



the note

Staff and student magazine for the [School of Sociology and Social Policy](#)

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A note from the Editor:

This is the fourth issue of the note and because Nick Stevenson got it off to such an excellent start it pains me to anticipate the disaster it is about to experience as the new editor steers full steam for the nearest iceberg. Pains me. But it won't stop me. Thank you to the contributors of #4 and to Angela Peer for making a demented editor look half competent. Remember: this is the School's magazine. If you are enthused enough to write something for #5 then please contact me at Tony.Fitzpatrick@nottingham.ac.uk

The wondering thoughts of a wanderer: in defence of the ‘Gap yah’

If you have not already, type the words ‘gap yah’ into YouTube and watch the short clip, which is bound to bring a smile to your face. The typical ‘Gap yah’ student has become a stereotypical character, synonymous with the British media and present in most lectures. They are usually obvious to spot; with their long scruffy hair, beer Saigon vest and a hand knitted trousers from the Swati tribe in North Vietnam. Or you can often over-hear them jumping at any available opportunity to tell their ‘gap yah’ stories. Typically starting with usual phrase “That really reminds me of one time on my Gap Yah...” You get the picture.

The ‘gap yah’ culture is becoming increasingly controversial due to a number of issues. Firstly is the issue of who really benefits? Many of us undertake voluntary work during this time. Who really benefits from paying £250 to work in an orphanage for two weeks in Thailand? The likes on your Facebook profile may increase dramatically; but in reality the real benefits are the British companies who take your money, not the orphanage itself.

However this is not to say that all gap year programs are money stealing, self-serving machines, churning out hordes of edgy middle class students who never know when to stop talking about their travels. For example, I worked for 6 months as an English teacher in government schools in Sri Lanka. During which I was able to see real improvements to the schools. Also I made life-long friendships with some of the staff and students, many of whom I maintain contact with today. But I have long standing doubts about the project. As a long line of successive Sri Lankan volunteers, I question the impact we had on the students, as we were seen as just another western volunteer.

The second issue is some “gap yah’s” may travel across the world, and yet never discover the cultures in front of them. Some spend three months in Vietnam and cannot speak a single word of Vietnamese. Nor can they comment on the culture at all, other than the typical phrases of “the beers good” or “the women are gorgeous”. However this is not to say that all gap yearers return with little knowledge of the language or culture. Personally I know people that come back being fluent in Spanish, Thai or like

myself Sinhala (Sri Lankan).

The third issue I take with the concept of a gap year, is it predominantly the children of middle class parents who take them. With around the world trips paid by ‘daddy’s’ money, I feel those who come from working class backgrounds would benefit more from a gap year. Those who travel with their own money have a greater respect for their travels as they have earned it.

Despite the teasing we receive, taking a gap year has many advantages. My fellow travellers and I are much more mature, have greater life experience and a completely different outlook on life. This can be massively beneficial to a sociology degree. More importantly we have the opportunity to travel the world, make a difference to the worlds most disadvantaged and have the time of our lives.

Sophie Reynolds

BA Sociology & Social Policy, 2nd year



This reminds me of this one time on my gap yah –Jaffna Sri Lanka

How to Become Middle-Aged without really trying

In the last edition of *The Note* Nick Stevenson described a recent international conference on *Kraftwerk* held at Aston University. Younger readers please note. This is not craft work but *Kraftwerk*: a German band whose zany antics and outrageous humour enlivened the 1970s, an otherwise dull decade.

In any event, my own history of conference attendance is a bit more mundane.

Firstly, some information. Most people like myself become academics for the same reason: the promise of fame, wealth, groupies and the opportunity to solve crimes in your spare time. Unfortunately, you are also expected to work and that in part means publishing.

Now, as a humble, no-nothing doctoral student I was told that conferences were essential. You present work-in-progress to a group of critical strangers and receive invaluable feedback. Some do indeed treat conferences in that way. They are popularly known as 'idiots'.

No. Attendance at academic conferences has three functions: to schmooze the great and the good; to get laid; to get laid with the great and the good.

So my first conference proper was quite an eye-opener. I can't remember any of the papers or who was speaking. But I do remember the pub near Goldsmith's College where we nested for the rest of the evening. Higher education was calling to me.

