

**Bernard Levin Award 2011**

**Entries and Awards**

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## WINNER

### Alizeh Ovais Kohari – The Wrangling of Minds

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When, with a solitary flick, the two hands on the clock become one and the demand and supply lines begin to blur into each other, I shut my textbook and call up a friend. By the time the clock hands have stretched as far away from each other as they possibly can, we are perched by the river, on the Southbank, eating lunch.

‘My head is cluttered with Plato,’ she says. ‘Mine with regression lines,’ I groan. ‘Let’s talk about something else.’

We are economists-in-training with a love for books and so, our conversation skips from one to another. Watching gaggle after gaggle of insufferably cheery tourists float by, I tell her how in a book I am currently reading, a character declares that she knows a trick for the perfect picture: ‘You must look into the camera and say ‘La petite pomme.’ I stumble over the French; her tongue flies over it with enviable ease. We repeat the words together – ‘La petite pomme!’ – and freeze for a moment, two (usually serious-looking) girls with pretend pouts. We look at each other from the corners of our eyes, confirm how absurd we look, and convulse into helpless laughter.

Another friend joins us. He is livid: on the way back from the LSE, he saw a bus that stated, proudly, boldly, that ‘There’s probably no God, so stop worrying and have a good day’. ‘To assume the absence of a God,’ he seethes, biting angrily into an apple, ‘to just assume it so nonchalantly, I mean, come on’ – with a vehement gesture towards the river and the sky – ‘how could there not be a God?’

And another friend points at my copy of *The Economist*, which shows a child in Africa, hollow eyes on a gaunt face, and says quietly, ‘How could there be one?’

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And so it goes, the wrangling of minds. We sit by the water and debate the existence of God, St Paul’s slender steeple on one side of the river, the Tate’s fat finger on the other, while above us the sky changes weather with characteristic English nonchalance. Yesterday, a squabble ensued over the independence of the subcontinent (‘We only left because *we* wanted to, because it was

in *our* interests,’ asserted an English friend and the Indians and Pakistanis amongst us, staunch patriots, pounced on him, our hackles raised.) We ponder over the secret feminism in Shakespeare’s *A Taming of the Shrew*, watch *Oedipus* at the National Theatre and wonder why he, Oedipus, felt the need to gorge his eyes out – after all, he didn’t *know* he was marrying his mother, did he now? Economics geeks, we discuss the world in terms of opportunity cost, marginal utility, cost-benefit analyses. We point at the Hare Krishna cart that parks itself on Houghton Street every single day and joke again and again, always laughing, never tiring: ‘*But there’s no such thing as a free lunch!*’

We are from all over the world, with ideas diametrically opposed, tempers dangerously similar; we argue, debate, discuss, dissect, try to know the causes of things. We refuse to be each other. And that, though it spawns so many quarrels, is the best part of it all.

London will do that to you: it will turn over and annihilate ideas that you have carefully nurtured in rooms sheltered from the light of experience. And even as those long-cherished views are twisted and crushed, even as they begin to appear so – silly, we find ourselves emboldened by London, by all that has taken place within its fold, by all that can still take place – perhaps, by our hands. Less than half a mile away from the LSE, in ramshackle Soho quarters, Karl Marx once weaved plans of a revolution. Just off the Embankment, Samuel Pepys resided; across the street, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Virginia Woolf lived in Bloomsbury, stringing words into sentences of staggering beauty (of Big Ben: ‘the leaden circles dissolved in the air’). And near Charing Cross, in a boot-blackening factory, Dickens began his career.

George Bernard Shaw and Bertrand Russell, Charlie Chaplin and ol’ Shakespeare, of course – in London and in its past, we find ourselves in extremely good company. And this proximity to power, and to greatness, is why so many of us rush to lectures every day, sticky-eyed and crusty-lashed, dodging runners along the Embankment or elbowing through the early morning crush outside Holborn Station; why, as exams near, the School is flurried with textbook-poring, knowledge-chugging, no one caring when the day sky darkens to dusk. We want to be one of them. Whether it is towards the City that we turn our faces, or Downing Street, or the Royal Courts of Justice right next door – or towards something infinitely more abstract like ‘World Peace’ or ‘The Great Modern Novel’ – we know that it is possible. London has taught us so.

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## HIGHLY COMMENDED

### Charmian Walker-Smith – In bed with the enemy

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The scandal which renamed the LSE the Libyan School of Economics cut deep. For most of the students on campus the problem was not the funding from Libya when at the time it had diplomatic and trade relations with the UK. No, the accusation that stung most was that Saif al-Islam Gaddafi could have plagiarised when he studied for his PhD at the school. That betrayed everything the students cherished most about LSE. That it demands excellence and integrity.

You only have to speak to some of the students to appreciate the sacrifices that we have all made to be here. We have given up jobs, left families, travelled half way round the world to live in damp rooms and spend hours in a crowded library. A lot of people comment on how diverse the university is. What is more remarkable is its great unity. Our motto expresses the desire to understand the causes of things. We work hard to come here because of the outstanding reputation that LSE has, or possibly had. Now we have to ask ourselves, how could LSE judge things so badly? Had it not done its homework? Worse, had it sold out?

Walking through the corridors of LSE buildings, pictures of illustrious alumni line the walls. You cannot forget its heritage. People who changed the world came here, pioneering thinkers and a decent smattering of iconoclasts. George Bernard Shaw, JFK, Eugenia Charles. Even in fiction Josiah Bartlett, the president of the US depicted in the West Wing is an old boy. He's upright, fiercely bright, compassionate, funny and courageous – traits that would probably be true of most of the LSE fraternity.

LSE's unimpeachable reputation was hard earned, built on enquiring minds demanding rigorous debate. The art of argument and diplomacy runs through every seminar. You can have any political leaning, as long as you are prepared to come open minded. How often do hard headed capitalists and left wing policy wonks break bread together? Not often enough, but it happens frequently at LSE. You are routinely asked to look at any problem from all the angles. The respect and rigour involved in any intellectual battle means we never come to blows. Considering the amount of heated debate going on it is amazing that

there isn't more violence. If anything you normally you go for coffee with your nemesis. It is the best skill you learn: argue well and without falling out with your opponent.

Informed opinion and argument are forces for good. People who disagree get things done, they question everything and work out their differences. Those awkward argumentative types, for all their faults, are the only ones with the capacity to offer olive branches across cultural and academic gulfs.

Apart from anything else arguments (non violent ones at least) are healthy. Beryl Bainbridge claimed "A day without argument is like an egg without salt". Admittedly the benefits of salt are disputed, you but that aside, recent research the university of Michigan found that women who did not speak their mind during fights were four times more likely to die during the course of the study. An inability to argue is deadly. Hang the obesity crisis; it is apathy that kills.

"Ask a man which way he is going to vote, and he will probably tell you. Ask him, however, why, and vagueness is all." Bernard Levin once said. Not at LSE. At LSE you can stand for fifty minutes in the rain, with a random person you walked out of your seminar with and know EXACTLY why they will vote for their student rep, their favourite dancing on ice contestant, or their local councillor. It all matters, and sometimes it feels like Houghton Street is the only place where anyone else will care. In a world where argument and discussion is frequently overtaken by popularity contests, we are, and always will be, in the business of asking awkward questions.

In a place like LSE there is no room for plagiarism; it could not be allowed to happen. But we need to find out if it did; we need answers and we'll have to study the evidence. The LSE might have to battle to restore its reputation but the scars will fade. We will keep on doing what we do best and we will learn the lessons. We will be our own harshest critics, we will row and wrangle and pursue the truth, because it is what we always do.

## HIGHLY COMMENDED

### Andréana Lefton – A Home for the Wander-Wounded

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*What is he whose grief bears such an emphasis,  
whose phrase of sorrow conjures the wandering stars,  
and makes them stand like wonder-wounded hearers? – Hamlet*

Do you like your music black or blue? Black *and* blue, baby. I like my music *bruised*.

Bruised music. Two words spoken by a rough sleeper near Holborn, near the London School of Economics, where students defy sleep in the library, their caffeinated bodies slumped over Schumpeter or Smith. Yet, come seven o'clock, when the second wind beckons, see these same students emerge, bleary-eyed, with a look of determination. You can almost see the thought passing through the prefrontal cortex to the emotional and reward centers of the brain. This is London. What shall we *do*?

The day of the rough sleeper was clear and sunny. Yes, those days do happen in London. I was walking, too fast as usual, the pace of London being somewhere between a trot and a jog. My ears were free from encumbrance (read: iPod), and I was able to take in the sounds of the city. I stopped glaring at my feet and looked up. Trafalgar Square. Covent Garden. The Strand. Pinch me.

Cities are notorious for mindless living. But in London, if you don't pay attention, you'll be run over. Literally. A friend of mine jokes that you're not a Londoner until you've been nearly hit by a cab. But the key word is *nearly*. In London, near-misses are like echoes of the Blitz. Survivors sometimes speak of life during wartime as "heightened," supernatural somehow. Yet fearfully mortal. London retains this paradoxical blend of headiness and caution. Step into oncoming traffic, yet mind the gap. Opera, theatre, musicals – the choice is yours. Yet the greatest risk remains: to chance a smile at a stranger on the tube.

I chanced a smile at the rough sleeper, but got little response. Life's poetry isn't always as neat as we'd like. Yet, again, it's the near-misses that make life so thrilling, warning you to hold tight, stay alert. It's the near-misses that make the sudden, blinding hits so palpable. So when you're hit by the realization that here you are, at LSE, in a cohort of students who act as the most inspiring check on ego possible, it's like strong coffee for the soul. You wake up, rub the grit from your eyes, stumble from your mental library. And live.

It's tempting, when writing about this hyper-real existence, to rattle off a list of places and events; to name-drop unsubtly ("yes, I believe it was somewhere between the Andrew Motion talk and a reception for Amartya Sen that I lost my wallet"); to get all tied up in the content of days without pausing to look at their summation. Thinking about the past two terms, my mind reels from sensory overload. First, there is my walk to school, through the surging heart of "The City" (which must be written in caps), past St. Paul's, Fleet Street, the Royal Courts of Justice. There are the sights – late October roses scaling old church walls – and also the smells – beer froth blending with sewage and cigarettes. The primeval filth of London. How to organize this gorgeous confusion? How to summarize this sensory barrage?

Let's build a dream day, a day of unlimited hours, that begins and ends with a startling realization and spends its middle age expanding your capacity for generous living. Knowing London, the day will be a temperamental mix of sun and cloud. Crushed into the tube, imagine yourself in a time and-space machine, rocketing through the bowels of the city – not just London, but Tokyo, Mumbai, Tehran. Today you will understand the rough sleeper's phrase of beauty within sorrow, bruising yourself on the sharp chords of life. London is not for the mere *flâneur*, the estranged walker who holds herself aloof among strangers. It's for the *engaged* walker, one who witnesses – then acts.

We begin at LSE, which just now is filled with students raising money for earthquake struck Japan. Others are protesting Gadafi. Oh, and over there, you'll see the Hare Krishna-mobile, providing cheap eats to cash-strapped learners. Dodge down leaflet alley, aka Houghton Street, and stop for a quick pick-me-up at the Garrick. Then it's on to class, perhaps a seminar on moral philosophy. The professor tickles some thoughts about Kant and cosmopolitanism, which you develop over (more) coffee afterwards. And don't be surprised if your professor shows up at the George (the campus pub) for Fright night libations. Here the student's marginality is replaced. Not only are you accepted. You are welcomed.

LSE is a place for the young and metaphorically homeless to taste true belonging. When people ask me, *Where are you from?* they either get a puzzled look (could you repeat the question?), or else a catalogue of places, in no particular order, which I could potentially call home. For many people, this roving existence is somewhat alien. Not at LSE. We're a school of imaginary creatures straight out of a Borges novel, each of us glittering with stories and selves. A hybrid bunch of multi hyphenates. Draw up a seat, take a load off.

Confusing as these shifting boundaries and identities can be, we all speak a common language, and share at least one interest: London! On our dream day, the city's treasures spread before us, we face none of the usual time constraints and can sample at whim. *Aida* at the Royal Opera House. *As You Like It* at The Globe. A smorgasbord of options. But the student is often a solitary creature. How to make sense, then, of this strange groups of "others" chatting by your side?

Aha! The end-of-day realization – the one you've been waiting for – hits, right on target, no nearmisses this time. Cue the bruised music. You've made your own belonging, shaped it just as surely as the Thames sculpts its banks. You and your posse of nomads, your LSE rough thinkers who refuse easy answers even when truth cuts to the bone. So unplug your iPod and listen to the sounds of London. You never know what you may hear.

Come. Walk with me.

## HIGHLY COMMENDED

### Rimmel Mohydin – I'm with Stupid

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“Gosh, you must be really smart or something.” That’s usually the response I get when asked about what the hell I’m doing with my life. Being enrolled at the London School of Elite Brains is meant to imply validation, granting of permanent bragging rights and the universal acknowledgment of your so-called above average IQ. It was with this smug self assurance that I packed up my life into 30 kg and flew across half the world to make Houghton Street home. Somehow, somewhere between running to Clement House, queuing up for Hare Krishna and looking for that elusive library Set Text, I lost myself only to discover that as far as the “Gosh” impression goes, it doesn’t go far.

This isn’t a self deprecating overview of how everyone else at LSE is so darn clever with their overflowing complaint boxes of brains and shiny hopes for the way the world should be. I genuinely feel stupid here. It took me ages to realize that I didn’t have to ‘buy’ the Beaver. For the life of me I could not figure out where the Shaw library was. What’s a Squid card and don’t even get me started on understanding what my degree was about.

So imagine my giddy dismay when a lecturer introduced his module by saying, ‘the point of this course is to confuse you’.

I came here thinking that I was a quasi-goddess. My word was rigid law and questioning my oh-so-well founded opinions? Moi? Ha! Of course all British plays were written by Shakespeare. What were states if not self-serving hypocrites? And must we even give the genius of Mozart a second thought? You see, the world made sense.

That all went to hell when I found myself literally drowning in thoughts from Cambodia, Australia, Estonia or some other far-flung land that contradicted my own. At first I clung desperately to the fraying edges of my perspectives, going from violent outcries to meekly stuttering ‘But..?’ And then I thought about the way I thought.

And I felt stupid.

I realised that the simplest explanation was never the best explanation, only the most convenient. I didn’t go beyond thinking a certain point because I was scared that I would be proven wrong. When the familiar is replaced by the strange, we fear getting lost in a world much closer to truth than to comfort. I was terrified of being ridiculed hence the arrogant exterior served as a deterrent to all those who followed my conclusions with question marks. We assume, only to become the first three letters of the word.

I think that everything about LSE, from the lovely Italian lady in Wrights’ Bar to the overcrowded lifts that take longer than taking the stairs, is designed to make my original judgments seem like Greek to me. I think the architects bore this in mind when they constructed the campus from urban jigsaw puzzles (which I now fondly chalk up to ‘whimsical’). You would think that the bridge from the Old Building’s third floor would lead to the same level in the East Building but you end up mired somewhere

between the Mezzanine floor and a long passageway that apparently leads to nowhere. Because its week 7 and you should really know your way around the maze upon Aldwych by now, you're bound to feel just a little bit closer to stupid. But not to worry; pick a spot, any spot on campus and chances are that within a 10 foot radius, someone else is also lost. Sure you set out to see Loyd Grossman's lecture somewhere in St. Clement's but somehow you find yourself attending an International Relations Department party in the Senior Common Room discussing the English School over canapés with the very professor who fathered it. The only thing I've learnt about not knowing where in the name of all that is Architectural Digest I am, is that being lost is precisely where LSE wants you to be.

It's easy to get lost between E402 and D606. It's even more easy to get lost in a big city. And when you can't make your way from Halls to Houghton Street, you feel not only lost but also (here it goes again) very stupid. But as has been established, stupidity at LSE is quite delightful because living in High Holborn I often use being confounded by turns and corners as an excuse to skip down Drury Lane and catch a matinee. If visiting friends at Bankside, I'd use 'taking in the beauty of the London skyline' as an excuse for being late to class. Sure we have a bit of a moisture problem but if anything, the entertainment value of everyone stripping in London the second the sun flickers a trembling ray makes it worth it.

I don't resent feeling stupid here. I am not the brightest bulb but no one has ever put me down for asking questions. I feel no shame in asking security which floor the fourth floor cafe is on or banging the door to a teacher's office demanding that she explain the intricacies of Determinism to me. To know the causes of things means a lot of who, what, when, where and why and nowhere is this done better than the battlefield that is an LSE classroom.

I still don't know what the hell I'm doing with my life and when I graduate, I won't even have the red and white banner of LSE to hide behind. But I don't feel the need to run for a GPS system to navigate me through life anymore. I don't get scared knowing that I could get lost in the building of a potential job interview. I am not too worried about moving to bigger cities. I think I'd get along with most members of the UN.

The long and short of it? I love how LSE makes me feel like a complete and utter idiot.

## JUDGES PICK

### Luke Smolinski – Bernard Levin Award: a parody

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Argh! Wake up! Put on my clothes. Still haven't written the Bernard Levin Award article. Not to worry. No time. Not even to complete a sentence. Hairbrush, orange squash, mirror. Forget conjunctions. Wolf down a bowl of muesli. Forget to shave. Muse about how wonderful LSE is. Hum a Stravinsky tune to myself. That'll impress the judges...

Catch the 142 bus to Aldwych. That's original, right? Oh, what-ho, my friend from India is on board! We discuss the nuances of pseudo-Leninist Confucianism, Baroque architecture in Liberia and the handkerchiefs with which Pope John Paul II used to blow his nose. Hold on! Got to dash! My stop! Argh! Watch out for the pigeons!

Arrive at LSE. Late for class. Hello, howdy, guten tag, Buenos Aries, ◆☐♦■☐, I can never remember how many times they high-five in Kyrgyzstan. Twenty-two classmates, fifteen countries, ten strange accents, eleven if you include the Northerner. Last week, we discussed cognitive anti-realist theory. At least the class did. No-one could understand what the teacher was saying.

Out of class. Meet up with my Chinese friend. Chat to my friend from North Korea. Air-kiss my friend from Tajikistan. Oh, what larks to have a friend from Tajikistan! I talked to him for so long I almost forgot he was from Tajikistan. Ho hum. Argh! Bernard Levin Award! Write about Virgil. Insert another reference to Brahms. Talk about how great the School is. Don't mention Libya. Yeah, the judges will like that.

Think of a good title for Bernard Levin Award. Something catchy: how about "Entry for Bernard Levin Award"? No, too literal. How about "Fire-breathing gerbil gobbles children sandwich with Norman Lamont"? No, too inventive. How about "Le journaliste extraordinaire écrit un article très magnifique!?" No, too... French. Keep walking, maybe I'll come up with something good. Argh! More pigeons!

Sometimes when I watch those pigeons flap by, I think how wonderful the LSE is, how multicultural, how beautiful the grey slabs of concrete are, how truly really brilliant LSE is, almost heavenly, and how truly and utterly lucky I am to go to a School with so many different nationalities that I don't speak to... Please give me the award.

## Calum Young – My Wright’s Bar Sandwich

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Two crinkled strips of porcine perfection; one brick of bread halved and halved again; three split cylinders of ‘not-quite meat’; topped off with an egg then doused in a combination of mayonnaise and ketchup. The slabs of butter are too thick to spread, so they are patted into place, leaving the whole thing sweating in a fatty marinade of its own juices. An edible breeze-block, it is three pounds of ventricle blocking, pupil dilating, and pulse-rate quickening idyll. And you can experience this culinary climax, legally, for just under three quid from Wright’s Bar on Houghton Street.

I have eaten too many such sandwiches to count during the course of my degree. In the early days, anxious not to appear hoggish around new friends, I would take dainty bights, chew it through carefully and pause between mouthfuls to take-on water. Later when drunk, surrounded by fellow devotees, I would scoff greedily away, sauce down my shirt, desperate for the calories. Then periodically the sandwich would be incorporated into dates, when hoping to seem upstanding I would poke disingenuously at it using a knife and fork. And with just hours before exams, hands a-tremble with mind elsewhere I would go to it out of comfort and security, my world might have changed, but the sandwich had not. But perhaps best of all were the solo trips, when I would grab the sandwich alone and scurry bag-in-hand to a private corner, careful not to damage my precious cargo, there to demolish it in solitude.

