

CULTURATOR

A Journal of Global Voices

*America's First Student-Led Journal
of Interdisciplinary Cultural and Social Science*



Spring Theme —
Systems
March 2024 Ed.
Volume 1

CULTURATOR

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Printed by Mixam, USA.

First electronic edition March 2024.

Culturator is a youth-led, non-profit initiative. Visit us at www.culturator.org.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

01 A Message from Our Editor-in-Chief

02 Our Staff

03 Our Columnists

04 Traditions and Treatments

06 Death, Taxes, and Geographical Illiteracy

09 Challenging Biases

10 Get Involved

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— OUR COLUMNISTS



Nishita Sinha

Article: Cultural Currents

Nishita is a senior at Swami Vivekananda College in Nadi, Fiji. A dancer and an artist, she is eager to impart her love of fostering individuality and her enthusiasm for learning about various cultures through writing.



Adrija Acharya

Article: Fragile Dreams, Calloused Hands

Adrija is a Year 10 student at Yatsen Secondary School in Suva, Fiji. She is excited to represent Pacific traditions and cultures and the Melanesian/Polynesian community as a whole as a person who grew up in it, as well as the effects she felt as a Bengali person far away from her homeland, Kolkata, India.



Shaurya Gupta

Article: Feathers of Freedom

Shaurya is a Year 10 student at Yatsen Secondary School. He is passionate about law and spends his free time playing reading books and coding. As someone who has lived most of his life overseas than his native home, he wants to learn about other people's cultures.

CULTURAL CURRENTS

Identity and Adaptation in a Multicultural Fiji

by Nishita Sinha — Swami Vivekananda College, Nadi, Fiji

Often, I have noticed that the dominant culture of powerful nations tends to supplant the traditional cultures of smaller island nations. Every day, our world grows more and more interconnected. Thus, language is crucial to culture and is what keeps us rooted in our history in this world. Under the trend of global Westernization, I notice that people often devalue and disregard their cultures. Right before my eyes, I see culture fading away as an increasing number of people are finding it difficult to communicate in their own tongues. Being in a multicultural nation like Fiji, this is not an uncommon sight. Fiji is home to a diverse range of racial groups, including iTaukei Fijians, Indo-Fijians, Chinese, Koreans, Japanese, other Polynesians, and many others. Since English is the most widely spoken language, many people would rather fit in than speak their native tongues because they feel embarrassed to do so. However, this should not be the case.

Like everything in the world, living in a multicultural country has its advantages and disadvantages. I often get insights into the lifestyles of other cultures. My mother prepares my favorite Indian sweets. I pull out a tin box filled with yellow-orange ladoos, sugary, golden-brown gulab jamuns, and white, syrup-soaked roshogulla, a classic of our Bengali cuisine. In contrast, my Fijian friends contribute *lovo*, a traditionally underground-cooked dish with a smoky aroma of marinated chicken and coconut *palusami*. We also try spicy and savory noodles, classic sausage with chips, sandwiches, and *bele*, a Rotuman staple. Moreover, just like everyone else, I love trying out food from different cultures and sharing meals while eating together as a class even though it is sometimes impossible due to prefectorial duties.

By expanding my knowledge and worldview, I gain entirely new experiences, and I am grateful for that. However, I have also noticed a darker side, where prejudice and racial discrimination come in. People are increasingly vulnerable to racial remarks as they come in contact with people from diverse cultures regularly. These remarks may begin in jest and progress to more serious situations, such as bullying and harassment.

I was born in the bustling city of Jamshedpur, India. Although I was quite little when we left India, my trips there have helped create a very special place for it in my heart. The smell of India, the city air, the spices from the different street foods that make my mouth water, the unique scent of traditional fabric from the nearby stores sprayed with scents of sandalwood, and the roar of the night crowds fill my ears, reminding me of the peculiar night walks we used to take to get to the *pani puri* stall, often overwhelm me when I think back to the vivid memories I made with the rest of my family. I temporarily forgot about all of my temporary obligations and the tension in my life as I strolled through the city; all that was left was the thrills of the present, which allowed me to be who I am and enjoy myself fearlessly, worry-free. The fact that I was able to be close to my family and loved ones was, however, the nicest thing about India. Indian culture and music continue to influence me even in Fiji, from the music I listen to to the movies I watch. Indian vibrations will always be engraved in my thoughts.