Over the next few years several memories do surface from the murky, labyrinthine depths of my being to shatter the icy surface of my increasingly pallid consciousness. And its laboured metaphors.

There was the guy who heckled me – me! – and then wanted to engage in friendly conversation over lunch when all I wanted was to jam a plateful of couscous into his eye sockets.

There was the unsuccessful attempt in Finland to tempt me into a unisex sauna (no towels, or anything else, allowed). The last person to see my naked body broke down crying. It was me. In a mirror.

There was the conference in Vienna where we roomed in a nunnery in the middle of a red light district. Less exciting than it sounds, unfortunately, on both counts.

There was the weekend in Amsterdam when during a stroll through the red light...no, wait, this risks giving entirely the wrong impression of me.

There was a Swedish conference where a plenary speaker was bumped in front me, droned on for 40 minutes (to the point where even normally polite academics were hissing) and where, because I did I funny, precise, 15 minute stint I was practically a Superhero for the next two days. I relive those moments of glory occasionally. Sob.

There was the Brisbane conference when a koala bear nearly urinated on me. Had it happened I would have reciprocated in kind. Wouldn't have been the first time.

There was my guest slot in Berkeley when I accurately predicted the next 5 years of British politics to a sceptical audience of social work students convinced that Tony Blair would have to resign as Prime Minister within weeks (he lasted another 4 years).

There was the Honolulu conference where the rain can be so heavy you really think the stuff has got it in for you. But, it's Honolulu so who cares?

There was the Tokyo conference where the organisers took us to an authentic restaurant and we were served baby octopus (I can still taste the tentacles going down) and that poisoned fish which kills you if it's not prepared properly. And I am someone who seriously hates seafood anyway. Apart from fish and chips obviously. I managed to stuff the killer fish into my socks and hoped the

How to Become Middle-Aged without really trying

organisers would simply attribute the smell to my feet. Embarrassment narrowly averted there. Phew.

Then to Melbourne, 2008. There was the severely jet lagged prat who was so tired he drooled on the shoes of one of the world's most influential philosophers. There was the plenary speaker in a room so hot that he fell into a nap on stage while waiting to give his paper. And there was the complete tit who one infamous night managed fell into a large shrub while managing to resemble each of the following, sometimes simultaneously: Toad of Toad Hall, a donkey with mobility problems, Caligula.

God how I miss those few weeks.

I could go on. And on. I could also tell embarrassing anecdotes about others. But won't, for fear of reprisals. Unless you take me to this place near Goldsmith's College where I hear that they apparently serve some kind of beer...

Tony Fitzpatrick has been at Nottingham University since 2000. Largely because most other universities around the world have taken out restraining orders against him.

Tony on his way to another conference...



Looking Back

Turning Challenges into Opportunities

Back in 2008, when I decided to leave the Erbil-Kurdistan Region to go to Nottingham for a PhD programme, I already had a reputable job at a local university and a publishing house. Some close and sensible friends of mine told me that kicking your occupation at this age (I was 33 years old) and pursuing study in a different country, dealing with a new literature in a language which is not your second language but your fourth, is if not impossible then certainly a big challenge. I agreed with them but tried to convince myself that I was up for the fight.

In fact, all their comments on my journey came true. During my stay and study at Nottingham University I faced many downs but only few ups. I was feeling that I had no choice but to ditch my PhD study and return back to where I had come from. Several times I got very close to doing so.

However, I ultimately overcame the challenges and survived to continue writing the thesis, take some short courses from the graduate school and even apply for part-time undergraduate teaching towards the third year of my course. These experiences gave me enough encouragement to keep going. What I should never forget in my life is being given the courage to push forward by my supervisors, Stephen Cope and Tony Fitzpatrick, though, I sometimes made their hair stand on end! Sorry Tony and Stephen.

However, when I got towards the end of my thesis I was contacted by a publisher who showed their interest in publishing my thesis as a book. Although I had some publications (textbooks and research in Kurdish) I didn't expect that topics on Kurdish studies would be of much interest by any publisher. Luckily my book was published in 2015.

