first. I still do not know the whole campus. I feel that as the snow melts, I will not be able to recognize campus. I’m only used to campus being all white and covered in snow.

Q: "Is there anything that you miss the most about home?"

A: I miss the food. What I miss is being able to cook for myself and have that time to decompress. I really love cooking and I feel that it is part of the way you’re connected to your culture.

- *Pauline Le Grand '24, France, currently studying on campus*

Q: “Did anything surprise you when you arrived at Wellesley?”

A: As a person who has never visited Wellesley before, I was surprised by how big the campus was and how welcoming the community and the people were. It was especially hard for me to adjust during COVID, but there were so many people who were really welcoming and I was able to reach out to them and it really felt like a tight community.

Q: "Is there anything that you miss the most about home?"

A: The thing I miss the most about home is the Korean food. I also miss my friends and family. Also the cultural events, like the Korean national holidays, I miss the traditions and seeing my relatives and cousins.

-*Natalie Lee '24, South Korea*



Q: “Did anything surprise you when you arrived at Wellesley?”

A: The level of independence that students had. I was amazed at the level of self-sufficiency the students had, because I was personally feeling very disoriented by the level of independence that was required at college.

Q: "How is your experience of studying remotely going? Since you can compare it with the experience of studying on campus last semester, I would love to hear your thoughts about the advantages and disadvantages of both."

A: My experience of studying remotely is going very well and quite smoothly with the exception of the time difference. I would say in terms of comparing it with the experience of last semester, I miss actually physically being on campus and having that in-person interaction with the professors, students in my classes, and students in my residential hall. I also really miss the beautiful Wellesley campus. One of the advantages is that you have the comfort of being home, so it's more smooth. But the disadvantage of being at Wellesley during the COVID times was definitely the on-and-off quarantines and the level of isolation too. However, for me, my block mates really helped in terms of interaction during those times due to covid restrictions.



Q: "Is there anything you miss about Wellesley right now?"

A: "I definitely miss how beautiful the Wellesley campus is and experiencing the different seasons. What I miss the most is the community - the students, people in the residential hall, the professors. They were all genuine and welcoming. I haven't ever met such a welcoming and authentic group before I came to Wellesley. The people who helped me the most with the transition to Wellesley was my big from WASAC and my block mates."

-Vidhi Shah '24, India



Q: "Can you share a little about your experience of coming to the US? Were there any difficulties that you've encountered?"

A: "I flew from Singapore to New York, which is an 18-hour-flight alone. I heard it is the longest flight in the entire world. And being alone and flying all the way to the US was scary, but I enjoyed it. I like how organized our school is, especially the hotel and then the dorm quarantine. I feel like the school tries really hard to give us the smoothest transition possible"

Q: "How is your experience of studying remotely going? Since you can compare it with the experience of studying on campus last semester, I would love to hear your thoughts about the advantages and disadvantages of both."

A: "I feel more like in college right now. Last semester I was in Shanghai and there is so much going on in the city, that it was easy to get distracted with all the events going around me. Also, here there is no time difference. And I can study together with other students, I feel like it is a really good vibe."

Q: "What do you like the most about the International Community?"

A: "I like how tight-knit the international community is. We just bonded really quickly and I feel like all first-year international students already know each other. It feels great to see the Slater team in person."

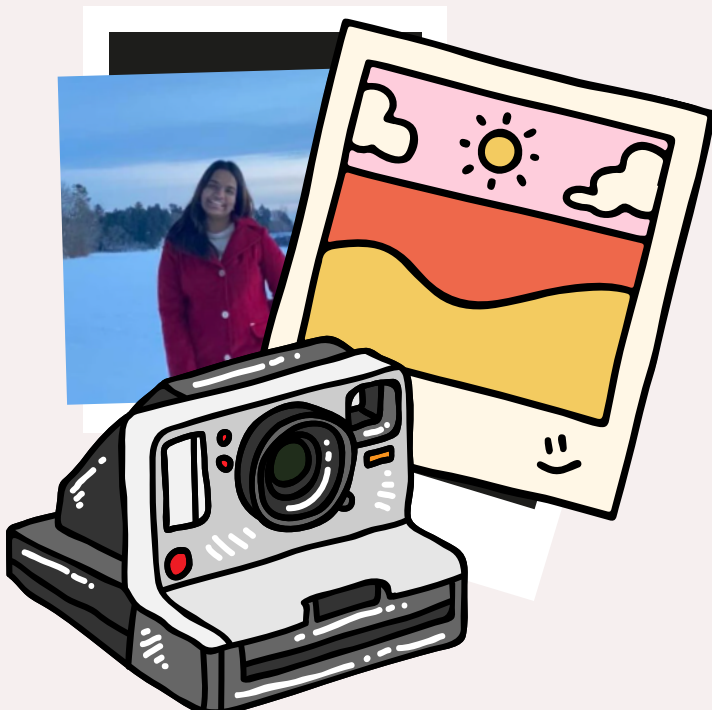
Q: "Did anything surprise you when you arrived at Wellesley?"