I am now surrounded by the vast Pacific Ocean, which I call home. This transition was a challenge as I learned to adapt to Fijian life. However, traveling here, although a leap of faith, was one I will never regret. Since I don't have any family here in Fiji, my life is completely different from India's. However, spending time with friends fills the need and completes the missing piece in my heart. Reminded of the beauty of this lovely island nation I now call home; I find myself surrounded by oceans and in the middle of nature as I embrace the Pacific breeze. I can smell the clean, fresh air in this frequently humid atmosphere as I stroll around, and I can hear birds chirping and the frequent rushing of planes overhead. Fiji is more than just a tourist attraction for holiday destinations. What is most special are the ever-smiling friendly people and the life that we share within. Here in Fiji, I have experienced some of my most priceless experiences, which I will always treasure and embrace whatever the future brings. These memories, which range from winning prizes at school to just chatting with friends while riding the bus, never fail to make me smile.

Since my identity is what makes me unique, I am proud of it, and I think everyone else should show pride in displaying their cultures too. Hence, preserving one's identity in the face of variety is a difficult but rewarding endeavor. I find it to be a process that requires reflection, bravery, and fortitude.

FRAGILE DREAMS, CALLOUSED HANDS:

Chronicles of a Vanishing Land

by Adrija Acharya — Yatsen Secondary School, Suva, Fiji

Age 12: Who Could Ever Leave Me Darling?

A drop of sweat ran down Kanu's forehead, her breaths getting heavier as her hands dug deeper into the little piece of scruffy timber. The night sky, usually lit by the collection of stars was grey- the reflection of the sombre atmosphere in their home was reflected onto the sky.

Her little candle was glowing, as bright as Kanu's rage against the world. Her tools suddenly clattered, causing an older, stressed teen to run out of the dimly lit house and look around. Her eyes searched for the child, and their eyes met — a sigh of relief from the older woman.

“Ana.”

Kanu's voice was a whisper lost in the air.

“What's the matter, my dear?” Ana asked, her eyes gleaming with adoration as she ran her fingers through the long curls of her little sister. Kanu slapped her hand away as she rested her head on Ana's shoulder. She looked at her calloused hands and sighed.

“Do you think we will be able to escape this?”

“Escape what? Don't you think this is a paradise? Our village, our home. We have everything we need!”

Kanu's cheeks grew warm at the words, and her eyes narrowed in rage.

“You're being impeccably delusional. There is no life in this village. Just-just a bunch of disappointments assembles to create this 'home' of ours.”

“Don't be so negative-”

Ana abruptly stopped speaking as she took a moment to think.

“I mean, it is pretty bad. But not as bad as it could get.”

They looked at the dying reflection of the sea. Kanu was pretty sure it had a vivid colour of the sea was blue, but her eyes betrayed her as she looked at the colourless, pale brown sea. The satisfying salty smell of the sea now had a distinct smell of what Kanu could only describe as dirty- dirty like fuel. The trees seemed to wither a bit, the green turning into a dusty colour of nothingness.

“Our home won't survive much longer.”

The words uttered by Ana caused an uncomfortable silence in the atmosphere.

Now we just sit in the dark and wonder when it is time.

Age 15: But Who Could Stay?

Kanu stared at the mere ruins of the pandanus hut, her face expressionless as she held the broken pieces of Lapita Pottery₁ in her hands. The sharp raggedy edges dug deeper into her calloused hands, and blood spilt out from her palm, staining her cotton skirt.

She couldn't differentiate if she felt the pain to see her home destroyed, or if she felt the pain because of the wound.

"We can't afford to live on this island! This is ridiculous!"

"What have we sinned for such an ill-fated ending?!"

"When will we ever escape this?"

The howls, screams and complaints of the villagers drowned Kanu's thoughts that raced a marathon in her head. What was the point of all of this?

She looked around.

Destruction.

That's all she could define it as.

The trees were like fallen soldiers, bleeding themselves to death. The place was flooded, soil sinking at the paces of their feet, just the way Kanu felt her hope sinking every time she saw her home.

The sea was sorrowfully cruel, showering the island with large waves.

Tsunamis. That's what the reporters say it is.

But I think it is her sorrows being cried to us. She isn't the perpetrator, we are.