Studying in the School of Sociology and Social Policy at University of Nottingham, plus my recent publications, enhanced my profile and made me a strong candidate for positions at leading universities in the Middle East. For the faculty member position that I obtained last year at the American University Duhok Kurdistan (AUDK) I owe the University of

Nottingham a great debt.

Muslih Irwani, Assistant Professor of Sociology, Politics and Social Policy at American University Duhok Kurdistan, KRG-Iraq. He graduated in 2014 with a PhD in social policy.

Results day

Results Day 2015 was very nerve-wracking. I walked to the campus with my friend early in the morning and our hearts were pounding as we approached the LASS building. We checked the board and to my relief I saw my name under the 2:1 category, but I was still very nervous about my dissertation mark and my exact grade. I had a coffee and relaxed with my friend until my tutor meeting when I found out I had got a 1st in my dissertation and I was elated and very surprised.

After my tutor meeting my friend and I didn't really know what to do with ourselves – for the first time we actually felt free! It was a Thursday and GraduOcean was the next day so instead of having a heavy 'results night' we just took ourselves home, made pizza and watched movies all night – not the most exciting but very relaxing and good preparation for the next night! It was a very surreal day but a good end to my time at Nottingham.

Kristina Kazerani graduated in 2015 with a BA Sociology & Social Policy



Materialistic influences on individual lives

An alienated city amid all the hustle and bustle of the super-happening student life leaves me spellbound. Nottingham is nevertheless extremely beautiful, and I have managed to capture its beauty on my mind, so it leaves an infinitely lasting impression. Belonging to a middle-class, yet principled and never-deprived-me-of-anything-I-desire family, I have embarked upon my university journey, with utmost tranquillity, and a constantly motivating mother, who guides me, towards attaining the very best in life, striving for an education that not only enlightens me intellectually, but also stimulates a strong sense of purpose within me, preparing me for the world of employment.

My initial days at the university were full of curiosity, along with numerous questions circulating my mind: where do I purchase warm food from? (This question still remains unanswered.) What time does my day end? How do I access Wi-Fi? What modules are available to take on? Is there anyone else like me in my year, lectures and seminars? Being the oldest sibling, I have always made an earnest attempt in providing my siblings with unconditional support in making their decisions, however I never thought that I'd ever require the support of my siblings, in order to reach forward in life, out of my comfort zone, into an entirely new city and an environment so different to the one where I originate from.

Within this context, the behaviour of my peers has been relatively pleasant: each seems to endeavour in trying to communicate with me, demonstrating colossal interest within the discipline of sociology, suggesting that there will be a sense of competitiveness around us all, in attaining the best possible grades, however, most significantly broadening our (existing) knowledge of the subject, utilising our skills and transferring them onto one another, in addition to maximising our opportunities to make the most out of the resources available to all of us, emphasising team work towards a shared goal: we display our individual potential and why we are here at the university.

Early experiences at the university have been overall jittery for me, being frequently misplaced on campus site, like a clueless creature of nature who remains unaware of its surroundings...

I am beginning to examine the behaviour of my peers, their body language, in addition to the mannerism with which my lecturers deliver their talks on: understanding communication and how to make sense of this medium will enable me to develop my own communicative skills, emerging as attentive listener and speaker both.

Potential influences on my own life which can be cited as characteristics of nurture consist of developing an optimistic approach towards life: a key methodology which I have grasped from the environment that I have grown up in, where remaining positive results in long-term self-confidence, in addition to a sense of perseverance that something needs to be pursued in life – leading a life which is worthy of living to the fullest. Nurture characteristics enable me to adapt myself accordingly, however the world would like to perceive me as, however it also allows me to challenge prejudice and dispel stereotypes which I am categorised in: an 18 year old British Pakistani Muslim being the prime example.

Moreover, as a female, the stereotypes which we, as women tend to face, relate to the kind of career which we aspire to follow. Why is it that women are traditionally believed to become nurses or teach children? Engineers and pilots today are largely female-dominated professions, so as global citizens and belonging to a diverse Britain, we should aim to dispel various types of stereotypes against communities and individuals, placing a large emphasis on equality.

Contrary to nurture influences, nature influences are derived from the genes which we inherit, and are most likely to pass onto our upcoming generations; nature influences consist of biological factors and processes which we have inherited from our parents and have an impact on our growth and development.