Always the experience was the same; a delicate symphony of marbled meaty fullness and lubricating grease. Each mouthful camps right on your T-spot, two thirds up the tongue and bubbles with your saliva in a paroxysm of bliss. One wedge at a time, the tender ligaments of bacon snap away from the body of the sandwich. And one wedge at a time they’re mulched leaving the eater disorientated and high on a cocktail of ambrosial completeness. You finish the sandwich mildly sedated. Spent. Movement, beyond mopping up the beads of leakage, is out of the question. It’s like taking a shotgun round to the stomach. Shorn of hunger though, there is a moment of extraordinary mental clarity, when experienced eaters recline, enjoy a post-coital cigarette and contemplate the majesty of the world. In the light of the moment everything seems more beautiful.

Wright’s Bar began as a mystery to me. In the early days my student mentor described it as ‘where Amartya Sen used to buy his fags’. Back then I actually thought it was a bar, because unlike the School’s Library and the IT facilities it had gone unmentioned in the prospectus. From the outside it is easy to miss, just a plain shop front wedged into a cavity in the mouth of the Old Building. Edwardian brickwork frames Nineties functionality; stone gravitas trumps man-made flimsy;

the halls of academia overshadow a food grotto. Above the door, a white plastic sign which is at once garish and faded spells out, 'Wrights Bar', and apart from the lengthy queue which usually spills beyond the shop's doors there is no outward sign of the treasures that lie within.

Inside the place has a prickly heat to it. Patrons are squeezed together as they elbow for order space, the fat-fryer guzzles in the corner and as a consequence of their now superfluous outerwear the customers perspire like much of the menu. The half-dozen staff operates a lunch production line down one side of the room; assembling, spreading, frying, packaging. At a guess the family that runs the place is Romanian, but I have heard them converse across the counter in everything from Spanish to Russian. Their English is a vowel-loving dialect which lingers over the sounds that natives ignore, 'one eeeg and baaaacon for aaa baaap' roles down the line from assembler to fryer. But what astonishes me most about the owners is their work rate. I have emerged from the library on Sunday to find Wrights Bar open and skived 9am classes on a Monday to sample their work. While there are LSE students to be fed, seemingly the shop stays open.

Post-Sandwich I have often considered this point. Whilst my day zigzags through an intellectual assault course of different classes, society meetings and public lectures, those who supply me with my food stay perpetually moored to their cooking apparatus. They repeat the same basic tasks; buttering not just my bread or frying my bacon, but doing the same for thousands of others. For the five morning minutes between 9.10 and 9.15, I am just a tourist in their locale, sampling the delights on offer, but quickly checking out and moving on. So does the cramped shop which seems to me to possess a quaint romanticism in fact harbour untold burdens for those that work in it for hours each week? Do they take joy from the majestic food that they produce or do they feel detached from their creations? Is this the habit of art or the alienation of labour?

Wright's Bar also fascinates me because of its relationship with power. Positioned next door to the Old Building's entrance, it is physically impossible to deliver a public lecture at the LSE without passing its doors. Great speakers have come and gone, bringing intellectual trends with them while the café has continued to operate. Keynesianism has given way to neo-liberalism while coffee is served, and communism has been invented, built, and destroyed to the smell of grilled bacon. For me Wrights Bar operates right on the frontier between private lives and public affairs because of the impact its clientele have on the world we live in. It's a monument to the forgotten breakfasts which underpin brilliant ideas and the snacks which went into great books. Contemplating the queue of Professors outside Wrights Bar is a reminder of the humility behind brilliance.

## Christopher Wilford – Babel or Babylon?

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Babel or Babylon? That is the question that faces the student at the LSE on realising that they are at the heart of a truly global City; one where Stalin ate fish and chips, Ho Chi Minh was a bell boy and Rimbaud was inspired to give up poetry. City of exiled Kings and revered Queen, statesmen and thespians, crooks and charlatans: the grime, soot and smog that created a myriad of intoxicating atmospheres have sadly gone. What is left are polished buildings and whisperings of the past: the odd plaque here and there commemorating Emmeline Pankhurst and WH Smith. The student of the LSE, aside from merely quoting Shakespeare, is left to ponder: Babel or Babylon?

***Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech (Genesis 11:7)***

So, is LSE Babel? Knowledge is the universal language here. Lectures, seminars and events rush by; the student all the while participating in the construction of a towering corpus of understanding and causes in a veritable Shinar. Yet the Tower has not collapsed or the students scattered. HG Wells prediction that the LSE would be lost in an epic disaster of unimaginable proportions was a thing that did not come. The School is still here amidst scrubbed buildings opposite the BBC and academics still consider radical solutions to the ills of the world funded by the rich and criminally insane. Students walk out and about eating Hare Krishna food taking in the views, confounded by the fees if not the Lord, understanding each other enough to argue and debate: even if enlightenment continues to be evasive after 1968 and all that.

***They shall roar together like lions: they shall yell as lions' whelps (Jeremiah 51:38)***

So, Babylon then? The student is greeted with a cacophony of languages as they enroll at one of the most international institutions on Earth. Amidst the hustle and bustle the smells of the globe emanating from a hundred different restaurants that populate the streets around the illustrious institution; but they can never quite cloud out the stench emanating from that Other Place right at the Aldwych, straight on through the Strand and up through Whitehall. The Palace of Westminster casts its shadow far and wide and the London School of Economics is more in its shade than most. The Director recently bowing out for getting caught up in UK foreign policy reminds this little world, this precious stone that power and politics is never far from the concerns of School. Unlike Nebuchadnezzar Sir Howard Davies has not withdrawn to a cave reduced to madness by memories of past glories in the salad days of yore; rather he awaits a successor safe in the knowledge that he has done the honourable if unnecessary thing.

Life goes on for the student. Demonstrations and marches bring traffic to a halt and like moths to a flame talented graduates and impressive students are drawn to a myriad of positions and internships with the great and the good; discussing affairs of state on one day, participating and facilitating them the next. The bars and clubs of Soho provide a welcome distraction from these goings on, if not always the most salubrious of environments. Does this combination of power, young blood and fun create a dissolute cocktail of Babylonian proportions? You might think that; I couldn't possibly comment.

***What is the city but the people? (William Shakespeare, Coriolanus)***

In truth LSE is neither Babel nor Babylon, it is itself in all its vibrant complex glory, it is a place of learning and a place of action, it is a place of fun and a place of hard work, it is something different to every student and member of staff. The motto of the School is *rerum cognoscere causas*, to know the causes of things: Babel or Babylon? Come and find your own answer.

## Xin Ting Wang (Heather) – The Transformer

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“NO way will I ever study History any more after three years of misery.” Yes, this was the thought that kept hovering in my head and wouldn’t go away during my first few weeks at the LSE. I was so determined to ‘marry’ History for the rest of my life before coming to London, but studying History at the LSE was just impossible, full stop.

Every week’s reading lists are so long that my middle finger goes numb after endless scrolling down. History is not like Maths where there is only a certain number of exercises one can do. History is a black hole. I never knew where to stop. But tons of reading didn’t stop me from looking like a fool in most of the classes, not being able to participate in any class discussions. I really did read the books! It was even more excruciating with numerous sexy societies and public lectures tempting me but I couldn’t see myself ever emerging from piles of books. What a paradox. While encouraging us to participate in all sorts of activities, the School was still so reluctant to give us any ‘free time’ – a phrase that seemed so foreign. What it was again, an animal? We were well inoculated against this leisure disease. Maybe we live in a world with 48 hours in a day; I just failed to discover the golden key to that wonderland.

Right, clearly I did not enjoy my first few weeks very much. I should have gone for Maths like all the other Chinese did.

But if you ask me now, “Do you like History?” I would nod, smile and reaffirm you not only do I like History, I also want to read it in Master’s and PhD and research in certain fields, like the Professors in the LSE did and are doing. I changed. But unfortunately I still did not find the magical key that could smuggle a few more precious hours for me, nor did I suddenly become so clever that I can master the excessive readings and essays without difficulties.

It is the environment. The LSE environment. You would be amazed how often we actually have intellectual debates instead of ranking each other’s boyfriends (Of course we still don’t miss the fun of gossip). I finally found a group of people who don’t stare at me like I’m an alien when I ask “what would China be like if the Communist party hadn’t won the Civil War?” In the LSE, people who gossip with me would also provide me with an informed and thought provoking answer.

After sitting in silence in numerous classes, I realised that it wasn’t just about how much I read, but more importantly how much I think. The teachers do ask “when was the American Revolutionary War?” But more often they inquire “Do you think it was the military strength or ideological motivation that enabled an American victory?” Simply memorising facts really doesn’t help. It’s about digging and probing the book mine hard and deep and having never stopping debates in the head like a maniac.

In a class, the teacher talks surprisingly little. Once the fire of questions is lit, the class would soon be heated to the boiling point by arguments. “Of course the American victory was more to do with their military strength! The Americans were not even united among themselves!...” “Well yea, but their military strength was in a way based on their ideological motivations...” “But...” “However...” The ‘but’ and ‘however’ game always refuses to stop after the often unnoticed voice “ok... let’s move on” had been echoing several times. The listening is as engaging and stimulating as the talking. There are always sentences that would create the nodding effect. Sharing classes with these argumentative and eloquent lots is something truly incredible.

Their excellence never dejected me, but emboldened my will to embark on the exciting and yet challenging journey of historical thinking. With my sword - the LSE spirit - by my side, I will prevail.

The intellectually aspiring History Department does not stand on its own in the LSE. It’s the norm. It’s one among many.

Oh! Actually, I did find a magical key, a key that whispered “one can either always have time or never have time”. The painful dilemma between the world of books and the world was easily solved with banishing prolonged bed snuggling, aimlessly picture browsing and long stretched mind drifting. If the LSE doesn’t have so much to offer, I would probably still be waking up at nine and start doing something marginally related to the word ‘constructive’ at twelve and complain why there is never enough time!

What I’m really grateful for the LSE environment is that there is a door open for everyone as long as you have a heart that cares. ‘Join the school newspaper’ had always been the first line on my ‘uni must do’ list. But there was also a fearful inner voice murmuring “will I be able to write for the newspaper?” “Will they kick me out if my article is not up to the standard?” “God that will be embarrassing!” To my relief the LSE is nothing like the frightening image pictured in my head. All I did to join was to type my e-mail account to an Ipad. And all I do now are think and write. In the LSE, as long as you are willing to engage, you will be able to. And you will be shocked by how much you can grow, like I do.

One doesn’t have to be absolutely brilliant to come to the LSE, but one will leave being one of the best.

## Jessica Dell – Richness of London, introduced through its newspapers

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I am amongst the rare breed that still subscribes to a daily newspaper. I like the ink slightly blackening my fingertips, I like the damp smell reminiscent of an old attic, and I even like the crinkly dried leaf sound as I flip to the next page. I savor the first hour of each day, my bowl of muesli, English breakfast tea in my “Keep Calm and Carry On” mug and my copy of the *Guardian*. Nothing makes me feel more like I have successfully acclimated to this country than this first hour of my day— I might as well be draped in the Union Flag serving digestives with a side of Marmite.

On the weekends I indulge myself. I collect the *Sunday Times*, *Telegraph*, *Daily Mail*, and *Financial Times*. My diminutive dormitory room bears a close resemblance to a printing press on Sundays. I might be behind on the latest clothes fashions and may never make it to a fancy restaurant here, but I feel that my pounds have been spent wisely during my tenure at the LSE, for it is my daily digesting of a wide variety of newspapers in London that has drawn me into the intellectual, cultural, and political life that enfolds my university.

I chose the LSE for its academic caliber, but I would be telling a lie if I said that the location was not an enticing factor. To study for a MSc in Global Politics in the epicenter of the nation’s thriving cultural and political life is incomparable. So I left warm California for dreary London, or at least that was the narrative that I was told by my sun-kissed friends waving in puzzlement as I headed off, my bags laden with gumboots, mittens and an umbrella.

Yet my time here has told quite a different story than one marked solely by weather. I left a lovely town with one major local newspaper, for a city that lays dozens at my doorstep. I entirely credit British newspapers for introducing me to all of the culture that surrounds the LSE. I read a preview of World Book Night, and in the midst of preparing an outline of my dissertation, ran outside, hopped on the 341, and scooted down to the Southbank Centre to see authors performing readings of their work. I read an excellent review of *Swan Lake* at the Royal Opera House, less than a kilometer from university, and the next day booked tickets for the nose bleed sections with a friend. As I sat last night in the theatre, enveloped in Tchaikovsky and marveling at the pirouettes, I could not have been happier with my choice to live in the beating heart of culture that is my city of London.

It is these newspapers that have breathed life into my time at the LSE, and it is not only by introducing me to the abundance of culture. At night I crawl into bed with whatever articles I hadn’t finished devouring in the morning, and drift off to sleep comparing in my mind the merits and drawbacks of AV and the necessity of a no-fly zone over Libya. I read about these political quandaries, and then I literally pass their embodiments when leaving campus. I consider the AV referendum as I am staring up at the grandeur of Parliament. I talk to protesters armed with a multitude of signs and banners outside the Royal Courts of Justice. I read about who Kate Middleton will have as her bridesmaids, as I take a picnic in St. James Park, steps from where

she will soon wed. I focus my studies on Middle East politics, and I do not have to venture far from campus to hear an enlightening lecture on the politics of intervention, America's troop withdrawal from Iraq, or the policies toward Israel and Palestine.

It is all right here, right next to us. Matthew Fox performing in *In a Forest, Dark and Deep*. Richard Zimler speaking at Daunt Books. Fleet Street. Borough Market. Courtauld Gallery. This city drips in culture, business, entertainment, and politics. And it has all been brought to me and my fellow students by the greatest part of London: its newspapers.

"And another thing," (to quote a man who breathed critical thinking of his surroundings into his writing), I would forsake every day of California sunshine for my morning routine of reading the British newspapers. It is that act that has introduced me to the breadth of dynamic motion that defines London, the lucky home of the LSE, and it is this morning ritual that has caused me to think critically of my own surroundings, hopefully following in that eminent journalist's footsteps.

## Matt Guilhem – Resident Osmosis

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If you've been on the tube lately, I'm sure you've seen the posters filling the station walls with the message that travelers on the Underground are indeed Londoners. According to the ads, "Londoners are 44% more likely to be 'very interested' in clothes/fashion articles in magazines than the UK average" and "Londoners are 37% more likely to be opinion leaders than the UK average stating they 'buy new products before their friends.'" Some reference television viewing, others weekly expenditures – no matter the fact, Londoners are different.

I'm wondering who CBS Outdoor is trying to reach with this campaign; if you can tell me I'll be quite grateful. Obviously true Londoners know they are – they pay for the privilege, but is this marketing blitz meant to entice outsiders, confirm the smugness of insiders, or generally confuse tube-riders?

Having only moved here in September, my claim on London is somewhere between microscopic and insignificant, but I can't help indulging myself and taking possession. I figure when those people handing out leaflets to tourists see through you and make no attempt at recruiting you for the Big Bus Tour you must be doing something right.

When I arrived, I was completely taken with the glamour, history, architecture, and magnitude of the city I now resided in. In hindsight, it was the pinnacle of naïveté, but for the first week or so St. Paul's Cathedral – and the fact I passed it everyday – was a very big deal to me. My commute took me across London Bridge, by St. Paul's, through the onetime mecca of journalism Fleet Street, and finally to LSE. If I wanted to vary my route I would stay on the south bank of the Thames and cross on Millennium Bridge. I found myself constantly surrounded by a laundry list of landmarks; it needed to sink in that I was living here rather than on some kind of permanent holiday.

Home became home and my daily walks through The City turned the Gherkin from a novelty to just another high-rise, but with the tempering of reality came a depth and richness that only time can bring.

Sure, my mental map got better, but my experience of London shifted; no longer was it about checking sights off my list but finding the best Mexican food in the city (I'm always open to suggestions) and exploring various genres of music the UK, particularly London, are known for.

Enter all those nights in Shoreditch. On nearly a weekly basis I find myself there; between getting Vietnamese food, dancing until the bar staff kicks me out at four in the morning, or having one of those chats with a friend you wouldn't trade for the world – something draws me there.

Where I come from, pubs don't exist, fashion is hard-pressed to be found in a nightclub let alone walking down the street at 10 a.m., and architecture ... well, let's just say "big-box store" is a common descriptor. Whether the honed skill of the perfect pour or a caryatid that's barely visible, I've found art to be the unifying facet of London. Nowhere else can Banksy and J.M.W. Turner cohabit a city's art scene by day and DJs mix dub-step and electronic with soul classics to form a danceable hybrid every night. A dynamism of synthesis is all around us. Seeing that – experiencing it, it's invaluable.

Like any good student, I will of course tell you that academics are my primary reason for being here, but having established a rapport with local friends, venues, and pubs I'm not so sure. School is my job, obviously; I've got to do well. After hitting the books and finishing that dazzling essay though, I can't wait to find out where in town I'll end up.

And so we've come full circle. Here I am, in some liminal, local-but-not position pondering the what and why of CBS Outdoors' accusation that I am, in fact, a Londoner. By birth (and accent) I'm not. However, I reckon the appreciation for what I have around me is in my favor. We all have days where museums sound unappealing and boring, but even on those days I still recognise and love the fact that the actual Rosetta Stone is within walking distance of my home.

I think that's it. That knowing recognition that the world is quite literally at my doorstep; whether the world I'm in the mood for is that of the avant-garde at the Saatchi Gallery, the academia of LSE, the music scenes of east London or a fusion of each. As soon as you see this and live accordingly – taking in culture however and whenever you can – at least in my book, "You're a Londoner."

## Tausha Cowan – A Smile Goes a Long Way

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I would be lying if I said I had not arrived in London with a skeptical smirk on my face. I had, after all, just come from New York. With my sense of city superiority and slightly overweight luggage in hand, I left my home of seven years and landed in a drizzly, chilly London. *Typical*, I thought, even though I knew nothing of the weather pattern in this place. I only carried with me mediated perceptions of a grey city with bad food.

In the months since my arrival in London and at the LSE, I have had that smirk erased time and time again. Occasionally the smirk turns to a scowl as I watch the 26 bus take off down Aldwych or observe another LSE student grab the last cookie at the Garrick. Even less often, the smirk becomes a frown as I lapse into overdramatic despair at the amount of reading assigned for the following week. *I have to read how many pages*, my more than slightly stressed mind ponders. And once in a blue moon, that smirk becomes a yell as I exhibit a bit of sidewalk rage to a honking cab driver (those walk signals can be very misleading). But mostly, overwhelmingly, the smirk becomes a smile.

I smile with enlightenment as my professors, world-renowned academics themselves, speak of theories and theorists that have become so familiar, I feel as though they are long-lost friends. In fact, I am fairly certain my classmates and I would beam with excitement at the opportunity to travel back in time and pow wow with The Frankfurt School scholars Adorno and Horkheimer, or receive a visit from our good pal Jürgen Habermas. Such are the wild and crazy dreams of an LSE student.

I smile with purpose as I tackle an assignment on the transformation of news production in my Critical Studies in Media and Journalism course. From the explosive emergence of Wikileaks to the redefining role of social media in the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings, there is arguably no better time to be a student at the LSE. To witness these events is extraordinary in itself but to actually study them alongside media academics and professionals is more than I imagined upon first strolling down Houghton Street.

I smile with anticipation as I join a line of equally eager students to attend one of the LSE's seemingly infinite number of public events. There are few places in which one can listen to a president who just witnessed a mining miracle in his country, or hear the Senior Advisor for Innovation in the Office of Secretary of State Hillary Clinton speak. Not to mention there was that lecture involving the outgoing Chairman of the BBC Trust, while down the hall, an LSE alum and financial powerhouse shared her thoughts on the benefits of an LSE education.

I smile with amazement as I sit with classmates at the George IV pub, our own LSE version of the public sphere at work. A girl from Mauritius sits next to another girl from the Philippines, their heads bent low as they delve deep into conversation. Further down the table, two classmates, one from Ireland and another from Mexico, speak not only of their schoolwork but also of their experiences. I am fortunate to be in a program that reflects the vibrant and dynamic culture of the LSE. In addition to various nationalities converging into one space, there are numerous opinions, preferences and particularities. It is an education in itself simply walking through the streets that make up the campus of the London School of Economics.