Ana tossed a piece of dalo at Kanu, urging her to eat it.

She stuffed it in her mouth, and the soft starchy food melted in her mouth. Kanu's eyes were soulless, yet she tried to cling to the warmth the food offered.

"This is all we have for now. You reckon we can save our home anymore?" Ana asked, her young adult face lined with pain and despair.

What did we ever do?

What did we ever do?

"What did we ever do?"

What did we ever do?

What did we ever do?

"Kanu, we did nothing-"

"No, Ana. We pace around like ghosts in this country, trying to save our home. We did so much and all of it is in vain!"

"Kanu-"

"You don't get it! I- no we did so much for this rugged old island! Nothing, nothing ever comes out of it. Is this the luck we have for being in the tiniest corner of the world? We cry for help, and no one bats an eye."

"Kanu! Stay shut! We still have hope-"

Ana's eyes gleamed with tears as she huffed.

"We still have hope."



Collapsed Buildings in the Phillipines after an Earthquake

Her voice was breaking, her soft voice was slowly turning desperate. She clung onto the hope of a savior, of salvage.

But would there ever be one?

In 2021 alone, the Philippines suffered more than 12.6 thousand earthquake events. In the past decade, the Pacific has suffered droughts (2015), cyclones, floods, and tsunamis almost every year. Due to the atomic tests carried out in the Marshall Atolls almost more than half a century ago, children are still born with disabilities and impairments due to the everlasting radiation. Perhaps, in the envisioned future, there will be a time when people can embrace their culture, sitting on their pandanus mats, basking in the warm sun and glorious white sandy beaches that the tourism advertisements show, without having to worry that the world's extinction might be near. Perhaps, in the envisioned future, we could laugh during the cool summer nights, the wind hitting our faces without seeing our country withering with every kilometer a car drives on the road.

Perhaps.

FEATHERS OF FREEDOM

Symbolism of Mockingbirds in American Culture

by Shaurya Gupta — Yatsen Secondary School, Suva, Fiji

Since I was young, I have always loved reading about American history. Two books that I love the most are *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *The Hunger Games*. One motif that I see over and over again is the mockingbirds as a symbol of innocence, justice, and liberation.

To Kill a Mockingbird is a 1960 novel by Harper Lee. In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the eponymous bird symbolizes innocence and the destruction of that innocence. In the novel, Atticus Finch famously says “Remember it’s a sin to kill a mockingbird” to his daughter, Finch. He says this because mockingbirds are harmless creatures by nature. They do not prey on other birds or animals, only consuming insects, berries, and seeds. They also produce beautiful song. Hurting innocent lives is both senseless and cruel. I noticed that marginalized characters like Tom Robinson and Boo Radley are likened to mockingbirds — innocents who are unjustly harmed by society.

Meanwhile, *The Hunger Games*, mockingjays are hybrid birds that originate from the mating of mockingbirds and jabberjays, inheriting the mockingbirds’ sweet song and the jabberjays’ ability to mimic sounds. While not explicitly symbolized by mockingbirds, the idea of resilience and rebellion is embodied in the mockingjay — a bird that represents the defiance and spirit of the oppressed. Originally, the mockingjay was a Capitol-

designed spy tool to use against the districts. Arising from the 74th Hunger Games, Katniss wears a mockingjay pin on her chest. For the innocent children abducted to the games and the innocent people oppressed by the Capitol, the mockingjay, along with Katniss Everdeen, transforms into a symbol of resistance against the long-standing brutality and oppression of the Capitol. In this way, the mockingjay transcends its origins and reminds me of the human spirit’s need for justice and liberation.

Mockingbirds are also important across various Native American cultures. For the Hopi and Pueblo tribes of the southwest, the mockingbird played a large role in creation myths, imparting language to humans. For the Shasta people of the northwest, it stands as a guardian of the dead, while Southeast Native American tribes view the bird as a symbol of intelligence. In the broader context of American culture, the mockingbird demonstrates the enduring spirit of the peoples through historical and societal tumults. Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird* leverages this symbolism to represent innocence and justice against false accusations. Similarly, *The Hunger Games* becomes a potent signal of the fight against oppression for liberation. Such symbols transcend across space and time, and the symbol of the mockingbird must stay culturally relevant for generations to come.

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