Examples of how nature affects are through inherited factors that can influence the way our mind and body function. Such influences consist of genetic illnesses – like diabetes, height, the colour of our hair, and complexion, which are part of our physical appearance, in addition to intellectual

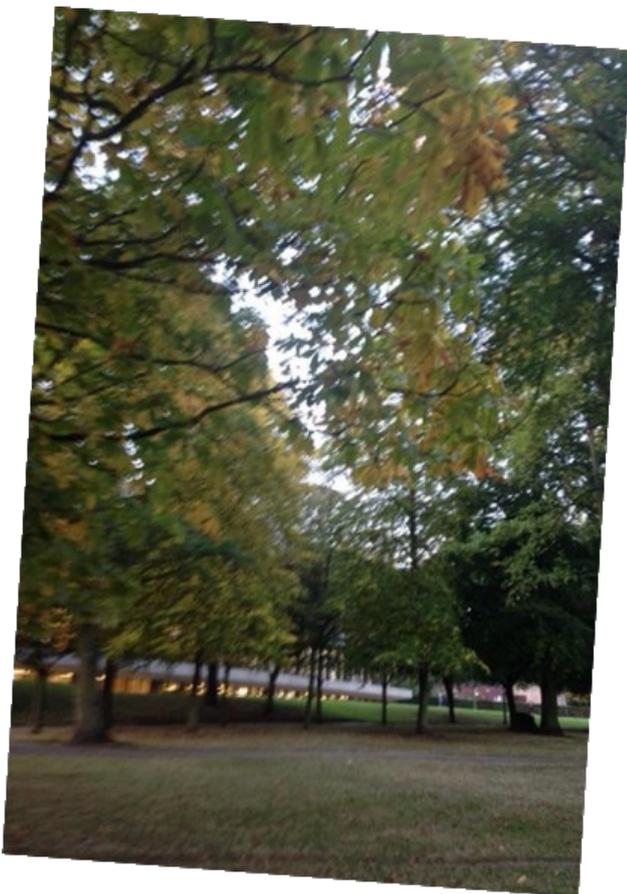
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abilities. Influences on my life which can be cited as characteristics of nature consist of my physical appearance and my intellectual abilities too, which have been derived from my parents, which implies that a large extent of influences on my life are resultant from nature.

However, a large extent of influences on my life are environmentally, socially, culturally and normatively derived, suggesting that my life is mainly impacted from my surroundings, instead of what I have inherited. For instance, the communication process, my accent, dialect and views which I have formed on numerous phenomenon's are all influences originating from nurture, in contrast to my appearance and cognitive abilities that stem from nature.

Iram Zahair

BA Sociology, 1st year



John

In the UK, particularly whilst I was in Nottingham, I felt that there was both an apathetic attitude and a creeping increase in the ideas and mentality of far right fascist perspectives that sought to scapegoat refugees and minority groups. I remember watching and listening in horror as a UKIP member spoke on our campus leading up to the general election spreading his hateful views.

In Hong Kong, as far away from university as I can be, the intensity of the globalized problem and the inevitable consequences of the migrant crisis were if not forgotten at least set aside...until I met John in a bustling lecture hall at the Chinese University of Hong Kong the familiar excited feel of Fresher's Week hanging in the air.

At first glance Hong Kong appears seems an unlikely destination for asylum seekers most often are stuck here like John hoping to have arrived somewhere else. In August 2015 the estimated number of asylum seekers, mainly from South Asia was around 9,900, a minimal statistic amongst the Island population of 7 million people. Hong Kong has a post-colonial take on migration so Whites are ushered in with welcome as "Expats" and whilst illegal migration and illegal workers are an issue it's

John

normally an accepted fact because of our proximity to the Chinese mainland. Due to post-colonialism the “otherness” and negativity including long standing prejudice about South Asian and African communities has prevailed meaning that John’s struggles to access Hong Kong’s society are immensely difficult especially as ‘shadism’ is still rampant among society. Even in the lecture theatre he notices that sometimes students treat him wearily despite his friendliness.

Ironically Hong Kong is a migrant society, having developed and thrived after the post-war refugee and economic boom. It works in the government’s favour to neglect refugees’ welfare so individuals like John can supplement the black market with illegal labour. A minimum wage was introduced for the first time in 2011 at HK\$28 (£2.40) an hour, you can only imagine what John was earning illegally.