By now, one may think I walk around with a perpetual smile on my face. While this may not exactly be the case, it is not too far from the truth. Whether I am passing by a friend as I hurriedly scramble from Clement House to the NAB or aimlessly wandering through St. Katharine Docks on a sunny London day, I realize I smile often, perhaps more than I thought I would. My strong allegiance to New York softens as I discover and rediscover the nuances of this city.

Grey skies exist. There is bad food to be found. However, increasingly, I grow farther from my Day One self, in knowledge, in perceptions and in my quickness to judge. My education consists not only of academic musings and readings from the library but also of the goings-on around me, from the undeniable power of thousands of students marching through a city in protest of tuition fee increases to the less important but still powerful pull of free lunch from the Hare Krishna cart.

And speaking of food, I admit I was critical. In fact, I was downright dismissive. But lo and behold, not far from the cosmopolitan campus of the LSE lies one of my favorite food places in the world. The joy of visiting Borough Market battles my guilt over having found something in London that has grown so dear to my heart. The New York City superiority that glowed so bright upon my arrival grudgingly dims with each passing day.

Occasionally the smirk sneaks up, ready to prove my present self wrong. But then I think of the LSE, with its education, its people and, yes, its amazing cookies. In fact, it is all of these things and more that turn my smirk into a smile and, dare I even say, a grin.

## Emma Kelly – Chip off the old block

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The eminent journalist James Cameron always argued that nobody ever set out in life to be a journalist. Instead they set out to be a judge, police officer, teacher or whatever but somewhere along the line they ‘fell into’ journalism. Bernard Levin studied law at LSE; it was his obvious profession but, like Cameron, he too ‘fell into’ journalism. And I’d like to think that it was his LSE experience which helped shape his future career although he would never have used the word ‘career’.

Levin would have been the first to acknowledge that a university education is not just about essays and grades but is about contextualising what you have learned. He always indulged himself in a variety of activities, from the law to editing *Beaver*. And later in life he was a broadcaster, tv presenter, journalist and general political animal.

I grew up with references to the London School of Economics inevitably being followed by either ‘left wing’ or ‘occupation’ not far behind. Ever since I was young I have been regaled with stories of my father’s time at the university. Unlike most tales you hear of your parents’ education of plaudits and achievements, mine consisted of occupying offices and blocking off Houghton Street with tables and chairs in order to close the road which, at that time, was something of a rat run for speeding taxis. My father heralds its closure as one of the greatest successes of his life!

So when I came to choosing a university, it felt like a foregone conclusion that I would end up at LSE. I knew all along I couldn’t go to a campus university in the middle of nowhere with nothing to do but drink away the days. Maybe I’m not a typical student in that when I picked my universities I didn’t care that much about the night life but rated other local features such as good cinemas and in particular record shops where I could keep up my passion for vinyls. I knew that every university would have bars and clubs but I wanted a university with something different. The best description I have come up with for the LSE when trying to work out whether to recommend it to other students is, ‘LSE suits a certain person and a certain person alone’. By this I mean that if you want the typical student experience then you probably shouldn’t come to the LSE, but if you want something different then it’s the perfect place.

Within weeks of arriving at LSE, I found myself enveloped into a political community. Due to the size of the university, it doesn’t take you long to find those who share similar interests. The labyrinth of societies enables you to become involved in anything from Palestinian liberation to boxing. The prevalence of these groups, and the scale of activities, means you are soon sucked into LSE life. Each society creates its own community. They are organic creations of people who share similar passions and you can form firm, and hopefully lasting, friendships as a result. It would all too easy to just sit in classes and then go to the library.

After a term at the LSE, I had marched all over London, opposing or supporting pretty much every cause under the sun, from the war in Iraq to Palestinian liberation. London is the perfect place for a would-be activist. As a friend once put it, 'you can't not go to the protest, it's down the bloody road'.

The reputation of the LSE however, gives us political beasts, a sense that we have a cause to uphold. So when the most hotly debated political issue was right on our doorstep, that of tuition fees, it was rather inevitable that we would occupy. It is something to be said for LSE's approach to the political activities of its students that the university's security staff were friendly rather than working against us as many other occupations reported. It's almost as if this kind of thing is accepted at LSE and that over the years a way of dealing with it has been worked out.

Unlike most assumptions about occupations, we didn't spend all day sitting around discussing our lives. Daily routines included getting up at 8am and long hours spent in Houghton Street raising awareness of our cause amongst the general student population. Something incidentally which could not have been done when the taxis were roaring up and down. Thanks Dad. Evenings were filled with speakers discussing political issues followed by inevitable late night debates. The occupation created what has become a strong political active group of students, who ultimately are really good friends. Bizarrely spending a week in the same room with people makes you like them more, rather than the expected difficulties which I had imagined would happen. The fact that the occupation was supported by so many people, from so many different parts of society and the world, created a fascinating mix of people getting to know one another. The international nature of the occupation, with people from different nations all working together towards a common cause, shows as much as anything, what LSE is really about.

My degree promptly went the way of my father's although it never did *him* any harm. During my time here family competition has been less about grades and me keeping up my studies but more about who has occupied what and written about what. University is of course about learning your chosen subject but at LSE there's so much you can learn outside the classroom. And in a way Levin's own life demonstrated that. He was a man of diverse interests; a natural conservative but with radical views, a journalist who could write equally for the *Guardian*, *Times* or the *Spectator*. You didn't have to agree with his views; you could still find him engaging and well argued. I'd like to think that this is the LSE way.

## Elizabeth Lowell – LSE Perspectives: A Lesson in the Human Factor

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### ***25 January, The Guardian: “Egypt: Thousands protest against President Hosni Mubarak (video)”***

The headline on my Blackberry screen did not seem to signal anything particularly momentous. Following coverage of the UK tuition fee demonstrations and the uprisings in Tunisia, the Egyptian protests seemed no more than an extension of a popular news trend. I knew little about Egyptian politics and had no real understanding of how potentially significant these riots were. I did however, know from previous experience that in order to avoid embarrassment and feelings of serious inadequacy, it is always best to walk into LSE Politics and Communications classes fully informed about the day’s news events. With no desire to repeat my past frantic in-class Google searches, I bookmarked the article and made a mental note to watch the video as soon as I had a free moment with my laptop.

### ***28 January, BBC News: “Egypt severs internet connection amid growing unrest”***

The Egyptian conflict had been a front-page story for days. Most updates were merely repetitive attempts to make use of very little reliable information. However, this news of a government-ordered Internet shutdown jolted me out of my media-induced daze. Earlier in the month, I’d covered an LSE public lecture by Evengy Morozov on his new book “The Net Delusion” for my internship with POLIS. In his speech, Morozov warned that, despite a general trend towards Internet optimism, it must be recognized that the medium can easily be used as a tool for oppression as well as democracy. Speaking less than a week before the Egyptian protests began, Morozov could have had no idea how prescient his words were. Fresh from a policy class on net neutrality and universal access, I quickly identified a potential story angle linking the debates on Internet equality and openness to the emerging situation in Egypt. I dove into my narrow topic research, bypassing images of injured protesters and stories of citizen oppression in favor of articles on Internet democracy and Twitter activism.

### ***2 February, Frontline Media Watchers: “RT @on\_the\_media Journalists attacked in Cairo <http://nyti.ms/eQaPWp>”***

Eager to join the discussion on freedom of the press and journalistic protection, I immediately retweeted the *New York Times* link and scrolled my Twitter feed for more updates. After months of contemplating the definition of democracy and debating the role of media in toppling autocratic regimes, I had finally found a practical application for the theoretical foundation of my Michaelmas courses. Live tweets from journalists and protesters alike filled my feed, creating a web of conversation that perfectly embodied the interactivity between professionals and amateurs that my professors referred to as ‘networked journalism’. In preparation for my seminar the following morning, I continued scrolling the Twitter posts, glancing at sensational headlines and skimming real-time reports of widespread violence.

***February 8, LSE student Sara Romany: “And all I could see is on the news you know my whole country going up in flames and I just couldn’t call anyone to even know if they’re ok or they’re not or what’s happening. “***

I had known Sara since the beginning of the year but only as a casual acquaintance from my Theories and Concepts seminar group. Searching for a new perspective on the Egypt story, I had asked her to talk to me about her experience dealing with the unfolding conflict as an Egyptian student in London. At the time, I viewed the conversation simply as research for a more original article. However, when I replayed my interview tape that night, I was confronted with a much more humbling journalistic experience. It was clear from the recording that Sara’s words had caught me off guard. Listening to the conversation I could hear myself fumbling for my next question while her words still echoed in my head: *“And all I could see is on the news you know my whole country going up in flames”*. In that moment my entire perspective on the Egyptian conflict was shaken. Suddenly, I was no longer the journalist and Sara was no longer merely a student I was interviewing. In that moment we were just two 24 year olds, far from home, bound by a common interest in media studies; and one of us was watching her home go up in flames. Sara went on to describe her confusion upon hearing conflicting media stories, the surreal experience of seeing a military tank outside her building and her loss of innocence when she sensed her own parents’ fear. As she spoke, my limited perspective on the situation became glaringly obvious. Despite all my research on Internet freedom, I didn’t fully grasp the actual effects of Internet oppression until I heard Sara explain her terrified isolation in the days she couldn’t contact her family. Throughout my analysis of journalism in the digital age, I did not really appreciate its importance until Sara described frantically monitoring dozens of news outlets for information on her country’s future. Up until this point, all my work had been missing perhaps the most important component of truly successful journalism: the human factor.

LSE lectures and seminars have given me the foundation to critically and objectively think about the implications of the events in Egypt for democracy and foreign policy. Yet, it was a member of the diverse LSE community that gave me an appreciation for the protests’ meanings for humanity. In my short time at LSE, I have been exposed to a multitude of global perspectives that have contributed to my more defined sense of self and purpose. Most significantly, the confidence I’ve derived from LSE’s intellectually stimulating and culturally diverse environment has reignited my long-dormant passion for writing. Beyond giving me access to platforms such as POLIS and The Beaver to distribute my pieces, LSE has transformed my worldview and refined my journalistic voice. For most journalists it takes an overseas assignment or total immersion in a foreign community to come face to face with their own otherness. In my case, LSE enabled me to confront my distanced perspective over coffee in the New Academic Building and then challenged me, as always, to be better.

## Steph Linsdale – Why state school kids don't need to moan

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Great news for state educated pupils: Oxford University's intake of this sector of society is set to reach record highs of 41.5% for the coming academic year. With the belief and support, state school applicants have cause to get optimistically active. Moaning will not change the statistics. Applications will.

I was this close - \*place pads of thumb and forefinger half a centimetre apart, actually, a quarter\* - to not applying to the LSE. This was largely due to the nauseating feelings that the "E" part of the acronym induced in my stomach. It was the 2008 open day that changed things. As I let my imagination momentarily wander whilst walking through the LSE's Social Anthropology department, I became captured by a photograph of a little pot-bellied boy, stood on a dusty track holding a wooden stick over his shoulder, looking up at the camera inquisitively; his eyes almost black. Was he looking at me? "Go on" he said, "if you get accepted to the LSE we could meet one day; share stories, eat Mama's daal".

"Right Steph I think we had better get a move on love, the parking ticket's about to run out".

*Cut daydream.* "Okay Dad, let's go".

Two weeks later, with my self-doubt ceasing to eradicate my romantic daydream, I applied to the Social Anthropology Department for an Undergraduate place at the LSE and thought nothing of it.

*Two months later.*

"Dad come and read this," I said.

*"Unconditionally accepted"*

"Steph you're in!" he said.

"Are you sure?"

"YES!"

Universities are not adverse to state school applicants. David Clifford, a lecturer and admissions tutor at Cambridge University, recently stated the negligible consideration he gives to the educational background of applicants, instead arguing that "you can't teach passion...intelligence is more likely to show itself in a flash of individuality than by any amount of coaching". It is imperative that state school applicants exploit the current political climate; the need for institutions to negate the consequences of fee increases through improving social mobility is critical. State applicants must recognise that the statistical disparity between the success rates of state-private applicants is due largely to a lack of state applicants, premised on an absence of rigorous academic grounding and belief.

Ever grateful to a persistent optimistic streak in my personality which surfaces whether the stakes are stacked against me or not, I arrived at the LSE during Freshers Week, ready to launch myself enthusiastically into London life, but instead found myself in a moment I'd rather forget, thinking:

Do I push the lime directly into the Corona bottle? What if my thumb gets stuck in the rim? Is it more “London” to give it a casual squeeze and push it aside? Okay - palms are sweating. Why am I not aware of the correct lime etiquette?

Right that’s it. Lime off. *Swig.*

In the company of a couple of confident post-grads who were watching this spectacle, I was sure they knew I was dying a slow embarrassing death from my gauche behaviour and the fantasy of being rescued by my Mum bursting through the doors in a knitted super-hero outfit ready to fly me back in a little pouch (also knitted) along the M4 to the serenity of home in Bristol.

Was this really such a good idea to apply to the LSE? Was I ever going to meet the little boy in the photograph?

*Four months later.*

Despite travelling no closer to the Mama’s daal, things were on the up. Courtesy of Jamie Oliver’s daring advice, I took to shoving lemons up chicken’s orifices on quiet Sunday afternoons as a way to make friends. Roasts buy you friends, I quickly discovered. It became fool-proof: give a student a citrus-infused bird and they’ll stick by you. Cheers J.

Becoming a fully fledged member of a carnivorous gang meant for fun Fresher times ahead. I had finally got over the risk of urinating every time a siren erupted, and the four lanes of traffic outside halls soon became a rhythmic companion. I began to realise that London has a lot of fun to offer those who embrace its challenges. As my curiosity for reaching the world of the little boy in the photograph became ever more present, I spent my time sharing food, socialising, growing a sense of admiration for my lecturer’s minds, and bumping into fellow pedestrians on Waterloo Bridge (who looks ahead with the offerings either side?).

*Twenty two months later.*

“Steph you’re ideas sound exciting. Let’s chat soon.”

I’m sure my buttocks must have been slightly elevated off the seat with joy. How could my dissertation tutor be saying that my little idea was promising? I floated out of his office and down the corridor, sharing a smile with the boy in the photograph.

More state educated young people need the chance to revel in the joys of buttock elevation. Building strong relations with academics in my department has led to opportunities for me to personally and intellectually flourish in a stimulating environment. Thanks to the LSE Annual Fund, I met and lived with a family who have a little boy like the one in the photograph in the Himalayas last year. I’m auditioning to perform at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival with the Drama Society this summer. I’ve embodied the philosophical outlooks’ of the remarkable Social Anthropologists in my department. And most importantly, I’ve had the experience to know that it’s possible to push a lime segment right into a Corona bottle. It is imperative for other state educated young people to have such opportunities. Efforts must be put in to improving education prior to the application process, in order to cement solid grades and

instil attitudes of belief. After all, as Bernard Levin said: “No amount of manifest absurdity...could deter those who wanted to believe from believing”.

## Rasha Touqan – Well Toto, We’re Most Definitely Not in Kansas Anymore

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It was just that morning that I was in Hertfordshire waddling in a pond trying to save a drowning hedgehog. Yet a train journey later, I’m on the bus to my new campus, trying to explore the place before orientation. Like most I had been to London before, but I knew very little about the different areas. As far as I was concerned, the LSE was near My Old Dutch and that was about it. The piece of paper in my accommodation welcome pack said to take the RV1 to Covent Garden. My first question was, “Is Covent anywhere near Holborn?” Pulling myself together, I board the bus. It is filled completely with American tourists. In one bus ride, we saw the London Eye, Oxo Tower, ITV studios, the Southbank Center and a very nice view of the Thames overlooking all the London Eye again. This wasn’t even a tour bus. Scared, I leave the bus and follow my intuition which in other situations may not have been the best idea. Walking past the musical theatres, I turn a corner past a large circular building and there I see it. The white letters on red are staring at me. I rush to said building and look at the map on the wall. A girl on her phone kindly explains that the rest of campus is around the corner. Little did I know that I was going to be well-acquainted with the New Academic Building. Uncertain of her advice, I tentatively walk to Aldwych, of which I knew nothing at the time. And there it was. Like a crack in the wall, there was this hidden bustling world. It was Houghton Street with all its rush and cluster. I knew I had found the place.

Doing my undergraduate degree in a small university in the middle nowhere in Staffordshire had not equipped me to the shock of London. I have lived in different cities before. Yet, they lacked the connective tissue that holds London together. Living in Amman for a good chunk of my life, everything was sprawled out to the extent that it took some motivation to get from point A to point B. I’ve also lived in Cairo, which is not lacking in spectacle and splendor. Yet, it suffers from a similar problem. London is different in that respect. You could turn a corner and you could be in an entirely new world. The LSE’s location in Holbron amazes and terrifies me. In one day I could have gone to Oxford Street, then walk to Holborn and then end up sipping Coffee at Covent Garden by that afternoon awaiting a bus that will take me to Tower Bridge. The fact that you can experience alternating textures of life and place in one city is what is truly astounding. You can live so many experiences cramped into one day. In one morning I’m

grabbing my 60p coffee from Wright's Bar, then I could be having lunch inside the Royal Courts of Justice.

Beyond the awe factor of its location, there are the people I have met at the LSE. At an Arab Society event that involved several London universities, an acquaintance had asked, "Isn't the LSE just full of nerds?" And it made me think. Indeed the LSE has its fair share of nerds. Yet, I can't say that is the defining feature of the student population. For every cocooned nerd, there are at least two passionate lively individuals roaming the halls of campus. Although we are in a climate where students cannot be cavalier, I have sensed a tinge of indifference over my undergraduate degree. Coming to the LSE was refreshing in the sense that people are so passionate about what they do and what they believe in. People in my department engage with our topics with such passion and dedication that it is inspiring. It is not out of place to discuss political and social issues daily. In fact, it is welcomed. Here, you are nothing without an opinion. Good or bad, an opinion is always encouraged. And this is done by the student body itself, not even by the academics who expect it from you as a given. It is not unheard of to have interest in high or obscure art. I don't have to hide my love of independent film. In fact, this has helped me in my studies. And it is not laughable or strange to want to experience the opera at least once. This is especially true since the Royal Opera House is barely five minutes away. Everyone is so engaging, whether they are manning a stall or queuing up for Crush. There is always someone with whom you could have a stimulating conversation.

I could say that the LSE is my fourth university experience. At 23, I have had a lengthy and broad university experience. Jest aside, every single one of those university experiences has come with its challenges and resistance. Yet, London and the LSE have led me to re-open my mind and explore a different side of me. It is a constant back-and-forth struggle, which is as frustrating as it is rewarding. It is easy to settle into a comfortable state of mind and just stay there. I'm glad I took a chance and came here to study in spite of having second thoughts. Although every one of my university experiences is unique, being here has reminded me of what I wanted when I was 18 and starting out in the world. And it is one of the few places where I would have been brave enough to pursue a dissertation on horror film and have gotten full enthusiastic support.

## Christopher Finnigan – Evening on LSE’s Houghton Street

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The students were leaning so far forward, trying to hear every word that was spoken between the two academics over the loud hum of the café, that their chairs had become virtually useless. “Metaphysics does not apply here Mark. You know that we must be empirical”. “On the contrary Tom, deontological assumptions answer all of our questions”. Their blue seats bore no weight as the students of the LSE practically levitated.

My head along with my legs were quickly tiring. Two hours of lectures preceded by a morning in the library and now an intellectual battle of such a pace that it made its spectators look like a crowd at the Men’s Wimbledon Final, all made me crave a break. I decided to step outside, stretch my legs and get some fresh air. I lit a cigarette, leaned back and let out a big breath of smoke into the crisp night’s sky. Though the sun had retreated for the night, Houghton Street was still busy. In fact, it was coming into a quite significant time period in its daily life: evening.

Created by a socialist pair in 1895, whose male figure wooed his aristocratic fiancé into building the university with the comment: “Beatrice, one plus one doesn’t always make two; often, it can make eleven”; student life 126 years on is fast-moving, fluid and interconnected with the LSE drawing its blood from the worlds most vibrant city, as it comfortably sits amongst the myriad of London’s streets.

Nestled between Kingsway and the Strand, just a little way up from the political centres of Whitehall and Westminster and a short walk from the cultural centres of Soho and Covent Garden, Houghton Street is the official entrance to the LSE. However, it’s hard to tell exactly just where the LSE finishes and the rest of London begins. While architecture delineates where LSE walls end and the borough of Westminster’s streets start, its inhabitants seem strangely unabiding to such logic.