A: "I was surprised by how empty our hallways are. My block is the only block in the entire hall, so it feels very quiet. Also, speaking of the logistics, the social security application process was much faster than I expected, it only took 3 weeks to get it done."

Q: "What are three things you miss the most about home?"

A: "My dog. My Family. Food. My friends. "

- Connie Gu '24, China



*-Interviewed by
Tarishi Gupta '24
from India &
Fatima Djalalova
'24 from Uzbekistan*

Arab Hip Hop: From Niche to Mainstream

-Veeksha Madhu

I was very surprised, when a friend from LA recognized my favorite Arabic rap song on my playlist. Arab hip hop has moved from the fringes to the mainstream. Its rise in a deeply conservative society is intriguing. Even more intriguing is how an art form that relies on free expression is blooming in a region where repression is rampant.

In the UAE, Arabic hip-hop artists have carved an identity of their own, jostling for space alongside spoken word poets (locally known as “nabati” poetry) and other art forms. Hip hop artists here have found their voice and also a huge fan following. Its popularity surge transcends cultures and languages, even enlisting fans of Eminem and Tupac. It is perhaps due to the blending of English and Arabic lyrics in their tracks that Arabic hip hop artists are able to reach across the aisle to non-Arabic speakers.

The monarchical UAE is often lauded as being more “free” than most other countries in the region. The government also encourages arts and culture by earmarking generous budgets. In December 2020, the UAE Ministry of Culture hosted a well-attended hip-hop exhibition titled “Contact High: A Visual History of Hip-Hop” featuring archival videos, memorabilia, and music of over 150 artists. However, even in this “free” oasis, repression exists. Topics such as politics and homosexuality are still taboo. Mass media, especially radio and television, is extensively controlled by federal agencies. Saudi Arabia, the most populous country in the region and an absolute hereditary monarchy, media rules are even more stringent. Therefore, the theme of all hip-hop tracks is limited to love and life.

Government control is not the only challenge that artists are faced with. Arab society is deeply rooted in hierarchies, conventions, and norms. Self-proclaimed as the 'Queen of Arabic Hip-Hop,' Lynn Fattouh, commonly known as Malikah, hails from an open-minded Lebanese family. She too faced resistance from her parents and had to cover her face for two years as she performed, because she did not want her family to know about her hobby.

So what is driving the popularity of this art form in a region with fragile political, social, and cultural structures? I believe it is the millennial generation that is more global, more tolerant, and above all, more self-aware. Ditching the kandoura (the traditional Arab male attire) for applique leather jackets, their songs still celebrate their heritage and culture. Despite religion being widely practiced and pervasive among this generation, their view is far wider than the prism of religion, which is quite unlike their predecessors.

Arab Spring has invoked a love for revolutionary change and social media is amplifying their voices. This brigade is self-empowered and self-reflective. Emirati artist KMulti says it best in his popular track titled, "We Taking Over."





Goodbye, But not forever...

Stephanie and Ella share a conversation as they get ready to finish their college careers at Wellesley and hand over the reins for the Slater E-Board



Dear Slater family... I hope this message finds you safe and well, wherever you are in the world. This truly has been a year like no other, and my heart goes out to each of you. I hope that amidst the uncertainty and difficulty of this past year, you have found comfort and strength in your communities and in yourselves. I am grateful for the community we have created here with Slater, which has transcended borders and embraced so many of you. Know that the energy each of you brings is what makes Slater such a vibrant and beautiful community.

STEPH

I completely agree! Reflecting on these last 4 years at Wellesley, Stephanie and I have had many truly incredible moments spent with each other, and with other members of the Slater community. I know that I will carry with me the memories and the friendships that I have made, for the rest of my life, and I hope with all of my heart that others feel the same way that I do when it is their turn to graduate! And speaking of graduating, I honestly could not have asked for a more encouraging, supportive, loving, and selfless President to help me, as I navigated my role as VP during our final year.

ELLA

Although Ella and I will be graduating in June, know that our #slaterlove will extend far beyond the time we have left at Wellesley. Ella, I could not have asked for a more resilient, hardworking, optimistic, and energetic Vice President this year. To my partner in crime and the Pitbull to my Shakira, thank you for all the kindness and love you have given the Slater family. I am so excited to see what Slater will continue to accomplish. I hope that we have inspired others to continue to foster a loving and supportive community at Slater. Each of you brings something so special to our Slater family, and we cannot wait to see what the future holds for you at Wellesley and beyond.

STEPH

I could not agree more Stephanie. And the love that we have for Slater and all of you will truly never diminish, and it is constantly strengthened by seeing students in the years below us innovate, bring new ideas to the table, and just give their all to the international community and strive to create spaces where people feel loved, supported, and at home. We certainly are leaving this organisation in great hands, with people who are committed and deeply care about the international community, and for that we are immensely grateful.

ELLA





*The
End*