For a more depth analysis I suggest reading Professor Gordon Matthew’s *Ghetto at the Centre of the World: Chungking Mansions* because it provides an incredible anthropological study of a specific Hong Kong residence that houses asylum seekers. Professor Gordon, who is an activist in his spare time for asylum seekers, suggested this module for John to improve his English which was how we met.

It’s during our hour-long commutes home from campus that he convinces me with his witty humour, to act as a “wingman/woman” and help him find a Chinese girlfriend during my stay. A feat considering my Cantonese is limited to “When’s dinner?” An easy-going guy with a large smile and generous personality he invites me to an evening of beer and barbeque on Silvermine beach, his home on Lantau Island. Only afterwards do I fully understand how self-deceptive and ethnocentric my own education and knowledge was about refugees not just as a sociology student but also as a Hong Konger.

While most of my adult life has been spent in the UK I found myself slowly questioning the internalised world of migrants I had been presented, of the specific geographical situations of asylum seekers that are divided along Western globalized

and politicized agenda, the faceless agencies like the UNHCR that we unquestionably accept despite their disorganization and these charities that lack critical accountability. We need to remember that by dehumanizing refugees we are actively displaying our own lack of human morality.

Asylum seekers are so often spoken over and spoken for because of the language barrier and even cultural differences so it’s important their voices are not lost. I asked for the words to come from John himself. While his English is still improving his words are honest and open like his character. I hope they show you the friend I will sorely miss when I return. Certain parts have been edited for language mistakes to provide a better understanding of the equivalent value of the HK Dollar to the Pound.

Phoebe Lau

BA Sociology, 2nd year

An asylum seeker in Hong Kong

I’m John, Iranian, Christian (converted from Islam), former fireman and power electric engineer, I fled Iran due conflicts after second election of Ahmadinejad, I get to Hong Kong on my way to England (as my agent managed) in 2012, and I had been sent to prison and detention Centre for 7 months and I have been here ever since.

To know the life of an asylum seeker we can look at 2 aspects:

A: The policy and system to process refugee claims which here called ‘USM’,

B: living conditions, supports and policies.

A: USM stands for unified screening mechanism. Hong Kong didn’t sign the 1951 UN refugee convention and they just signed the convention against torture which means Hong Kong won’t send a person in danger back to the country in danger but they won’t resettle a refugee in Hong Kong, so a refugee (if one get accepted by USM) will be sent to

John

UN for resettlement in other countries.

To apply to this system either one should arrive illegally or over stay to become illegal.

This system is very slow (in average almost 7 years it takes to a person get an answer) and has only 0.5 % acceptance rate.

For example I had an interview after 3 and a half years and that's it. Probably you know that my case is not that complicated.

Until now I described a system which gives a refugee 7 years of waiting with fear of sending back, or staying for long time in Hong Kong and hoping to get accepted, but why fear of staying here which bring us to second section.

B: Refugees in Hong Kong are not allowed to attend to university or be educated in anyway, we are not allowed to use government sport facilities, not allowed to work and of course we can't exit from Hong Kong. There are bad and negative news about refugees, which call them illegal immigrants, criminals, system abusers that spread hatred of refugees in society and make it so difficult to live.

There is government assistance, HK\$1500 dollars rent per month (£126), which is almost impossible to find a place with such a rent (Hong Kong is one of the most expensive cities and unequal societies in the world. Phoebe.) On average the price per square foot of land is about HK\$20,000. A small studio flat around 400 foot square with one bedroom can cost upwards of HK\$5 million which is around £421,000. There is HK\$40 (£3.40) food assistance per day. A breakfast in McDonald's is HK\$35 (£3). You do the calculations. There is HK\$150 (£13) for electricity bills (in a hot, humid city needing air conditioning) and finally HK\$200-400 (£17 - £34) monthly for transportation, haircut, Internet, phone bill, extra clothes and extra help.

With a simple search and calculation one can find

how hard is to spend 7 years in a city waiting while you face hate and lack of assistance. Refugees have to rely on churches and NGOs, It means if we are lucky enough we get to have some food which people were throwing out, or clothes they didn't want to wear and is not our size. Remember I'm talking about at least 7 years.