Looking down Houghton Street you see Aldwych whirl by. Its fast pace resembles a river in full flow. It carries hungry journalists from the BBC’s adjacent Bush House building, and fired-up barristers from the gothic temples of the High Court – the tip of whose spires you can just glimpse above the brightly lit classrooms that echo the learning’s of past intellectual heavyweights, from Popper to Russell to Sen. Black-cab drivers, while competing for pavement space with old red double-decker buses, shout at their colleagues who are failing to get the attention of the politician they are trying to deliver back to Parliament in time for the evenings vote. And amongst all this traffic, is a 15 metre-wide entrance, that sees people unseemingly slip in and out, blending effortlessly into the surroundings.

Throughout the evening guests invade and students escape - only momentarily mind - as the story is switched around a few hours later when the guests who have spoken to a full lecture theatre or pontificated to a society leave, and the students who have explored the drama of the city return to a lecture theatre’s lights that are awaiting the night’s next performance. The capacity of the street can’t be great, I thought, as I leaned up against the café’s window under the light from a tall black street lamp, yet proud posters of the recent Student Protests in Trafalgar Square that adorn the walls suggest otherwise - evidence of Students organizing in the capital; a generation finding its voice, citizens from autocratic countries using theirs for the first time. Advertisements for tenured professors, or resident

Nobel Prize winners stack on top of posters plugging visiting authors or Student Union debates, as tomorrow's events quickly replace yesterdays.

Gesticulation Street may be a more appropriate name (not just because there are lots of Italians and Spaniards, though there are), but because of the emboldened professors who, holding the floor, softly place their hands forward as they unfold their argument, while outside passionate students wildly wag their fingers in the face of their opponent as they argue about revolution or reform, realism or idealism, conservatism or socialism. Lovers wrap their arms around each other in the cold winter's wind while they decide which nationality's food they will taste tonight. Chauffeurs frantically wave their arms around to let the CEO of a FTSE 100 firm, defending his corner against the sharp economics undergraduate, know that his car is waiting along with his shareholders back at the office. Friends shake hands as one departs to his flat in Mayfair, and the other back to his room in Hackney. Bank Headhunters pat students on their backs as they sell them the latest graduate package, and spies gently tap others, discreetly offering them a package of a more secretive nature.

The sound of the Thames can't be heard from the concrete lair of Houghton Street; neither can London's climate send all of the LSE's students racing to Hyde Park to bathe in the sun's warmth. Instead, it's location tightly packs hungry students into a contemporary, vibrant and pulsating capital city. You will fail to find Classics taught at the LSE, instead you will encounter students glued to their glowing iPads and Kindles reading the days news and blogs when they arrive or depart from the city that shapes the world's events.

Does London create the LSE or does the LSE create London? Analytical distinctions crumble after an evening on Houghton Street. The LSE and London are two organs of the same body. Both functioning together, both reliant on the other.

Feeling refreshed and rejuvenated I reenter the café and approach my levitating classmates, their purposeless chairs and the intellectual milieu in the corner. "Tom, please don't appeal to Marx or we may just have to visit him in Highgate and ask him ourselves". The night, it seemed, was just beginning.

## Neha Jain – All in a day's work

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I am notoriously bad at fabricating excuses for my tardiness. My secondary school teachers' 'sympathetic' nods as I would tell them I was struck down by some malady for the fifth time, of course complemented by the obligatory sniff and cough, or possessed a magically self-destructing USB stick which coincidentally contained a week's homework, may as well have been nods of pity towards my lack of inventiveness.

I clearly have much to learn from LSE. In the space of a day my lecturer turns up late after getting caught up in tea with the Dutch prime Minister. My teacher gets crowd surfed by a mob of angry protestors down Westminster while my friend runs out of dinner to cover the surprise resignation of Howard Davies for The Beaver. Perhaps I am deeply disliked by these people. But I'd like to think that this vivid plethora of excuses are testament to how my political science degree extends far beyond the theoretical remit of hypotheses conjured up by esoteric academics and champagne socialists. That raising fees has more than just a numerical consequence on the circular flow of income or that the Dutch Prime-Minister is someone other than a figurehead in the governmental hierarchy- how *does* he like his tea anyway? That I live my degree and don't just study it.

Houghton street is a warzone; I'm engulfed in a sensory attack of the clanging of donation boxes, whirlwind of pamphlets and bribery of sweets and bakery boxes, all accompanied by battle cries for support of the two state solution, the UCU strikes and the Japanese earthquake. Who needs the House of Commons just a stone's throw away? But it's often the bearded communist or the staunch conservative who stand alone that attract my attention in midst of chaos. Their lone murmurs and flimsy piles of garishly-designed leaflets are drowned out by the vigour and enthusiasm of the larger groups. Yet upon close inspection one sees fervency in their calmness, thoughtfulness in their message and pride in their singularity. Sometimes strength in numbers isn't enough to win a war. Sometimes it's the strength of conviction that makes the quietest whisper triumph over the loud and only at LSE is such a sundry and mess of opinion not just accommodated, but understood.

But there are injuries in war too. I return home to a sobbing friend in the late hours of the night; neither typical adolescent angst nor drunken student disarray lay at the heart of her pain. It is an LSE lecture. As she agonises over the deep offence she feels over her religious roots being apparently attacked by a Palestinian official, I wonder whether I came to university to prepare me for 'the real world', as my elders so cryptically put it, or whether I was already living it. With a rainbow of nationalities coalescing at LSE, engaging in cultural clashes is the rule rather than exception. An inevitability. A fact of life. But these grating points are just the price we pay for the rich cultural benefits we receive; do I spend summer in South Africa with my friend or visit another in Vietnam? And who knew that the Chinese custom of drinking tapioca balls in your tea would be so delicious?

Entering my weekly ballet lesson in the Old Building, I seek respite and calm from a week's hard work. I instead find my heart pounding as loud drumming is blared through the speaker and my weekly dose of pirouettes and tondues are replaced with tribal movements. The ballet

choreography for the LSE Annual Dance Show is probably what you'd least expect, as the usually delicate and demure dance-style is used to grapple with the theme of 'lost identity', to the sound of African drums, flutes and a live jazz band. Only at LSE could such a concoction of contrasting artistic styles be merged.

Challenging the norms exists in every facet of life here. I owe a lot to the daring nature of LSE students to probe and protest, whether it be my colleague's recent inquest into the integrity of the LSE Middle East Centre management following my friend's heartbreak, or the sheer mass of student protestors over student fees. It creates transparency and understanding of the difficulties LSE management face every day and removes the embarrassment and secrecy surrounding it. A fin de siècle is on the horizon for LSE, some say. Questionable donations. The Director resigning. Fees hiking up. I retain faith in LSE as the frankness to admit a problem goes a long way in solving it. Bernard Levin himself valued straightforwardness: "All euphemisms are lies. They are lies told for a particular purpose, and that purpose is to change reality. But no man can change reality". We see a new dawn approaching with new challenges, but the same, evergreen intellectual force upon which the school was built to deal with them.

I came here determined to be a lawyer. Within the first week a debate on the global implications of patenting pharmaceuticals made me convinced I wanted to be a doctor whilst a lecture on financial regulation, despite my best efforts to resist the stereotype, made me ruminate on investment banking. My confusion has extended well beyond the uncertainty of Freshers' week and I'm ending my first year here with more academic questions than answers; perhaps with even less of an understanding about political science than I came here with and no idea or expectation of what my future could behold. No library textbook or economics lecture can truly prepare me for my coming years at LSE. Though being punctual might be a start.

## Matthew Shearman – Kitchens of London, Unite!

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The third dirty gin bottle dropped to the floor, empty, again. It was that cracking of glass on tiles that ripped through our quiet mood. Leaning clumsily on the table, the beer drinker, my friend, seemed to give the room a Lilliputian quality as we and the squat kitchen shrank from his presence.

Labouring under the weight of some climatic point he jabbed his finger at me, the young Brit across from him, living in one of LSE's less desirable halls. You might have thought that the tension was palpable, but amongst our small group of friends it triggered a chorus of heavily accented laughter. Gestures like this had long turned his fiery presence into something of a joke, not least because of the cooling intervention from the girl who brought vodka.

Nevertheless, the point stood, and at once, in a swirl of liquid around his glass and down, down, into his mouth, the group descended upon his position. We brought our theories forth with an enigmatic flick of the wrist and dashes of wine which whizzed across the table. Or else we chose to cut him down to the wick with a well placed slam of a glass on cheap wood. We held finality in our voice, yes, again.

Be it on Foucault or the war, my friends know their thoughts. Their ideas were nurtured from across the globe like the drinks they brought as gifts to my otherwise ordinary kitchen. These flavours of far-off lands were slowly consumed over the lively evening. Fuelled by the drink, our conversations carried on long after darkness had fallen across the city and the automaton bankers had powered off for the night. We, in our little kitchen, remained lit up with an unwieldy intellectual passion.

An explosion flares up at the intersection of opinion. Between half-baked thoughts and a speculative claim, we debate the restrictions on international students this 'government' has just imposed.

The peak of intellectual power may rest in gilded classrooms, or offices plush with new technology, but the sparks of creativity that bring these frigid wires to life are better located in the dank kitchens of London or, should they be so lucky, The Tuns and The George. From far across the world, fresh ideas come to my tiny kitchen and cause a swirling vortex of debate.

And so, like the coffee houses of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the early rudiments of LSE's next radical thought lie somewhere outside the confines of classroom walls. They rise in little kitchens filled with microcosms of the world. With ideas they from home, this vibrant dynamic is where young minds really meet their test.

So Mr. Cameron, about your plan to shut out 25% of my friends and future debaters. On removing the challenge to my quaint English notions. How will that enrich the education of young British minds?

Who will bring the saki and tell me what its like to have a brother in Fukushima right now. Or how this fearsome Butterfly's wings, laced with radiation, will beat at my future more fiercely than any man from my Yorkshire home.

Just the other day, Mr. Cameron, over a quick pint of English ale no less, I vividly heard the sound of Israeli jets shooting over my head and the screams of children in the dark tone of my friend's voice. He tremblingly described how he'll spend his Easter hols back home, dodging the bombs.

Just the other day, Mr. Cameron, whilst you, I believe, were in London, the man who brought me rum explained how the tariffs on Cuba work, and how they fuel his family's poverty. He was one of those economic types, on a scholarship.

And just the other day, Mr. Cameron, I read this all in a book and thought I knew the answers well. But then I talked to the young man whose father was that story, and bringing real flesh to old library tomes, his son drank with me.

So tell me Mr. Cameron, how exactly will his removal, and that of my friends, benefit the students of LSE and beyond?

And in anticipating your rehearsed answers, I say little kitchens of London, unite! And in whatever debauched manner you choose, make your expression heard. Offer your hospitality to the good PM, and ask him to explain his thoughts, as you do me.

Show him what you offer beyond good fees, or a drain on treasured places. Talk to him of things he's never heard, and whatever you do, don't let him dodge about and pretend he's done the reading, as you do me.

Release your experiences in impassioned voice through the hundred languages you represent and show him something only you can bring to this little world of learning at LSE. Oh, and tell him I sent you to challenge his resolve, as you do me.

Can you imagine LSE without a quarter of its most distinct population? Let us see how this world compares to the infinite interpretations our kitchen time has brought me, because in any given night right now there might be twenty or thirty of these little gatherings across the city.

And when the lights go out, as if diwali never happened on Houghton st. what will be left? We will be drinking with people we understand perfectly. We will have lost the essence of challenging our deepest cultural beliefs.

LSE is not just an institution and degree, but a gathering of the world for young minds. It will be as if we'd gone to the same little school for all of our lives and never tasted anything exotic. The world is far too interesting for that!

And speaking of which, Mr. Cameron, for those of us who will remain after all these rules are implemented, what exactly would you have us drink? I can only guess that it will be a dull, weak English tea.

## Nathan Briant – LSE: the 1960s

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If you like direct action - and by that I mean protests where you shuffle forward at the rate of a metre an hour, chanting, waving banners made out of old cardboard boxes you've liberated from the back of Lidl, that sort of thing - you'd have enjoyed the LSE this year. We've (well, they've) had: marches around Whitehall opposing an increase in university tuition fees; protests on campus against cabinet ministers Jeremy Hunt and Chris Huhne (but nothing for the grand old duke Ken Clarke in December because his talk fell on the same day as the third march around Whitehall); and a sit-in in the Senior Common Room over Saif al-Islam Gaddafi's thing tank-thing's donation to the Centre for Global Governance (even if there was a delay of about 13 months (or maybe longer) in protesting after the donation was received, and only when it suddenly became clear to the world once again that Gaddafi Senior was still, in fact, a brutal dictator). The list's much more extensive than that though; they are just the major ones. So when the LSE Occupation's Twitter account was hacked into a few weeks ago and it was announced that students were planning to protest outside the Garrick over an increase in coffee prices, I very nearly believed it. After this year, it seemed a (relatively) plausible thing for some LSE students to want to do.

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The LSE, the late 1960s: Mick Jagger had come and gone a couple of years before and was doing whatever he (still) does; students who had arrived mid-decade with short, neat hair were probably graduating with a longer do, perhaps having had a few doobies during their stay; there were no doubt fewer soon-to-be bankers. And London was swinging: Waterloo Sunset, Carnaby Street, King's Road.

Add to that political events of seismic global importance. Vietnam was one. Hundreds of LSE students took to Grosvenor Square for the famous protest of March 1968. Civil rights was another, this time driven on by what was happening in the United States. That one of the LSE's Directors of the time, Dr Walter Adams, was connected to apartheid in then-Rhodesia having been Director of the country's University College meant students didn't welcome him as warmly as they might have other figures with less contentious pasts.

When I interviewed two former LSE students, Colin Crouch and Martin Shaw - both former Sociology students who started at the LSE in 1965 who are now Professors at Warwick and Sussex Universities respectively - they said it was France where the student movement had been born a couple of years after they started university. But they both added proudly that the LSE was one of the most important universities in the 'cultural milieu', Crouch described it. Although students protested around Britain, it

was notably 'more diffuse' than recent protests, Crouch said. 'There were protests at Leeds, Essex, Oxford and other places - but we were the first.'

A significant proportion of the LSE was politically engaged, but there were times for some when values had to be reassessed. At a protest held in March 1967 to oppose Adams' appointment, Crouch was standing next to a porter who suffered a heart attack and died. Having always been on the 'moderate' wing within the Union, he became increasingly sceptical of direct action. And although he was elected as Union President in March 1968 with the 'moderates'' backing, he had resigned by the late autumn. The more radical segments of the Students' Union were dismayed by his lack of support for their radicalism; he was dismayed by their radicalism.

### **LSE 1960s**

Martin Shaw was more radical than Crouch – but he was just as suspicious of violence in the movement. Looking back, he classes himself a 'second-tier' leader in the university's International Socialists group. But once security gates were installed - and subsequently torn down - around the LSE campus in February 1969 primarily to prevent protesters entering buildings, and major figures within the Union were banned from commenting, Shaw, by then a postgraduate, spoke up against the victimisation of students who had been responsible for removing them. At one meeting held at the Friends' Hall on Euston Road - because the university couldn't accommodate the 2,000 students at the meeting on campus - Shaw remembers a 'very tense' atmosphere. It's no wonder; he was addressing over half the Students' Union.

With the importance of technology today – Twitter, Facebook and that old relic, the humble e-mail - the only way Shaw could think of a 1960s' equivalent was just lots of meetings: 'it tended to be union meeting to union meeting'. On the part the Beaver newspaper played, his response was a little disappointing: 'it wasn't terribly important, in all deference to the Beaver...but people read it'. Looking back, he added the last bit hastily. He probably didn't want me to think that the paper I'd been writing for since I arrived at the LSE was totally futile back then, even if it probably was.

And although I can't say that I was terribly surprised about the Beaver's (lack of) influence, those newspapers do date the period well. In one from 1968, there is an advert for The Graduate. In colour, Dustin Hoffman is looking at that famous leg (that is actually not Anne Bancroft's); in another edition there is an interview with up-and-coming 'Radio 1 DJ' John Peel. It had bite, as well. When Crouch told the Daily Telegraph, just before he resigned as Union President, that the newspaper was run by the university's Anarchist Society, the Beaver soon put that right. Only *some* of the people working on the newspaper were members of that society, actually.

Whatever Crouch and Shaw thought 40 years ago it's perhaps significant in showing how radicals moderate or relative moderates age that whatever they thought then, they're quite similar now politically. Both are members of the Labour Party, both voted for Ed Miliband to be the party's leader last year and both didn't seem to like Tony Blair. That said Shaw, who lives in Brighton, voted for the first Green MP, Caroline Lucas, at the last general election, so perhaps he's still that bit more radical than Crouch.

## Rawan Mariam Abdulla – LSE is that place

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LSE is that place. It is Narnia. It is Alice's wonderland and Crusoe's desert island. It is also Willy Wonka's chocolate factory. LSE is even Hobbes and Locke's State of nature, although the streets would be paved with Gold.

"We are such stuff as stories are made on!" I announce proudly in class. Everybody is silent. These international students have taken to the British stiff upper lip all too well.

No Mad Hatter, Oompa Loompas nor wicked witch here-but mutinies, strong characters and moral battles exist here also. No delusions of grandeur, this is a place of extremities. Fabian roots and yet the nursery for City recruiters. The infamous finance society and the Timeless talent show, many students are members of both. Then there are the political campaigns and dirty games. Donations, connections and ethical investments. The question of morality or is it not our responsibility? Glory, excellence and recognition. FIGHT THE FEES!-or looks good on the C.V.?

There are too many contradictions and too many things going on, that deciding what to do on a Thursday night becomes a dilemma of epic proportion and long-term implications. I heard somewhere that your choices define who you are. If I watch Giselle at the Royal Opera House, then I am arty and cultured. I could stay at LSE to see Baroness Hale and strengthen my feminist and intellectual prowess. Or become a political revolutionary by celebrating the fall of Hosni Mubarak on Edgware Road.

It is easier to make sense of LSE when you label and categorise in this way. I've met the soul-selling wannabe bankers, the bleeding heart liberals and the jet set diplomat kids. Or perhaps this is generalising and I should group my fellow students in terms of their nationality. Would that be more politically correct?

Yes, Houghton Street is my very own yellow brick road and as I skip along, every person I meet and every room I go into teaches me something about life. I spot a classmate, a classic example of a soul-selling wannabe banker, and I anticipate our conversation. He will ask if I managed to secure an internship, and before I answer he will tell me that just last night he received his offer from Goldman Sachs, watched Legally Blonde at the theatre, went on an international food crawl, took the Eurostar to Paris and wrote his essay on the train back, all in time for our 9am class. I seethe with jealousy at the thought of him being able to do in one night what is still on my checklist.

He interrupts my angst by waving at me and asking me how I am. He tells me his plans have changed and he's decided to start up a charity focusing on London's problems. There is

vulnerability in his voice that I hadn't detected before, the kind that comes when your inner values are changing and you are still trying to come to terms with it.

Who'd a think it? I put him into a box but he climbed out of that box, and stuck it on my head as a symbol of my ignorance.

I wonder off, pondering what changed him. I know that he is a different person to me and that we would develop differently accordingly. I did not realise that you do not choose what affects you. As if by intelligent design, the London chill never lets you become complacent. It grabs you by the shoulders and forces you to be aware of everything around you. After my encounter with non-soul selling wannabe banker, I suddenly appreciate the fact that in London you cannot shield yourself away from the less idyllic aspects of life. I often come across homelessness around LSE and I must now consider if I feel a similar sense of responsibility as non-soul selling wannabe banker does, or if feeling that sense of responsibility is simply a matter of choice. If so, then do I choose to feel it? Questions I am forced to ask myself after this encounter.

Perhaps then, my yellow brick road analogy is too simplistic. O LSE what shall I compare thee to? Is there anything that is quite fitting? My assumptions and beliefs are challenged every day. I have gained fiercely ambitious friends and fiercely compassionate friends. They excel in this environment, where their incredible qualities cannot help but shine. They make me evaluate my own levels of ambition and compassion. I have professors who advise governments and yet welcome me for half an hour impromptu chats. They make me evaluate my own level of arrogance.