NGOs victimise refugees to make money and manipulate them to reach their goals; refugees have to listen to them to stay in their program in order to sustain receiving a little help. NGOs give the least help and keep refugees needy; for example they gave me the least transportation fees and they asked me to take cheapest transportation which took me more than 4 hours a day. I think they don't have to help me but they can't tell me how I should spend my time. Why is my time not as important as others? I refused to continue some of programs but a lot of refugees have to obey.

How have I survived? This is a long story. After prison a good friend found me a shelter. I lived with 11 other refugees in a room with one toilet and shower, then I moved to a studio room of 6 square meters. I couldn't pay the rent. Only solution was to sell my body, not exactly like prostitute. I would find not beautiful, aged, overweight and helpless ladies on the Internet, meet them and sometimes sleep with them. Then I describe my situation and they would help me with my costs, even though sometimes that wasn't enough either.

So I had to work illegally, night time 7pm to 7am breaking printers and divide plastics from metal for \$250 (£21). That job made me sick. I find out more about phone business in Hong Kong and then I start buying and selling second hand phones, I did painting, moving furniture, fixing electricity, work as waiter, cleaner, etc.

Of course I had suicidal thoughts, nightmares almost every night, depression was inevitable, especially when my wife refused to join me and broke up with me, but there is light everywhere and some friends or good people who care.

After God had mercy on me and church helped me find a place to live, I didn't have to do everything to provide shelter, so I had more time to learn English, read, write books and do exercise.

It's easy to write words but what I have been through is impossible to be understood by an article. Maybe some will hear. A face older than my age, or my facial expressions when I'm talking about how I have been tortured, can tell you more but still there are a lot left which no one will get.

If you see me probably you will find me a happy person who makes others laugh. The truth is people make me laugh, especially when they talk about their problems, the stress of a new job, the slow internet in their new home, naughty babies, delay in their flight, etc. I'm happy for people who have such problems and are bitching about it.

This is John, a messenger.



How an Administrator de-stresses at the weekend

The best way to de-stress after a hard week at work is to go and watch a good game of ice hockey. For 2 and half hours I can forget I am a parent, a housewife, an administrator etc.

Obviously, being from Nottingham it is the GMB Nottingham Panthers I am supporting. To stand and cheer when they come out to clapping and singing songs when they score. It is a family sport from babies to Senior Citizens. With no bad language allowed it beats football in all directions.

Being there in Belfast when they won the league (56 years had gone by since we last won this trophy) and winning all 3 trophies in the same year, what a dream team.

Ice Hockey is one of the few sports where home and away fans can sit together and chat between periods. Which is why the end of season play offs are the best! 10 lots of supporters in one arena and you do not know if your team will make the final four teams but you buy your ticket 2 months in advance just in case and so you can sit with your teams fans.

Even though Panthers did not make the play offs last year our fans were the loudest. As someone said who watched the games on TV you could hear the Panthers fans.

The passion I have for this sport, as do my family, is second to none. My husband, 2 sons and 1 of my daughters are there every week in our black and gold tops cheering our boys on.

For a good night out why not come along and see what I mean. The season started again on the 5th September and with new players in the squad who knows whether we will win a cup but the faithful supporters will be there hoping to see a cup held aloft with our ribbons on it at the end of the season. After only 2 months of games we have qualified for

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the knock out stage of the Challenge Cup and are second in the league, one point behind Belfast Giants but we have games in hand.

There are fights (all controlled) between players and the fans cheer when the opponent falls down on the ice first. 5 minutes in the penalty box is all worth it and fans love it. Pucks leave the ice and the saying is 'keep your eye on the puck at all times'. Even though it rarely hits the crowd it is best to be prepared as it will come at you at a great speed.

Players are always going on and off the ice, changing lines and people ask why. We say, try skating at 40 miles an hour, controlling a puck and see how tired you get.

Need I say more to me this is the best sport ever!!

Kathryn Clay is the School's Postgraduate Taught Administrator.



Kathryn with her favourite player of all time (Jordan Fox) taken at a Nottingham Panthers Christmas Celebration

Photos courtesy of Emma Sleight