I cannot even rest when out celebrating Iranian New Year with friends. One girl finds out I am from the South in Yemen and asks if I am a secessionist. I have never thought about this deeply enough as to have a standpoint. I find it unnerving that I took this unique element of my background for granted and am grateful for the inquisitive minds around me. So I went home, searched on Wikipedia, and decided that no, I am not a secessionist.

The benefits of LSE are bittersweet. In this wonderful world, there is so much fun to be had but so much self-development too. You become aware of what is around you and as a result, you become painfully aware of what is within you. If there is any inconsistency, then this must be brought back to equilibrium. That, unfortunately, is the only thing I remember from my economics module.

Usually towards the end of the story, the character has some finality which makes for an appropriate cue for her exit from the fictional landscape. But I don't want to leave. I am not yet the change I have been waiting for. And to be honest, I'm enjoying the process far too much.

## Maeve Glavey – Just Another Week at LSE

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### **Monday**

Term is wrapping this week and my thoughts are scattered. Wasn't it only yesterday I arrived at LSE, fresh from my gap year, yearning to reawaken those brain cells that had been slumbering peacefully for the previous twelve months? As I sit staring at today's date, I recall the Monday I moved into my London flat, bags everywhere. As a graduate student I thought I knew it all, but I had little idea of the multitude of ways in which this year would challenge me. Entering Houghton Street, the vibrancy of LSE bursts forth. Language is one of the first things you notice here. German, French, Spanish, Korean, Mandarin, and on and on. Different traditions and opinions leap out at you and you find yourself engaged in a debate on religion, culture, politics, just by walking down the street. My student colleagues who are so diverse invariably share some attributes – their sense of curiosity, their appetite for life. First years, second years, third years, postgraduates...that first vivid week was a whirlwind of interactions between us all. The focal point was Clement House where the hundred-plus societies of the Students' Union competed for my contribution. Tonight I walk briskly into that same building, to attend a public lecture on the Middle East. I quickly sit with my friends and marvel at how I once sat here timidly introducing myself to them.

### **Tuesday**

No classes, I never did have any on a Tuesday. The library lures me in – it's the end of term and upcoming exams have made me nervous. I swipe in, laughing silently as I recall the first time I tried that, card upside down, standing out as new. The smell of books drifts toward me as I wander into the recesses of the basement, away from the chatter. LSE's students use this as a place for socializing too. In here I'm not just reading for my classes. Discarded copies of *The Beaver* and *The Economist* litter the area where I'm sitting hunched on a beanbag, allowing me to focus on LSE's news one moment, the news of the whole world the next. Scandal abounds this year and the two cross over – I pick my way through the articles on Libya, my department at the forefront of the storm. I remember sitting in the induction in September, meeting the academics whose names are now splashed across the news. These people have become my guides and I see them for what they are – people, who yes, sometimes make mistakes. My education at LSE reminds me to look for the hidden parts of the story. A friend startles me from my thoughts. Lunch? And I'm lured back out of the library and into the Garrick where I'll no doubt encounter some classmates with views on the topics I've just been reading about.

## **Wednesday**

Wednesday begins early. Core class. 9am. Seventy of us sleepily troop into Tower One. I never knew there were so many ways to interpret globalization. I remember the first time I sat here, arriving late and accidentally sitting next to the lecturer. I asked him for a pen. Study groups are springing up now that exams are in sight and I know not to ask the lecturer to join. I organize with my friends, trading interpretations of our readings. Later I dash off to the New Academic Building (another tricky swiping system). A society I'm in is putting on a panel to discuss issues of poverty and I'm looking forward to the lively Q&A I know will ensue. Drinks are handed out, journals produced by our society distributed. I am impressed that so many of us are voluntarily giving up our evening to learn. At this school there is a constant quest for knowledge not confined to wanting to secure a good job, but about genuinely wanting to broaden one's mind.

## **Thursday**

A day of exploration. I make sure to venture outside of LSE several times a week. Today is one of my favourites – Borough Market. An Indian friend first took me here in November. I shun the midday crowds on the tube and take a new walking route, back and forth across the many bridges stretching over the Thames, so it takes me over an hour to get there. But it's worth it to take in the architecture along the river, to bask in the Spring sunshine that's hinting that London is about to show me its best side. Arriving, I find a crowd from my class deliberating over what to eat. The aroma of spiced lamb, freshly baked bread and vegetable curry hits me. I understand their dilemma. We disperse to take advantage of as many stalls as possible, then reconvene on the grass, indulging in the market's finest foods and discussing our plans for the upcoming break. The diversity of plans is testament to the options LSE offers its students – over half of us are embarking on some kind of society-led trip, from Morocco to Israel to the Balkans.

## **Friday**

Friday is the last day of term. Though I've lived a hundred Fridays at LSE I know this one will offer something new. Today we have our last taught class, the last batch of slides, the last formal debate. Afterwards a group of us battle up Oxford Street to reach Hyde Park and sit in the sunshine, celebrating. But it is a celebration tinged with sadness, the knowledge that we are nearing the end. Summer Term will see revision and the start of exams, that pesky part I have to go through before claiming my degree. Days of the week come again and again, but on this campus each one brings something entirely new. After this brief, intense tangle with LSE I wonder if I'll ever settle for an 'average' week again. I came here to collect a piece of paper, but I have discovered a whole new way of living life, one that will stay with me long after I move on from London.

## Eugenia Marna – Dear Jurisprudence

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23<sup>rd</sup> September and I am heading down Aldwych road to register to LSE. The weather is fine, the sun is smiling and there is even a mild but yet noticeable breeze gently ruffling people's hair. Grim London weather stereotype: debunked. Everybody acts happy, waiting for the new academic year to begin while calmly going through administrative tasks. Few days ahead and there I am, surrounded by a multinational bunch of complete strangers, having to introduce myself in my clumsy English, Greek intonation evident, under the clever eyes of the Jurisprudence Professor. Rehearsals prove useless as the words come out of my mouth sounding nothing like I had planned. And then the girl sitting next to me takes turn in presenting herself; her accent is impeccable, her ideas well-put, a perfect balance between a witty sense of humor and the seriousness anticipated in class. There is endless mythology surrounding love at first sight, but none available to describe friendship at first sight. I ask her to join me for lunch after class.

Moments away and we are talking like we were friends for ages. Pouring your heart out to a perfect stranger stereotype: confirmed. Days and weeks and lectures go by and we meet every week, straight after Jurisprudence class. The place is not important: it can be the small coffee shop just beside the library for a cup of hot tea. Garrick, for a latte and a quick bite. Our talk acquires a ceremonial order, silently agreed on by both parties. First, a small reference to this week's class. A quick amazement at what 'the' annoying person said this week, then extended analysis of the material and the readings and the arguments and the bibliography and on. At some point it becomes obvious that we will never understand, say or read enough and we quit for the day. And then on to British politics, a lively tour to the busy affairs of the country conducted for my eyes and ears only by my friend, a well educated and clever Londoner. Then it is small talk on families and friends and just a few lines on boyfriends, since we have both realised that when it comes to boys it's like philosophy class: you'll never understand enough and there is no conclusive argument! She usually laughs out really loud, head thrown back, while I remain shy and reserved. Mediterranean temperament compared to British coolness stereotype: debunked.

Mid-January and it's freezing, I am trying desperately to finish an assignment, she's there correcting my English, I give her back a few ideas on her paper, just to feel I'm somehow repaying her kindness. We hand in, coffee's in order, we sit on the third floor of the New Academic building almost looking in the eye the giant red ball that hangs from the ceiling. "Tell me a secret you would never tell somebody back in Greece", she suggests. I give her secret number one, she finds it ridiculous, and then it's her turn. By secret number five we have decided that she has to come to Greece this summer and I promise to try a full British meal. I start talking about her to my Greek friends, her name typically omitted, she's "the English". Then one day, I surreptitiously find out through a quick look at her phone that I am equally, "the Greek". In May, right before the exam frenzy, I make tuna sandwiches, we sit on the grass of the park right in front of the New Academic Building. Let's summarize what we learnt this year: If you wish

to see yourself in pure honesty, try living for a while in a multinational environment of strangers. It will take you a few months before you develop your new habits and hide yourself behind them once again; in the meantime you are transparent. The experience in terms of self-knowledge amounts to years of psychotherapy. "After this year I'll feel older" my friend grudges. "This is called maturity". Master's soon over, we'll have to go on, pretend that we are mature adults and make a living out of our insecurities, lies, strengths and skills. "And a foreign friend can be invaluable to help you laugh with all that", I say, "Indeed" she replies, I try to imitate her accent, as impossible to copy as at the beginning of the year. End of university-years depression stereotype: confirmed.

We sit our Jurisprudence exams in the same room, but we can barely see each other. We nod just before sinking in the papers in front of us and we emerge after three hours. We are running down the stairs of the New Academic Building, while calling relatives and boyfriends and best friends. We survived, it's over. Everybody comes at LSE because they believe that knowledge is still important, that studying at this level will give them an answer, a beginning. A cure. Maybe this could be a period of pure contentment: to find what you were looking for and more.

Year number two, still in London. Busy with PhD studies. My friend went on to train as a barrister. The stereotype would dictate that one would most certainly lose contact with the friend made during a master's degree. Well, stereotype debunked. I do my PhD at LSE, while my friend works right next to the campus, at the Royal Court of Justice. Coffee's still in order every week. This reminds me of another stereotype, the one that says that the friends from university are friends for life. Stereotype happily confirmed.

"Aren't we supposed to be able to think out of the box? Free of stereotypes, clichés and prejudice? Isn't a world-famous university that celebrates diversity the place to achieve that?" my friend asks. After experiencing life at LSE, I am not sure I managed to jettison stereotypes. I just know that they don't frighten me any more because I am now equipped to observe them.

## Heba Elsayed – Chronicles of a PhD Student: How Events in Cairo led to my Own Revolution in Understanding

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### **Before January 25<sup>th</sup> 2011:**

Already a few minutes late for a meeting with my supervisor, I hastily dodge my way past hordes of excited and nervous faces. Warm embraces and kisses indicate some students are glad to be back after the Christmas break, while bleak expressions tell the stories of those dreading another semester of study. "Typical undergraduates" I think to myself as I turn into Houghton Street where suddenly, I am bombarded with leaflets enticing me to join this particular student society, or asking me to vote for that person as Education Officer. Realizing I am already ten minutes late, the leaflets end up either in the bin or the bottom of my bag as I run in a state of hurried disinterest. I am reassured that my voice will not make much of a difference- I'm just one more figure after all.

Next day. Following a continuous three hour hunt in the library, I decide I need a break. I will treat myself to sushi from *Itsu*, a bit of a trek towards Covent Garden, but nevertheless worth it. As I head outside, I notice a large gathering of students with banners. Getting closer, I realize with immense annoyance that it is a protest against the government's proposed increase in university fees. Great, now I'll have to take an even longer route, wasting precious study time. Politics needs to stay within Ten Downing Street and Parliament!

...

Are you wondering what 25<sup>th</sup> January symbolizes? It is the date which marked the commencement of protests in Cairo to topple the government. It is the date that the world stood by and watched as this youth-led revolution achieved what generations before them failed to do. Previously, any mention of Egypt would conjure up caricatured images of a desert surrounded tourist destination littered with camel riding Bedouins. With little resources except sheer determination, young Egyptians have been able to alter their country's global image, now the centre of international attention. Obama told us that 'Egypt has changed the world and the world took note,' while Paulo Coelho thanked Egypt, informing us that the world 'only gets better because people risk something to make it better'. International celebrities also rushed to express their admiration as the Barcelona football team observed a minute silence in memory of the martyrs.

I will not be clichéd and say that 25<sup>th</sup> January changed me, but I will be double clichéd and say it changed the world. As part of my PhD research, I had the privilege to work with young Egyptians over the last few years. I came to understand how people can be alive, yet dead at the same time; have beating hearts yet deceased souls and empty eyes. I realized the extent to which these young people, repressed, silenced and misunderstood, occupied an everyday culture of paranoia and fear. Once, during a fieldwork session in a public university, I was suddenly dragged to the security office. I was suspiciously accused of being a journalist who had snuck their way into the university. In an attempt at reassurance, I produced my student card, although the alien English text did little to ease their fear as I instantly became upgraded to a foreign spy! I knew Egypt couldn't last long like this; it was a ticking time-bomb that would explode at any moment. Sometimes I was skeptical, sometimes I thought that these young people were so complacent with their cruel fate that nothing would ever change. Today, they have become a beacon of hope to many across the globe. I tearfully watched as a group of public workers protesting in the US state of Wisconsin held up banners reading 'fight like an Egyptian'. Camel riding Bedouins no more!

Importantly, I realized that I've had what, for so long, these young people have craved, although I never valued it enough. They often told me that being able to discuss politics openly or protest when dissatisfied is a distant dream that they believe they will never realize in their lifetime. On 25<sup>th</sup> January many lost their lives to achieve this; for me, it's just another day at LSE. As part of my university life, I am always given the opportunity to speak my mind. My email is routinely swarmed with messages about joining the Debating Society or filling in a form to give my honest opinion about how a seminar was led or how fulfilling I have found my library experience to be. Even in the most subtlest of ways, I am taught to express my point of view. My supervisor, Dr Myria Georgiou, constantly criticizes my lack of confidence in my writing, and for being hesitant in emphasizing my own stance within my thesis. 'Authorship, Heba...where is your voice and opinion in all of this?' is a statement I've heard from Dr Georgiou many times.

As a student at LSE, it was through the skills I learned in becoming an ethnographer, as well as the financial support the university offered me, that I had the absolute honor to work with young Egyptians. I will always live to regret that I was not able to be a part of my country's revolution, although I find this an important opportunity to demonstrate how academia does not revolve around secluded labs and geeky scientists in a state of frenzied excitement about hypothetical research problems. I am adamant that as a well trained researcher affiliated with a world class university, I can return to Cairo and contribute academically to the re-building of post-revolutionary Egypt. I plan to dedicate future research towards understanding how the revolution has influenced the self-perception of these young people. I hope LSE will continue to be a part of this post-revolutionary, post-doctoral journey.

...

**After 25<sup>th</sup> January 2011:**

I will stop to read leaflets. I'm not just an extra number, but I have a voice. I now appreciate how the influence of words in initiating peaceful change is more powerful than a hundred bullets. I promise myself never to get annoyed at student protests, but as I sadly recall the pretty face of Sally Zahran who died in Cairo, or the horrifically unrecognizable face of Khaled Saeed who was brutally tortured to death by Egyptian police, I am filled with an immense admiration for these students. Next time, if I'm not in a last minute rush to reach a meeting with my supervisor, I might just join them.

## Anita Shargall – ‘Reminiscences make one feel deliciously aged and sad’

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Nostalgia is a funny thing. I am not known for being a sentimentalist, and there tend to be tube delays whenever a trip to memory lane is suggested. However, with my third and final year soon coming to an end, nostalgia has led me to reflect on what my time at LSE has meant; smiles, tears, laughter, and a healthy dose of embarrassment, not to mention those overdue essays for my class teacher Mr Cherryman. Thank you nostalgia, in the battle between an evening reading Kershaw’s analysis of the Third Reich and visiting nostalgic sentiments, the winner has been decisive.

Nostalgia, taking me back to the excitement of the open day at LSE. I recall the journey to the Big Smoke, following the smoke stream to the Holborn microcosm. A vast academic empire welcomed me with the sight of bustling students and well groomed academics meandering through the campus labyrinth, a multitude of accents bouncing around the historic confines of one of the world’s most famous institutes. Could this really be my home for the next few years? After a day in the midst of pandemonium, I could not help but wonder; sitting in Subway with a feeling of fear, nerves, and uneasiness (a feeling repeated far too often after a performance at Crush), if every Friday would feel like this.

Nostalgia, the journey that moved my world to London and the feeling of anticipation of what the next three years would have in store. A journey concluding with a Bristolian Sat-Nav guiding us entirely in the wrong direction through the entanglement of one way systems, bridges and traffic jams, then brought to a dramatic halt by a three- point turn outside my new home. This was not the best first impression to prospective friends. I was supposed to dazzle with wit, charm and worldliness, instead I garnered looks of confusion as my parents argued over who should stay in the car to fend off any pesky traffic wardens. Any concern of stilted and uncomfortable conversations about politics or unfair parking tickets was soon forgotten in the delirium of diverse and engaging conversations with colleagues from all corners of the world, from Portsmouth to Portugal.

Nostalgia, guiding me back to my first week of term. A question that is frequently debated, yet never satisfactorily answered, has been ‘what is culture?’ To define culture, one needs to look no further than LSE; a melting pot of varied religions, nationalities and interest groups. Culture, for me, defined in my first few days at LSE by the everlasting memory of my Canadian housemate drinking Snakebite and reading the FT, whilst being surrounded by a competition between various Asian dance cliques. Not quite the conventional definition of culture, but undoubtedly an experience that would be unlikely to occur at any other university. It’s these poignant moments of spectacular individuality and extraordinary culture that make the LSE experience so unequivocally unique.

Nostalgia, the furore of first year exams, the madness within the BLPES and the crazy things revision can make you do. The BLPES is a fine example of a place that means so many different things to so many different people- home to a kingdom of knowledge, an abyss of depression synonymous with revision time, free accommodation from May- June, or just a bloody lovely building? Sitting in front of a screen at nine a.m with a Vanilla Latte lost in thoughts of wonderment. What would Bertrand Russell think of the current orientation of LSE? What does Krugman think of recent cuts? How can I change my footwork

to look less awkward walking down the cascade of stairs? So many of my days since exams have been characterised by daydreaming in the library, taking breaks from reading about Nazi military history, then envisaging the last coveted computer in my section is the site of Stalingrad. Who would win in this bitter Battle of Revisionism? Who would have the better strategy Guy One or Two? Who would be helped first by their ally, both determined to tackle an econ. problem set?

Nostalgia, watching Queen Noor's lecture on nuclear non-proliferation, appreciating how such a moment could add a whole new and unprecedented dimension to a modular lecture seen just two weeks prior. LSE attracts a wealth of inspirational and gifted speakers that add such a unique aspect to the student experience. Whilst my local politician's talk in sixth form about the complexity of recycling did make me consider looking at labels more closely, the speakers and range of talks at LSE, effectively introduce new and fascinating conceptions and debates, making you seriously question your beliefs, assumptions, even your views on recycling!

Nostalgia, two weeks ago a hot bed of debate in a Foreign Policy Analysis class in the height of the Middle Eastern chaos, some arguing about the ineffectiveness of the UN, others predicting a striking domino effect. Whilst some classmates were absent, either through occupying an area of LSE in political protest or occupying a cubicle due to the unfortunate consequences of an AU night prior, what this class demonstrates is how your perspectives can be shaped and moulded in such diverse ways. Whether it's the passion of an enthusiastic teacher or deliberations between the apathetic and the active or even hungover Tyrone's rant about the failure of multi-lateralism followed by a quick dash to the recycling bin, your education can be enhanced in ways that text books simply cannot. I did inform him afterwards however, that it was a misinformed decision to choose that bin.

Nostalgia, when recalling my LSE reminiscences in the future when I'm deliciously aged and sad, reading the virtues of George Bernard Shaw- would I want to change anything? Not for all the smiles, tears, laughter, healthy doses of embarrassment and three point turns the world could offer!

## Claire Tighe – A sense of greater responsibility

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Sometimes I think of Shaw, roaming around LSE looking pleased with the café conversations he'd overhear on campus today. Egypt's rise, Gadaffi's likely fall, the crux of the financial crisis, the challenges of climate change confronting our world. Global concerns, global perspectives; a nerve-centre of international problem-solving. From this small corner of the earth, a dialogue of solutions not just problems ripples forth powerfully. I think this would give him great cause to smile.

For such a fledgling university, LSE has risen to impressive heights with characteristic determination and conviction. Founded in 1895, the aim of the school was the betterment of society, and today, this candle of intent still burns brightly. Internationally, LSE is considered one of the world's best universities and a leader in the social sciences. The stream of top dignitaries that visit the school to speak is telling of how highly LSE is regarded beyond the industrious confines of its Holborn walls. From Nelson Mandela, to Bill Clinton, to Mary Robinson, the calibre of guest speakers who take time while in London to visit the School reflects just how esteemed it is.

It is both humbling and inspiring to think that LSE's great alumni once sat here as students, wondering how they would make their mark in the world, although unsure as to how that contribution would look. Was it from a chair in the Shaw Library that John F Kennedy first imagined the possibility of running for president? Was it at a UGM that Shami Chakrabarti first discovered the resonance that her voice had on the issue of Human Rights? Was it through a chance involvement in a battle of the bands event here that Sir Mick Jagger first reckoned he could plausibly make a career out of music? The great possibility of being an LSE student is that you have a platform from which you can consider making a contribution on a local, national or global level. Thinking big is encouraged at LSE, because sometimes that's exactly what the world needs.

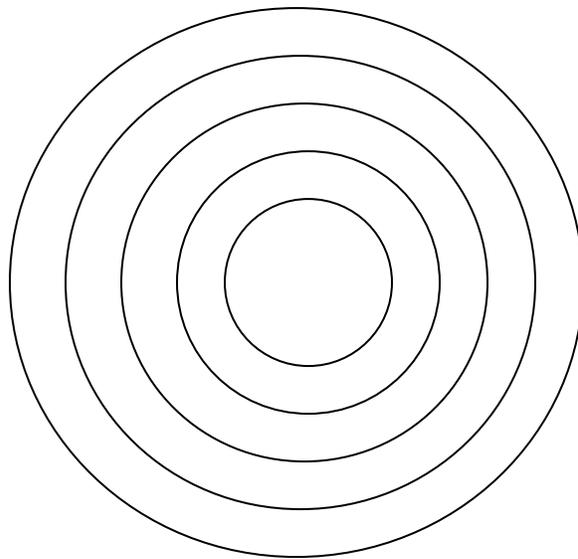
Studying here is not just about attending classes, meeting deadlines or getting a good job; it is of much greater consequence. The concern for global issues, the importance of engagement, the sense that our responsibilities are not to ourselves alone, but to wider society, are LSE's most valuable lessons to its students. Throughout this year, I have heard it time and again that the responsibility of the future is ours. This idea, continually imparted in lectures and talks, has begun to take root. We are all invited to think what our role will be, how we can have an impact. I have come to believe that it starts with our words. The courage of our written and our spoken words to challenge consensus, to speak up, to use our newly fostered perspectives to confront the problems and help find the solutions in a society of so many needs. Words to build with, words to challenge with, words to mediate with, words to elicit with, words to forge with. It is through our words that all things become possible. In the words of Bernard Levin, "Words have an existence of their own, they are not ours to command altogether freely; but without us they cannot come to life."<sup>1</sup> I believe that they are our most powerful tool. The right words can start to change everything.

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<sup>1</sup> Bernard Levin, *Enthusiasms*, (1984)

LSE was founded to tackle social issues affecting our wider society and to be a powerful force for change, ready to take a bold stand where necessary. Throughout its history, it has been devoted to its founding principles, and has at times been infamous for this spirited commitment. In the wake of the recent controversy, Howard Davies' decision to step down of his own volition elicited poignant respect from the college community. His principled departure served to reaffirm the ethos of a university so committed to playing an active part in ameliorating wider society. Amid global crises almost unimaginable unfolding around our world today, our role collectively and individually seems more pronounced than ever. It was with such challenges in mind that the Fabians founded LSE however, aiming to foster this sense of greater responsibility in its students and in so doing, work towards the betterment of society.

Responsibility does not exist outside of us, but within each of us. It starts with the individual, and ripples out steadily beyond that in greater waves of influence. For global change to occur, it must begin at the centre and works its way out. This is what I have come to understand from my time in the classrooms and lecture halls at Houghton Street. If you want to change society, start with yourself, create a ripple, be an influence, take a greater sense of responsibility. If I could take only one lesson from my time here, this would be it.



*For global change to occur, it must start at the centre and work its way out. Traveling from individual, to social, to local, to national, to global.*

## Laurence Vardaxoglou – A GREAT BIG THANK YOU

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### *Characters*

ISAAC

SAL

ACT I

SCENE: *Tavistock Square, London, around 11am. ISAAC and SAL are sitting in the sun, ISAAC is singing an inaccurate rendition of a hymn.*

ISAAC: Autumn days when the grass is due, and the milk inside a chestnut shell. Jet planes waiting in the air to be refuelled, all these things I love so well, but I mustn't forget, no I mustn't forget, to say a great big thank you. I mustn't forget.

*(Laughter)*

ISAAC: I can't believe I remembered that.

SAL: What is it?

ISAAC: A hymn we used to sing at school when I was a kid, I didn't realise it had been so embedded in my subconscious.

SAL: It's Christian right?

ISAAC: Yeah

SAL: And you've remembered it all this time – impressive!

ISAAC: I guess, makes you wonder though, I wonder what kind of effect it has had on me, if any, I mean I've carried that ethos with me for years now without knowing it...do I say thank you a lot?

SAL: I don't know, I mean, I haven't noticed if you do. Cigarette?

ISAAC: Yes, thanks.

*(Laughter)*

SAL: *(Sighs)* Such a glorious day.

ISAAC: London's so much better when it's sunny, you know, this summer will be amazing.

SAL: Not for us it won't.

ISAAC: Why?

SAL: Exams.

ISAAC: Ah, enough of that, be fine, right now I'm just happy to be here. So good having a reason to be in central everyday.

SAL: Gives you a sense of purpose doesn't it.

ISAAC: Yeah man, just being here everyday, you really get a sense of what's going on. I'd hate to be stuck in a student bubble in some nondescript provincial town.

SAL: Aw come on man it wouldn't be that bad!

ISAAC: *(Condescending look)*

*(Laughter)*

ISAAC: March this week isn't it?

SAL: Yeah it will be all month.

ISAAC: No I mean on Saturday!

SAL: Oh yeah, should be excellent, near a million people apparently

ISAAC: Really, is everyone going?

SAL: Yeah man I think so, Jess and all that lot, they were going mad at the UGM the other day!

ISAAC: Ah they all get so irate about stuff, it's annoying.

SAL: Nah man it's good.

ISAAC: Yeah, but still.

SAL: Come on, so many people got really involved in the Gaddafi stuff, and Houghton Street is full of people raising money for Japan.

ISAAC: Was the UGM about Japan?

SAL: No, Libya, well, Davies and Gaddafi, you know.

ISAAC: What happened?

SAL: Well there was this ridiculous motion to say thank you to Howard Davies for 'everything he's done'. I don't think we should be congratulating him for propping up a corrupt regime.

ISAAC: Aw man, come on, he's resigned over that already, and rightly so, but you still say thank you, it's simply a matter of common courtesy to say "look Howard, you did wrong and all, but thanks for all you've done otherwise". He did do a good job.

SAL: You can't just ignore his shameful ties to Gaddafi!

ISAAC: I'm not saying you should, it's just a case of being polite, did your mother never teach you that?

SAL: Hey-

ISAAC: -Jesus, England's built on maintaining absurd niceties even with your worst enemy! Where would we be if we didn't favour our please and thank you's over our P's and Q's?

SAL: Dublin?

*(Laughter)*

SAL: Speaking of drunks what do you say to Crush this Friday?

ISAAC: No.

*(Laughter)*

SAL: Aw it won't be that bad if you just get very, very drunk.

ISAAC: That's what I'm afraid of. I couldn't think of anything more unpleasant than consuming a vessel topped to the brim with a plethora of unknown spirits, beer, cider and Guinness, not to mention the peculiar inclusion of condiments at the end.

SAL: Ha, you sound like you're speaking from experience.

ISAAC: I am in a way! I was once lucky enough to see one unfortunate AU participant finish a pint before stumbling across to the toilet throwing up red mess everywhere.

SAL: Greeted with a rapturous reception I bet!

ISAAC: A God amongst men.

SAL: Now that would be my philosophy lecturer. One cool guy.

ISAAC: He was the one in the band the other night right?

SAL: Yeah, at the philosophy party.

ISAAC: Man that party was so good, I dread to think what the economics one would be like, if they have one.

SAL: Probably be a bunch of people standing around wondering what it is exactly that one should do at a party, worrying about their cost-benefit ratios.

ISAAC: Yeah, it'd be shit, basically. What was the band called again?

SAL: In Defence of Rhythm, or something.

ISAAC: Ah-

SAL: No, no, The Critique of Pure Rhythm.

ISAAC: (Laughing) What does that even mean?

SAL: There's a book called *The Critique of Pure Reason*, by Kant I think. Anyway, something to do with that. You know that song you were humming earlier-

I ISAAC: What? (*Starts to sing*) Autumn-

SAL: (*Laughter*) Yes, that one! I was just thinking about it-

ISAAC: I want to try and forget it, I'm worried it's been engraved in my psyche over all this time and so now I can't escape it even if I wanted to. I don't really know why you're meant to say thank you.

SAL: No I was going to say it reminded me of what Afan was saying the other day.

ISAAC: In the lecture?

SAL: Yeah, about how it's a massive challenge-

ISAAC: A remarkable challenge!

SAL: Ha whatever, you know how he was saying being at LSE is a *remarkable* challenge, but it'll stay with you for life. The people you meet, the School itself, you'll always be a part of it. There's something about that that's quite...

ISAAC: Autumnal?

SAL: (*Laughing*) No, brilliant.

ISAAC: Hmm you're right.

SAL: (*Whilst opening and passing ISAAC a can of beer*) We got to be grateful for that man. *Really* grateful.

ISAAC: Thank you.

## Gabrielle Letimier – Youthhood seductions

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Puberty is over and we are older, perhaps wiser, at the LSE but nonetheless hapless in the throes of youth. How we got here and how to navigate whatever this is, will remain a dark, handsome mystery until the very final end. Tenderly I contemplate how coldly but wildly rational we could become. We will ruthlessly slap down petty rival arguments with only a flicker of thespian irritation. We will know about global markets, cosmocracy and how to transform people in a field to a society. I get hackles at the mere thought. My inner totalitarian can barely wait and there it is, the gnawing LSE, mightily hot to trot ambition.

The truth is, this could be the description of any ardent youth. The difference is the LSE is ardent youth abundant. They are prowling through campus, lone wolves, taught, tense on their way to the library. Where secure in a realm of bookishness, they drool across love worn statistics papers larger than encyclopaedias. Pencilled in notes on books suggest the author had not been 'concrete' enough. Conscientiousness is a measure of worthiness. So young, we are so easily seduced by the pretence of our own grandeur.

However, amongst all this alluded obligation and teacher's pet tolerance, thankfully we have no need to become- and I can barely write it- sensible. Sensible is what we will become after these heady, intellectually illicit years of absolute confusion but total bliss. Idealism will dominate and how we will devote, brood and break. Utopias shattered and hypothesis disproved. Any instinctual convictions for what is good and right, will be lathered with doubt and marched to the wayside. We can be militantly political and politically militant. Our offhand affairs with well-beloved theorists end in jilted lover bitterness, we realise he was nothing but a sanctimonious lackey. We become ludicrous and sceptical. Who cares. You are at the LSE and you are supposed to become disillusioned, if only to theorise about fixing it.

This is youth. Equal measures of hedonism and uncertainty are vital. It is what adrenaline is made of and if at times we have nothing, there is always that throbbing cutthroat compulsion to be, but more importantly, to feel alive. The fawning reckless pursuit for a vocation, a lifeline, a meaning. Identity. Identity. Identity. Residual adolescent angst. The nothingness of a disillusioned afternoon when everything collapses and nobody understands. The realisation that this youth is all a bewildering quest for some unknown passion we are yet to claim as our own. Deluded, we schlep to the library at 3am after Soho whisky nightcaps to read Hegel and slowly we begin again and are brought to some reason, a reason, however insignificant.

I do not believe in deprecating platitudes and gratitude. Yet how fortunate we are to be asked to and equipped to study, purely. Womblike, the LSE promises to shelter us; all the while nurturing our naive youth lives. It demands we analyse real harsh reality, poverty, the globe, its issues and our issues with its issues and then to render this reality abstract. At the LSE theory is godliness. However, to come to a place where we are asked to contemplate things we cannot easily

comprehend, which we cannot feel like our own selfish emotions or pain or distress and which force us to spend a while merely deciphering, it is a gift indeed.

Alas, I am a first year undergraduate. Perhaps my virginal instinct and a penchant for hyperbole doth misled me. Although sprawled across the sapphire suede seats on a bleak afternoon, miserable and lethargic, I think I get it. Slowly I am distracted by tales of a theorist who, armed with a flaming torch, chased a prostitute from his bedroom. Righteous kvetch. Devious and chuckling, I stroll out onto the Strand not a little bit content to be conjuring a spirited defence of the obsolescence of virtue. However this is not enough to define new virtues or stratagem or dictates. All this is for another period. When the post-puberty oasis is over and adulthood takes charge.

## Alexander Young – The ‘melting pot of cultures’

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The student body of LSE has a proud history of being incredibly globally representative: with the fact that the student body once represented more countries than the United Nations borne in mind, the overuse of the phrase ‘melting pot of cultures’ is inevitable when people talk of the School. The brute facts of multinational heritage of students and the speaking of over 100 languages on campus are impressive, but mean very little on their own; such facts lead to the expectation that campus life is fragmented: an expectation which is not verifiable empirically. The more interesting side of the School’s cosmopolitan credentials lies in what unites students, rather than differentiates them from each other.

The Grade II listed shell of the British Library of Political and Economic Science holds far more than the glorious smell of ageing philosophical tomes and the impressive uniformity of the newest journals lined up on bookshelves; it is a hub of both transient and enduring interactions, all unrelentingly honest. I hear, with my undyingly British ‘broken’ understanding of European languages, ‘je ne l’aime plus’, ‘er behandelte mich schlecht’ and ‘tá mé béim.’ The pattern here is unmistakable: people are tied by the personal.

Between the harsh cobalt LEDs of Bluerain and the soft fluorescents of the Library’s ground floor, I talk to someone about her take on life, love and family matters; profanities punctuate every serious remark made, doing nothing but to drive the points into my mind in the way that only such fervorous informality is capable of doing; she throws her head back and cackles at the most horrendous of things, and that is nothing if not endearing: it is testament to an ability to reflect on oneself critically and realise that there is humour in everything.

Looking over the Quad from a balcony in the East Building, it is fairly difficult not to get taken away by a sense of being closed-in: while the Quad is a large area, the spectre of the East Building encircling you and St. Clements Building to your right is impressive enough to imbue a sense of insignificance in even the most arrogant of those who pass through LSE’s halls. These are buildings that have housed some of the greatest minds of generations past and present, and indeed even future. Your discussion with someone about how exactly to politick in the run-up to a society election should fade into the most complete of obscurities with even a mote of perspective being applied to the situation; of course, this goes unrealised: as well as honest, discourse at the LSE is competitive, perhaps even to the extent of being blinkered by intent focus on success. Even here, in the gladiatorial arena that is society and Student Union politics, the personal comes out once again: you over-share insecurities and fears of failure at a rate faster than utterances of ‘I want to become an investment banker’ around campus. An air of nihilism directs the conversation to previous failures, and the feeling of being hemmed in just gets worse.

The dank atmosphere of the Three Tuns in winter becomes a signal for good conversation among friends; the beer-stench that rises from the long-suffering floor becomes an indicator of comfort: the marker of a 'home from home.' Sitting outside, in weather really not suitable for such an evening sojourn, a friend interrogates me as to things I tell nobody. A delicate tipsiness and high mood guaranteed by the homely surrounds set me off into a stream of divulgence of secrets. The fact that I get nothing back from sharing all of this is irritating: she responds cagily to anything that I ask, but this too is typical of the LSE. Reciprocity is not guaranteed, and nor should it be: we still form interpersonal trusses whether or not our sharing is dialectic.

The glow of monitors upon the faces of those one associates with is an inescapable element of life at the LSE: be it in the library, C120 or one of the subterranean enclaves of digital facilities on campus, it is a sheer inevitability that you and a friend will be subject to each other's company in such a place during your time here. This, as is demonstrative of why LSE students have the reputation of being incredibly studious at the expense of social activity, may well be where you engage in some of the most intimate of conversations you will ever have with anyone. I had such a conversation with someone about her past and present: the handy distraction of the weekly newsletter issues to students via email diffused the tension; Howard Davies's resignation statement bearing the brunt of the latent strain in the air: never have I been happier to receive a circular. The screens give her a reason not to sustain eye contact, and a glazed-over expression does little to hide how hard she is trying to distance herself from the words coming out of her mouth.

Of course there are differences between students in terms of their cultures and upbringing, but we are all unified by one very human, universally shared property: we all have our own experiences, our own secrets and a will to build bridges with others. The way in which we impart this information to others may differ based upon our heritage, but it is something that we all engage in; therein lies the greatest strength of the LSE's cosmopolitanism: with this (please do excuse me) 'melting pot' of cultures comes a vast array of experience to have imparted unto us. As an institution of the social sciences, it is only right that we have such a holistic pool of knowledge to draw from on the personal level.

## Rouba Mhaissen – The List

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Yet another day, I delve into a world of the lovers, the homeless, the cyclists: the Londoners. This is my current city; and at the heart of it, rests the London School of Economics.

I read the contest topic once more. I pick up *the Beaver*, and scribble on the back, "Must write about LSE Economics professor winning the Nobel Prize, getting priority tickets for my prime minister's lecture at university, participating in 'freeze the fees' protests..."

What else can I write about? Think Rouba, think!

I have always had difficulty picking favourites.

I get to *Houghton Street* just on time to queue up by the *Waterston's*. I throw in a couple of pennies, pick up my free Hare Krishna lunch, and sit on the stairs of the Old Building in preparation for my daily fashion show. Seriously, how can such a large number of students carry Louis Vuitton bags? Wow, nice dress. Oh, and apparently, grey nail polish is 'in' this season.

Ok, I really need to focus.

A flashback hits me. Setting: my high school, Beirut, Lebanon. Timeframe: recess. Heartbroken, I wonder, 'Shall I break up with him?' Yes, I remember it so vividly: the famous list of my teenage fling. Things I love and things I hate.

I shall begin at the end. The record I have in hand today, ladies and gentlemen, is not just another skewed list. It is an account of memories and feelings, of facts and hallucinations. An account so dynamic in essence, that it makes you question its authenticity. Was I really that fortunate to be part of this infinitely diverse universe?

I shall now proceed.

For one thing, I hate LSE's Monday morning lectures.

Especially the soundtrack of 'nimble' fingers typing every word the professor utters, recording every breath he takes. Makes me wonder, what's wrong with pencil and paper?

I love its surprises.

'Aren't you...?'

And as he stretches his hand to shake mine, confirms: 'Amartya Sen, yes!'

He leaves the Old Building elevator wishing me good luck, as I make my way up to the *Fourth Floor Restaurant*, dazzled by the unexpected meeting with my favourite author. Today's special menu: Vietnamese Pho and French Beef Bourguignon.

*Me encanta* its *fiestas*; I simply adore them.

Like *la noche Columbiana*, Le Gala, or that *Qawali* night; my first encounter with Pakistani Sufi music: national sweets, tea, and free bangles too!

I hate its non-freshly-brewed Tea; so different to the one I enjoy at home.

I nevertheless sip it every Wednesday at the *Garrick's*, as I free-trade my French skills for some Madridian Spanish with my tandem partner, *Borja*- whom I love, by the way!

I love its Tuesday yoga rituals at the Badminton court.

'Breathe in as you go downward facing dog. This is your eighteenth sun salutation. Breathe out as you go into a push up position. Breath in.' And the beauty of that position is that it lasts long enough for you to decide if that's Persian perfume or sweaty feet you smell.

*Bref!* In LSE, 'knowing the causes of things' helps you reach an informed conclusion: that no matter what happens, if the globe ends up warming, if the Middle-Eastern unrest persists, or if China invades the US, there is a reality about this place that will always make it special. It is the site where the soul finds hope in the most unexpected places.

Like the hope those blue beanbags in the library basement give me every time I get sleepy after extensive hours of reading. Or the hope that peace will indeed find its way to the world, as we raise our Lebanese-Portuguese-Egyptian-Indian-American glasses and say our Christian-Jew-Muslim-Jain blessings while having dinner on Strand. We laugh and debate. We chew and we swallow our newly acquired knowledge: Jain people are vegetarian and Muslim women are not necessarily oppressed. We share the bill, take a photo that we promise to upload, and discover that in order to learn about the other, you first need to unlearn.

The unlearning process starts in fact on the day you enter the Hong Kong Theatre for course registration. That same day, you are stripped of your prejudices. The other, whom you once feared, is no longer a mere reflection of your thoughts. The other is now the object of your contemplation.

As time elapses, your presence at LSE empowers you with the understanding that context matters. You realize that the 'one-size-fits-all' solution to everything fails in real life, just as much as it does in policy formulation. Realizing the danger of stigmatization and the power of understanding becomes the only force behind change. Pieces of broken prejudices join to form a wonderful mosaic bridging the extremes. Judgments are reversed by realistic perceptions not by blind assumptions. With its simplicity and charm, LSE turns things you detest into ones you tolerate.

I hate goodbyes.

But I loved the candle-light vigil the students organized for Howard Davies' resignation. To him I say, thank you for everything you did for LSE; but mostly, thank you for teaching us that accountability and loyalty are not merely theoretical concepts.

I hate asymmetry.

But I loved how, in one workshop, Robert Chambers can convince you to look at the map upside down; questioning whose reality matters, challenging you to 'ask them' about what they want.

Through its conformities and contradictions, LSE turns out to be everything you expected it to be, and everything you didn't expect it to be.

Have you ever heard of revolution through surrender? LSE will revolutionize you, only if you surrender to it. But rest reassured that upon departing, you will never be the person you once were. Bidding LSE Farewell makes you realize you are that person, and much more.

You are the president, the minister, and the policy maker. You are the citizen, the refugee, and the vulnerable.

You are yourself, and much more.

You are yourself, and the other.

## Marina Gerner – LSE: Love, Sex and Education

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I used to think that I study “so I may perceive whatever holds the world together in its inmost folds” as Goethe, the namesake of my old school in Frankfurt famously wrote. When I googled the LSE for the very first time, I was very happy to see that not only does it pride itself in being one of the best universities worldwide, but it also has a whole corporate identity, as it is common and traditional at British universities. Official colours, academic scarves, a mascot - and even a slogan, which is written on the University’s emblem, underneath what looks like an excited beaver. I wonder if my Goethe-Gymnasium had a mascot – would it be poodle from Goethe’s “Faust”?

I looked at the emblem, in big curved letters it read “Rerum congoscere causas” and although my third foreign language in high school was Japanese instead of Latin, I managed to figure out that it meant “to understand the causes of things.” This sounded like the logical continuation of my education. Now that I am here in London I have realized that “In vino veritas” might have been my University’s slogan as well, students at the LSE do not only receive the best possible education but we are also lucky to live a very sociable life.

Whenever I mention in Germany that I study in England, I normally hear a lot of praise, concerns about the amount of rainfall, the inedibility of fish and chips or a comment on the Queen. Whenever I mention in England that I grew up in Frankfurt, people come up with the following associations:

1. Frankfurt, ah yes, I’ve been there – but just at the airport!
2. Oh Frankfurt, so do you eat Frankfurter Würstchen?
3. Do you like Rammstein?
4. Tell me, what is it really like at the Oktoberfest?

To all of that, I could reply “Ah. No. Not really. Me?” If I then go on to explaining that I have never been at the Oktoberfest and that Bavaria is a very different story from Frankfurt, and that I am not a big fan of beer anyway – my audience reacts surprised; so I normally prefer to comment on the airport or the sausages.

From these first few associations we can make assumptions on how apt our own spontaneous associations when asked to comment on a place must be. I was relieved to notice that Hitler is not (or rather no longer) in the top 4 of associations in connection with Germany, neither are Lederhosen. This alone should be a reason to be grateful. That nobody asks about Hitler I mean. Because if they did I could probably not refrain from mentioning that I am Jewish. And then, the conversation knows no boundaries. “Jewish and you live in Germany? Germany! Of all places!” So back to the airport, quick. I have learnt a few random facts about the airport, so that I can say „did you know, that every 50 seconds a plane takes off?“ If that doesn’t guarantee a good start into a conversation!

Every time I land in London I am overwhelmed by the fact that I never have to carry my own suitcase. This certainty even led me to travel with three suitcases once, and indeed, I did not have to carry a single one of them. Despite all clichés of British coldness and aloofness, I personally have never experienced a warmer and more welcoming nation. People smile in the corridors of my University and talk on public transport. Unless it is rush hour. Rush hour in London, is probably best described as what Hobbes called the “state of nature”. Speaking of public transport, the tube goes right past my window in the beautiful house that I share with seven wonderful flatmates. They say – whatever is on the tube map counts as London, everything else lies in the suburbs. Therefore, we are very well connected.

On my first day of University I bumped into Christopher Pissarides, who had just won the Nobel Prize, he said it was a shame I did not study economics. I said, had I known that he would be my lecturer, I would

have. LSE is renowned for hosting big events and inviting high-profile speakers on to campus. I had the pleasure of hearing Gordon Brown joke about how his new won spare time led him to write his book. Gaddafi came to speak via a video link, the topic was “Libya’s position in the world”. But instead of making a speech, he simply asked us whether we have any questions. Whereupon one student asked “So...what is Libya’s position in the world?” Gaddafi replied “Libya lies south of Europe, between Tunisia, Algeria and Egypt...” Needless to say, it is a shame that more controversial questions were not asked that evening, yet I doubt that we would have gotten any honest answers.

I also saw Jeremy Hunt’s lecture being interrupted by a group of champagne socialist protesters shouting “Tory vulture - minister of culture,” blaming him for the rise of university fees. Talking of British politics, I had the pleasure of being part of a lobby group in Westminster, where we addressed the issue of hate speech on campus. We asked MPs and Lords to raise the matter in parliament, so that guidelines to prevent hate speech on campus can be implemented.

During my BA at the University of Manchester I used to write for the “Frankfurter Rundschau” as well as the “Bild” which is known for its simple and explosive language. However writing for the Bild did not impact the length of my sentences. My professor remarked my extraordinarily long sentences – typically German, he said smilingly. The editors of “The Beaver” luckily publish my long sentences and my professor still gave me a great mark for my essay on cosmopolitanism. The grade, coupled with a coffee and conversation with Ulrich Beck inspired me to pursue a PhD next year, on cosmopolitanism – a topic that has always intrigued me, yet I never dreamed of it to be a contemporary academic discipline. What can be better than developing a new empirical framework for an old idealistic project? I can not think of any better footsteps to walk in, than those of Anthony Giddens, David Held and Roger Silverstone, who founded the department that I am in. Who else, if not students of the LSE, know what it means to be what the Stoics called “a citizen of the world.” It is our everyday situation, we come from every nation. Yet, we love to speak one language, the language of academia. I have to say that I have never been more inspired and intellectually challenged than here, at the LSE. This is how I went from going to a school in Frankfurt to the Frankfurt School, whose ideology my media department is based on. I have covered my education at the LSE and my love for it, please excuse me for not talking about sex, but I had to chose a headline that would lure you in – and as Bernard Levin once remarked “the best headlines never fit.”

## Nevena Crljenko – A World Elsewhere

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Actually, it is the exact opposite of the temptation Odysseus faced when sailing by the Sirens' island. Warned that their song would charm anyone who hears it and drive them to their demise, he followed Circe's advice and filled his sailors' ears with wax and had himself tied to the ship so he could not act upon his desire and stray from course.

Temptation faced by the LSE students sometimes goes unrecognized until it's too late: it is a danger of never actually leaving the campus. The way we live now, marching to the rhythm of the LSE drums, it can easily happen that one wakes up the morning after graduation (or more likely, afternoon) only to realize they have spent every waking and a few sleeping hours between Houghton Street and Lincoln's Inn Fields, the only theatre whose inside they saw being the Peacock Theatre and not for attending a performance – though taking statistics class there did have a strong air of tragedy for most of the audience; in need of conducted tour of London after calling it home for a year and generally missing out on a vibrant and exciting scene offering virtually anything you can imagine – and things you never did imagine too, and that would be a shame.

For the most part, the LSE days are occupied by an intensive academic schedule, short breaks between topical debates over a cup of coffee or lunch and hours of reading in the library. Then there are POLIS dialogues, Literary Festival and public lectures that bring eminent speakers from all around the world, adding to a truly fascinating amount of challenging thoughts one encounters on a daily basis here.

Far from complaining, I am loving every minute of it, though the timetable of intellectually stimulating content is so dense, it can actually get frustrating: public events that take place simultaneously at the LSE make me practice my bilocation skills with fervour, and I am almost there – though I usually stop being here at that very moment. I also belong to a somewhat awkward group of people who can't get enough of new information and lively debates, and I actually find pleasure in the tranquillity that sets on the LSE library after midnight, settled comfortably in a beanbag reading, writing or just listening to music with my eyes closed, hoping all the knowledge bound in books will become part of my system by osmosis.

So one needs to be as cunning as Odysseus to keep in mind there's another world elsewhere – and step outside to find it. Or in the words of Lady Rosseter 'What does the brain matter, compared with the heart?'<sup>2</sup>

It would take much more than a thousand words to describe the worlds I have discovered outside the LSE - and mostly within the walking distance. So couple of stories will have to suffice.

A few days ago I saw Cory Arcangel's installation 'Beat the Champ'. The artist has programmed a series of self-playing bowling videos to constantly replay the losing game, so the ongoing attempts by virtual players hopelessly fail to hit a single pin. Watching the sequences of different games and their development since 1970s till early 2000s, in the darkness of a hall echoing loud synthetic sounds I

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<sup>2</sup> Not meant to be taken as a career advice.

couldn't help but wonder how the guard managed to bear the noise for hours. Sitting in darkness, as if programmed into the same game, deafened by the sound of bleeps and unable to escape - at least physically, as he was browsing the web on his phone – both tortured and rescued by technology. Leaving Barbican I pondered whether the idea of bowling alone being programmed to unavoidable failure would appeal to Robert Putnam.

Seeing Chekhov's plays in Russian is – much like studying at the LSE, for that matter - a privilege, so I wouldn't have missed the guest performance of Sovremennik Theatre for the world. Intermission discussions revolved around the theme we found resonating with contemporary world and in a way present in both plays: the question of change - the one we desire and the one which is thrust upon us to handle, with more or less success. While three sisters: Olga, Masha and Irina yearn for Moscow and the good life they had there before moving to the province, it remains a forever gone past ('If we only knew...If we only knew'), while in 'The Cherry Orchard', adaptation to the immense social changes proves beyond reach of Mme. Ranevskaya and her family. What would Chekhov think of the changes the world has undergone in the last hundred years, if he woke up in these times, for example in contemporary Britain, in a NHS hospital of all places? Well, I will find out soon enough – few weeks from now 'Chekhov in Hell' is performed in Soho Theatre.

Some older people look for familiar faces on the obituary pages of the papers – as a joke about this practice goes: a child asks a grandparent who's gazing at the pictures: 'So you're on Facebook again?' Looking at installation 'Obits', a part of Gabriel Orozco's exhibition in Tate Modern, I actually laughed out loud. Descriptions taken from the New York Times obituaries, such as 'Imperfect Baseball Deity', 'Horseman from an Aristocratic Family', 'Noted as an Iconoclast in Research, Politics and Religion' and many others show how funny, banal or pretentious results of a difficult task to reduce an existence to a sentence or two can be. Talking about his work, Orozco said: 'For me what is important is not so much what you see in the show, but what you see after, how your perception of reality is changed.' And this is exactly what I'm looking for - and finding - in this amazing experience of a lifetime crammed into a year in the heart of London. If you want my opinion (and if you don't you can just do the math), life consists of more than just three letters. Even if they are capitalized.

## Sri Ranjini Mei Hua – Swing

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“How do we get inside?” I asked, crouching lower with each step as I peered through the fence trying to figure out where the opening was so we could get inside. “Oh, we can go through there!” said my friend, Jen, pointing to an obscure location in the east. As we walked several more steps, we finally found the opening.

“Yayyy!!! Come on! There are empty seats!” I exclaimed as I hurried to fill the nearest vacant spot, dumping my bag on the ground before swooping into the swing. The playground was filled with little children shrieking with laughter and running about, oblivious to us ‘big kids’ who had just entered their realm of timeless fun.

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It was a Wednesday. A school day. But it was nothing like the typical school day I was used to where I’m from.

I headed out at noon to get some lunch. Not particularly concerned about how I looked as I wasn’t venturing far, I drew my hair back with a hair band, pulled on my maroon LSE sweatshirt, and a pair of old jeans.

On the way back to my apartment in Euston, I stopped to listen to a speech by a well-dressed young man at the entrance of Birkbeck College. Projecting his voice through a bull horn loudspeaker clasped firmly in his hand, he spoke about the need to protect university staff pensions, jobs and pay, while a row of students stood beside him holding a bright yellow banner with the words, “THE UNIVERSITY IS A FACTORY. STRIKE.” printed in bold red and green.

A crowd slowly started to form around the impassioned speaker. Gesticulating as he spoke, and varying the pace of his delivery, he seemed to captivate the surrounding audience of students, staff, and passers-by, myself included.

As he began reading out the names of particular universities that were involved in the strike action, he commended LSE for being a part of the movement, and I felt a great sense of pride. Indeed, all the more so wearing my LSE sweatshirt!

Because of the savage cuts on education and the ensuing increase in tuition fees as well as lower pensions, students and staff at LSE have come together in a spirit of solidarity to rally against these injustices. I’ve always admired the commitment to student activism at the LSE and across universities in London. In fact, the political vibrancy on campus was the first thing that struck me about the students here. They care enough. Not just about themselves, but about the welfare of others as well.

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“Come on, you’ve got to go higher than that!” I shouted, cheering Jen and Vidha on as I pushed off against the ground with my legs, creating momentum so that I could swing higher each time. I love the

adrenaline you get from being on a swing, cutting swiftly through the air as you surge into the sky. It's an inexplicable feeling that makes you feel like a child again. Carefree. Happy. Wild.

We were in Regent's Park; a place which always feels to me like a little slice of heaven on Earth. It's comforting to know that in the midst of such a pulsating city like London, you're never short of peaceful and inspirational scenery.

Jen, Vidha and I had decided to do something spontaneous since the glorious sun was up, and it was perfect weather for a day out. So we met at Camden and trawled through a huge maze of stalls in the open-air market. The diverse mix of people, food, sounds and smells made everything so alluring.

As the sun began to set, we made our way back, taking the scenic route through Regent's Park. That's how we stumbled upon the magical playground in the corner of the park.

I immediately caught sight of the swings. And the rest, as they say, is history.

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In a way, life at LSE, and London, in general, mimics the motions of a swing. Oscillating between high and low. You may find sometimes that the dull weather, coupled with a lack of vitamin D from sunlight is a recipe for dreariness. But at other times, like over the past few weeks, as spring approaches, and the flowers begin to bloom, you'll feel a spring in your step, and find that you can't stop smiling.

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Yet with each swing of the pendulum, it goes lower each time. Telling me my time here is almost up.

Friday. 25th March 2011. "It feels just like the first day when we were at orientation, doesn't it?" I said, turning to face Jen as I scanned the vibrant scene around me. It was almost like a flashback to our first day on campus. Some students were at booths selling tickets for their drama performance while others were spreading the word about the upcoming march and rally against cuts to public services. The only thing that felt different was the more relaxed atmosphere and the ease with which conversations flowed and greetings were exchanged.

"We've come a long way, haven't we?" Jen replied, creases forming on her sunburnt face as she smiled at me.

The temperature shot up to 17 °C today. Mind you, that doesn't happen very often in London, and when it does, you see throngs of students hanging around on campus just enjoying a cold beer or having a chat with friends.

Jen and I were sitting on the steps of St. Clement's building, directly facing the sun's rays. It was the end of term, we had just completed class, and were now enjoying being idle for a while. Quietly contemplating the time that we had spent at the LSE, we knew that this was not the end of our journey.

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It'll keep on swinging. Sometimes moving slowly at first, overcoming the initial inertia then gradually picking up speed, other times accelerating at a pace that makes you giddy. I don't think it'll ever stop. Nor do I want it to.

I'm just glad I got on the swing.

## Yangyang Fang – Get ready to battle

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“Darling! What can I get you?” From across the counter a loud Italian-scented voice procures from a beaming face. She always smiles, I think gratefully. The cup of instant *Douwe Egberts* she hands over eases my transition into superwoman mode.

With my very drinkable cup of 60p-Wright’s-Bar-coffee, and a free copy of the student union provided *International Herald Tribune* stuck under my armpit I stride down an already busy Houghton Street. Clearing my head with a puff of Malboro I silently rehearse my presentation while questions, like bullets, whistle past me from every direction. “Will you come to the protests against the cuts?” “Care to ask a question about Islam in exchange for a cookie?” “Want to make an educated guess at how many squashed cans fit in a cubic meter” “What’s your stance on the Palestine/Israel conflict?” Welcome to the daily battleground of young intellectuals where fierce argumentation is your weapon, evidence-based opinion is your shield and critical analysis is the road to victory.

Like the Chinese say, “the newborn calf is not afraid of the tiger”. Alongside our ardent attitude towards sniffing out the *cause of things*, this I find a good way of describing LSE mentality. We’re a curious bunch, and with deceptive naivety we appear to be fearless in treading contested theoretical grounds.

Coming from a mixed cultural background I find myself in the middle of my comfort zone. My Dutch pragmatism and no non-sense approach are equally well received as my random outbursts of Chinese proverbs and Chuang Tzu philosophy. Our heterogeneous student body is the anti-thesis of the *clash of civilizations* and throws even the faintest hint of *orientalism* far off the radar. International brainpower is, and hopefully will remain to be one of LSE’s greatest assets, though I must confess that the lack of English folk around has been detrimental for my initial resolution to adopt a British accent. Ah, you can’t have everything in life.

At LSE we train to become excellent jugglers of intellectual property. Auditing eight courses on top of the compulsory four I am thankful that at LSE ‘nerds’ are not considered obscure entities. Impressive jugglers we may be, it very soon becomes apparent that corporal and temporal limitations get in the way of quenching our intellectual thirst. “There.is.too.much.on.offer” resonate the frustrated voices that are having a beer in the 3tuns, and I agree. No, you can’t go to Niall Ferguson and Gordon Brown at the same time. And no, you can’t go to the Dan Ariely talk if you didn’t manage to secure a ticket. It’s a cultivated skill to choose your battles wisely and make well-informed allies. Academics are the biggest celebrities, and at LSE we’re all die-hard groupies.

As a graduate student I was initially not looking to invest in societies; why plant deep roots when you leave after a year? Well I'm glad Fresher's fair threw me off my *à propos* and prompted the subsequent re-construction of my agenda.

Monday night: Arabic class. Mumtaz! Practical benefits include earning shisha-points on Edgware road and gaining quasi-understanding of Qaddafi's satellite-enabled 'speech' in the New Academic Building.

Tuesday night: Whiskey tasting. Sgriobn! Practical benefits include strengthening friendship with Irish classmate and increase in body temperature for the walk along the Thames.

Wednesday night: Gallery opening. 'Remastered'! Practical benefits include networking in *haute couture* and in depth discussion with featuring artists.

Thursday night: Liferoom drawing. Perspective! Or the change thereof. Practical benefits include hand-eye coordination and an escape from words.

Friday night: Documentary screening. Witness! Practical benefits include free popcorn and an eye into foreign reality.

For me, it's the rich plethora of extracurricular activities that add spice to life in a concrete city under an often concrete-colored sky. At LSE we're good at striking near-perfect balance between work and play. One two one two. The ability to strategize cost/benefit is a trained mindset. Combat sleep deprivation with Bach at lunchtime concerts. Defy empty wallets with Hare Krishna. Catharsis in the George IV or spend Friday afternoon in the library? A silent recognition is passed when we brush shoulders in the course selection. "The golden house is embedded in the books", a Song-dynasty Emperor once said. Alcohol-instilled venting can wait.

I am member of the social psychology battalion. Relatively unknown to ourselves, we have been branded as mind readers. But fear not. In the Institute of Social Psychology it is not the art of telepathy we practice but Vygotskian higher mental functions, Tomasello's shared intentionalities, and social

representation Moscovici-style. Yes, we do a bit of Freud too. But only in discussion of our discontents with the civilization we are to be change-makers in.

Class is like a heated delivery room. Questions continue to give birth to more questions, which – more often than I would like to admit – lead to jarred brain spaces that surface as constipated expressions on my face. I remember at the end of last term, in a concluding session of a course, the professor asked if we had gained a clearer sense on the subject matter. Silence. “You seem like you want to say something”. Under-breath curse. My face had given me away once again. “I have so many things to say, I...I just feel that everything I used to take as truth has been contested, dissected, regurgitated and now I feel a lot more confused than before.” Surprisingly, the professor seemed content.

That’s what I take home from LSE: the creation of so-called ‘structural confusion’ and intellectual machete wounds. No spoon-feeding, no sympathy, no time for lagging behind and no working heaters in Clement House. *This* is how steel is made. Howard Davies may have warned us about washing our underwear, but he didn’t warn us for the knowledge discourse that enfolds itself under the red logo.

Tomorrow is another day of library quarantine. “Darling! What can I get you?” Snap, engage in superwoman mode.

*I go to LSE.*

*I am an intellectual.*

*I think big.*

*I read books.*

*I have content.*

*I will get a proper job and get rich quick.*

Amidst recent economic downfalls and prospective education ‘debt’-sentences a little self-affirmation is critical to battling deadlines and hangovers.

## Kerry-Rose O'Donnell – Pinstripes and Placards

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I hated lawyers. I hated economists too. I even had a poignant distaste for political scientists. LSE drew me in like a giant left-wing time bomb laced with a Fabian sense of betterment. A place not only where the world came to think, but one which carried the voice of Marshall Bloom in a hub of political activism. A memorandum of the Red Flag hanging from a window above the Students' Union celebrating Labour's 1945 victory.

Fresher's week. High Holborn. Excitement and open-minded anticipation in tow. Political playing cards at the ready. I trawled the streets of Covent Garden in awe at this sudden cultural emersion. I wondered past the Royal Opera House, Wagner's shifting tonal centres harmonised my determined thoughts of visiting all seven of the theatres that occupied my immediate vicinity.

Unlike common freshman reservations, as I queued outside Clement House on registration day and watched the span of the globe in student form pass me by, I was genuinely worried. Worried because I found it impossible to differentiate between 'micro' and 'macro' economics. Worried that I would never be able to help the Canadian tourists emerging from the Travelodge on Drury Lane to find their way to Piccadilly Circus. Worried because the guy behind me was from Djibouti, which sounded to me more like the name of one of the Premier League's latest signings than an actual country.

Besides, I had once inappropriately laughed when asked if I would "read from the bar upon graduating from the LSE", mistaking the enquiry to be a pun on student alcoholism. Even my father could scarcely envisage my penchant for celebrity gossip magazines being shouldered by a subscription to *The Economist*.

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Sunrise. Southampton Row. Southbound. Rush hour. Holborn Station. I enter the world of business leaders, court judges, government officials and LSE academics. Lecture notes in hand, a plethora of critical analysis pushing at the sides of my brain, lusting attractive debate, I rushed to my first class.

My heart sank low enough that I could feel it beating through the soles of my feet. My eyes drowned in a sea of corporate dress and briefcases. City gents accompanied my walk across campus. I thought I had somehow, during my short commute to class, been transported to an Eton finishing school.

Kingsway became awash with a great sea of Saville Row suits. I stopped to marvel at this rare breed. Playing spot the LSE student among the commuters dissolving into the grey midst that engulfs the Royal Courts of Justice proved more difficult than writing an original PhD Philosophy thesis. Heads buried in iPads, these 'students' would next be seen making the 10AM post-lecture stampede to the library computers. Spotted: the ghost of Goddard walking between ignorance and barbarism, debating the ethics of capital punishment. Economics hand in hand with Political Science on either side respectively.

The words of the 1980s Students' Union slogan, "Education is a right not a privilege" grew hazy, replaced by swarms of David Camerons. Half of them 'going green', making their journey by bicycle only to have their chauffeur driven Jaguar creeping two feet behind. I half expected they were donning t-shirts bearing Ronald McDonald's capitalist face with the slogan, "a true hero of our time".

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It's late October 2009. I am on the brink of abandoning any hope of student dissatisfaction to cave in to the belief that the LSE is nothing more than an impersonal, investment bank nursery. A disenchanted fork in the road between the City and Westminster. 6PM. *BBC Evening News*. I am made to revisit my disgust over the odious Nick Griffin's appearance on *Question Time*. Disgust however, quickly subsides to fascination when I recognise a number of my LSE peers fronting the protests at the BBC gates. Houghton Street is submerged into a 'Unite Against Fascism' battleground.

The next year transforms the Aldwych crescent into a platform for national and international campaign. A triumphant nod back to the politically enhanced history I had first seen plastered across the Student's Union handbook. Images that had brought me to the LSE in the first place. The cure for a heartless summer internship with Goldman Sachs I have found, is to stand on Houghton Street with a placard denouncing banker's bonuses. Spending cuts. Tuition fee rises. Israel, Egypt, Libya, Japan. Every phone in the Student's Union rings off the hook with the world's media eager for a piece of the action. Editors at *The Beaver* swap their Sunday night whiskey for Red Bull as they document the latest revelations.

'Baby Tembo' sits on Clare Market wedged between a future Nobel Prize winner and the next US Presidential Advisor. Bronze ears pricked, he catches their debate over the sudden resignation of

Howard Davies. A motionless trunk picks up the scent of hard-up students lining for Hare Krishna's daily rounds. Two stone eyes follow an undergraduate from Bangladesh, flying past Saint Clements to chair an emergency occupation meeting in The Quad, the cold London air crusting the multicolour of Holi festival paints masking his face. To quote the Director, the LSE truly is "a global village at the heart of London".

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Sunset. Southampton Row. Northbound. Rush hour. I pass crowds of LSE Alumni, one an aging City banker who clutches his *Herald Tribune*. The publication he conveniently takes a detour down Houghton Street every morning to pick up for free, just as he did four decades earlier. The 91 crawls past the eloquent throng of live *Grazia* clippings that infuse Central Saint Martins. But I no longer wonder whether I have missed my stop. It was then that I realised. I do not hate lawyers. Nor do I dislike economists. And I certainly have no qualms with political scientists. I merely hold abhorrence to the disjointed stereotypes that they are thrown into. I often wondered how I would fit in to LSE and into London, but that is the beauty that makes LSE so great; everyone is the same in that everyone is an individual. Everyone is engaged. Not only does the LSE understand the causes of things, it strives to *be* the causes of things.

After all, I am allowed to fly my metaphorical red flag from a window above the Student's Union.

## Marion Koob – How lucky we are

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It is eerily quiet. In the sixth floor of St Clement's, at the very roof of the Economics department, a student has fallen asleep alone, in one of the four compartments of the study space. A glance at her notes reveal that she is in second year, taking one of the School's most subscribed – and demanding – courses. After half an hour of undisturbed slumber, she arises as normal, and steps out to fill her water canteen. Turning back to my own work, I ready myself for the next round of hours spent hunched over the wooden desk.

It is from the windows of this very same room that I often peer into those of the library, the building standing across the plaza. The students there seem as if within a mirror, in a parallel world, so similar their posture and manner is to the one of my own surroundings. Twiddling a strand of hair, picking up a pen, turning a page... side by side, elbow to elbow, and sitting in the near religious, devotional silence which is deemed proper to study spaces at the LSE.

Take later on in the evening, however, when the campus inhabitants, most often alone, walk beyond Houghton Street, Aldwych, Kingsway, or Holborn. Several will head to lecture theatres, witnessing what really ought to be called something otherwise than 'public lectures'. Simply put, their scope goes beyond the ordinary dimension which conveys the word 'lectures'. These speakers often come from far away, with in their minds crisp-new ideas. This week only, David Miliband, Frances Kamm, and Kenneth Shepsle are visiting campus. The awe of attending these events perhaps fades with habit, but with time they also sharpen the critical eye. Some visitors, we come to learn, are much better thinkers and writers than speakers. Heads of state, ministers in office, never allow themselves to diverge from their official angle, something so obvious that its reality is surprising. And in a campus tradition initiated by Nelson Mandela's visit in 2000, former and current world leaders don the LSE cap at the end of their speech.

There are students who queue early in winter mornings, for a ticket to see the 'greats'. The announcement of a new visit generates excited whispers, and even hints of envy among friends, not all of which manage to obtain a seat. An acquaintance sneaks in to take pictures for *The Beaver*. Every evening, after each event, he uploads these images methodically onto his computer.

'These are to remind me of how lucky I've been', he explains.

It is so easy to forget that we are circled, by one side, by a financial powerhouse, most representative of the UK economy's health and illness, and by the other, the houses of government. Yet, the School presence in the city means more. London has transcended its 'domestic' boundaries, much like the LSE. Both have become international centres, to which individuals of all cultures gravitate. Diversity is rampant, thriving, and joyous. Each group demonstrates unbeatable pride. Political debates along these lines-and any other, for that matter, are taken seriously; perhaps, at times, too much so. And gradually and ever so cautiously, groups are beginning to intermingle that one day the school may pride itself in

having rejuvenated the culture of the international citizen.

These international citizens will have a concern for the world, and how the social sciences can improve economic and governmental performance, and ultimately lead to better societies. But, 'what is better?', should automatically question an able graduate. Among the peaks of ambition which inhabit many who aim to work in lucrative industries-notably the financial- among even the tense and overcrowded career fairs (filled to the brim by anxiously suited students) exists, I insist, an essence of optimism. A daring belief that social sciences can make the world more efficient, more utility-maximizing, or better governed.

In short, what makes the beauty this-our- institution young with tradition, at times shaken by the equal strength of its relations with the private and the public, is that it has not yet lost its dedication. The most unsung of its qualities is, above all, its driven work ethic. Those entrepreneurial, whether in the realms of business, academia, or political mobilisation, are respected for their efforts. Looking beyond these strengths, internationalism is LSE's yet untapped potential. Cultivating the ethic of a world citizen is what the School ultimately, should aspire to complete.

## Alice Fonarev – Balancing Acts

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### *Prologue*

The worst ailment for a student is the blockage of the mind. Over-consumption of any one thing – whether of alcohol or caffeine, or of typing and reading – is the suspected cause and the consequences include hollow eyed anxious pacing between library stacks, hair pulling, or else general social feebleness. But cause and consequence are not the subject at this juncture. Instead, I will recollect through a series of musings the ways in which this deadly condition may be alleviated. LSE enthusiasts, take note.

### *Those Days*

I groggily rolled out of bed on a particularly memorable Monday and swaggered towards Fleet River Bakery to meet my friend for brunch near campus. The bakery is one of those genuine foodie finds where enthusiastic baristas scoop up ever-changing quiche creations and foamy expert coffee to queueing loyalists from around the area.

The sharp smell of espresso hit my senses when I opened the door and I already felt more awake. I barely sit down before my friend interrupts my inner recalls of the weekend that past, his brow furrowed in intense concern.

“I’ve come to the *determined* conclusion that environmental conservation cannot be reconciled with capitalism.”

Aah, it will be one of *those* days.

I heartily debate the merits of his argument as we load our bellies with steaming lattes and fresh jam pastries. The gears in my head, slowed slightly over a weekend’s romp through London’s East End drinking establishments, begin to spin with ease again as thoughts unwind and stream forth like rays of light.

An hour later we emerge, the contours of our minds refreshed by their morning stretch, and walk along the greening Lincoln’s Inn Field to class.

### *Urban Essence*

I had been too distracted for weeks, scurrying in the inner mazes of London, between buildings, shops, tiny like an ant in piles of sand. Shops, restaurants, windy streets, endless streams of movement – sometimes you just need to stop, feel stillness, nature, vast space. I felt a pull to nature, and desired to go to a countryside somewhere even for a night, how much I needed that vast stillness for inspiration

and for patient motivation to do the tasks I'll have to do over the next few months. But I had forgotten that in London, you never have to go too far for what you want.

Suddenly, after a tired school day, I found myself at Waterloo bridge and saw before me a little piece of inspiration – calmness which I had been craving for so long. Here I stood high on the bridge, saw the water moving and felt big again, like I could see above the city's absorbing limbs. I looked out, saw water glistening slowly below, the perennial creations of man engraved in time, the moon arched above. Exalted, I took deep breaths and smiled.

### *Dinner for Twenty*

One day, Gokul burst into our shared kitchen late at night as I conversed with another floor-mate.

“I'm going to cook a traditional Indian dinner tomorrow! Cancel your plans!”

“Okay...”. He left before we could say much else.

In our large and international kitchen, we've promised to cook different cuisines for each other, but we had never followed through. At this hour, we thought Gokul was calling another bluff.

But my skepticism quickly changed as a fog of spicy air hit me as I got home the next day. I wearily peeped into the kitchen from the hall and felt like I walked in behind the scenes of another part of the world. Pots and pans bubbled with curry on the stove and tandoori chicken lined on trays waiting to be browned. In between, Gokul and two friends from India darted between dishes.

He's actually done it.

I joined the other twenty or so impressed individuals musing in astonishment at Gokul's unexpected feat. That night, rice steamed, curry stewed, drinks flowed and conversation only stopped for muffled chews. We shared our commons and discussed our joys and sorrows, and got a little piece of somewhere new without even leaving home.

### *Saturday Sun*

The sun was beckoning to me from the window all morning and I had been trying to work to no avail, so I gathered all my strengths and stuffs and bolted out of my room. I strolled across Embankment Bridge and along the sunny South bank. People were everywhere, cheerfully wearing shades, basking on benches, and eating ice cream cones.

I walked briskly toward Borough market with a mission for distraction and met a new mass of happy people meandering through the stalls. Excitingly, I began with a wheat-grass shot and a fruit smoothie on a previous recommendation, and then sought to look around. There were grocers, meat stands, fishmongers, artisan cheeses, olives, oils, spreads, goodies, and breads. I got a scope of the land, picked

up a sample or two, and did a few rounds of wide-eyed exploration before settling on the shops and groceries I liked. Whether it was from joy or samples of wine-infused cheese, I felt refreshed again. I walked back, exhausted and loaded down with goods. As I neared home again, I remembered my work and the answers I needed flowed easily again in my head. Satisfaction.

### *Ferguson's Class*

Every week, the postgraduates in the international history department have the chance to listen to a particularly tendentious lecture series on the topic of western empire. Without fail, the discussion heartily continues once the class is done, as we spill out of the theatre and onto the street and slowly move toward the George for a pint.

On this particular day, challenge turns to cheers, and someone says, "let's go out, the night is young!" We drink and dance, stay merry through the boisterous night. Waves of fulfilment pulse through my soul.

The wheels keep spinning, no end in sight. In the morning, who know what awaits? A trip to the ballet, strolls through Covent Garden, midday sun, cafes, bookshops, stories, dusk till dawn.

*Fin.*

A STEP INTO THE ‘DREAMHOUSE’

STORY TREATMENT

Ding-dong. It is the postman, holding a fairly large envelope. Wonder what's inside. A soft silky piece of paper pops up. Now, I am excited. Looks like, it's an invitation to a ball. How much I have been hoping I would receive this is another story.

After a long journey, I finally make it to the glorious mansion. Immediately, a handsome, vigorous man comes up and opens the door. "Welcome! We have been expecting you. My name is Leopold Shaw Ellis. Please enjoy your time here." I start to like this place, already. As soon as I step inside, I'm mesmerized by the diversity of the people. I introduce myself and join the conversation. "Although I'm fascinated by him, there is something really doomed about Schopenhauer's philosophy..." says a young man who is an economist from Horsham. "You know Wagner was heavily influenced by his ideas, which can be seen in Tristan and Isolde..." a Frenchman comments. Before I realize, we are already talking about Wagner and Hitler's fondness of him. "We will be staging our production of 'The Fear and Misery of the Third Reich' by Bertolt Brecht soon. Would you be interested in producing it?" he continues in response to hearing about my passion of the subject and the arts, especially the theater. "Let's start auditioning on Monday!" I scream to his face. What a curious and exciting crowd! As I turn to pick up a glass of fino amontillado, you wouldn't believe who I saw in the next room, giving a speech on 'the impact of politics on economy in Turkey'. It's Kemal Kılıçdaro•lu, the leader of the main opposition Republican People's Party in Turkey. I had some questions I wanted to ask him for a long time. Can't believe he is standing across the room.

After a serious conversation with Mr. Kılıçdaro•lu, I decide to relax and enjoy my drink in the room above where Spontini's La Vestale is playing. How I love this piece. A gentleman enters and asks for the time. He comments on how he thinks La Vestale is Maria Callas' greatest performance. Finding out he is a Callas fan, I recommend him to go and see Manhattan Theatre Club's upcoming production of 'Master Class', a play by Terrence McNally and his homage to Maria Callas. Before I leave, he invites me to a private event next door where invitations are required. Generous enough, he offers me one. Before I refuse, he lets me get a peak into what's going inside from the backdoor. I'm in awe. I don't know how to put it into words. Oh wait. I'm staring at a teary-eyed Stephen Sondheim and Cameron Mackintosh who are captivated by Angela Lansbury's live performance of "Liaisons". Attending the Olivier Awards may as well be one of the highlights of my year. And yes, Sondheim is a legend, an emotional one indeed.

I'm starving. Wondering if there is anything at all that I like, I enter the kitchen. What is this place! It's humongous! To explain it briefly, there are street performers, espresso bars and a bunch of lovely people offering all kinds of foods. They call it the 'Garden Market' room. What a strange name but I am not leaving before I take a bite of some of these delicious crepes, a young man is offering in the corner. I am sending a Crepe Monsieur over to Mr. Sondheim. There is

nothing like a ham and cheese crepe to cheer one up. But what is this noise? They sound like horrendous screams! Should I even consider exploring it? Apparently some part of me did, as I found myself in row D seat 22. It was Frankenstein! Fine...the stage version of it directed by Danny Boyle where the roles of the Creature and Frankenstein were alternated by Jonny Lee Miller and Benedict Cumberbatch. Nevertheless, it was a viscerally exciting show that was at times truly frightening.

It's getting dark but this place and the people in it look and feel timeless. Nothing ever is the same. All I wonder is what is next. I look out the window. It's cold, it's dark and it's feels like a Sunday. Thinking maybe I need a break, a group of us decide to go to Paris. I scribble some of these memories on an old receipt as I enjoy a lovely breakfast at the café, 'Les Deux Magots' on 68 Boulevard St. Germain. It's been an adventurous escapade, but I must admit, I miss the old man and the manor.

It's been almost six months since I have been a guest at Mr. Leopold Shaw Ellis' manor. No doubt, I have had the best days and experiences of my life, but I still can't get over the fact that I am only a guest here for just another six more months. Now tell me, how can one leave such a place and these people? It's the dreamhouse. It has been my dreamhouse. I guess Schopenhauer had his reasons for being a pessimist and certainly was right when he said happiness is not the point when it comes to love. I will be forever grateful to Mr. Leopold Shaw Ellis who has given me this chance to meet extraordinary people but above all for an invaluable insight into my future plans. After all, just as Dr. Samuel Johnson once said, "By seeing London, I have seen as much of life as the world can show". Now let's see what's going on next-door...Knock knock!

Houghton Street is a TV news program with a life of its own. Events that happen everywhere in the world are somehow reflected in this short and narrow avenue. The students, professors, campus workers and anonymous individuals, take the responsibility to perform and transmit it from this limited space between the buildings. If there is something going on out there, it will probably be shown in Houghton's screen in 3 dimensions.

London is a unique type of city where it is possible to go unnoticed while trying to change the world. In this busy and multicultural city, you decide what role to take. Here it is difficult to judge by appearances, and first impressions often prove useless. London is the location for bizarre fashion, where all colors are combinable and no complement is excessive. The girl with blue hair wearing pants with holes and a radioactive yellow sweater always comes up with solid, articulated, and precise arguments in class. Unbelievable, unmatched, incoherent? In most of the cities where I have been, what you read, speak, how you dress or sing is a basic summary of what you are. That is not the case in the British capital, or at least, among its students.

Like a globe toy on a nightstand, this city provides a mini-world with an enormous range of opportunities that are at your fingertips. Tomorrow is the Oktoberfest, later on the Guy Fawkes Fireworks, then the Chinese New Year's celebration, and soon, next month there will be the Mexican week. If elections are being celebrated in a country, you will probably be following them and nervously counting votes. If a football match final is taking place, you are very likely to end up watching it and wearing the T-shirt of one of the teams. If there have been murders in Colombia or media censorship in Venezuela, you might be joining the protest. If there is a natural disaster in Asia, you will feel the responsibility to take part in a charitable campaign. But the most important fact here is that in most cases, none of those activities will share your nationality. However, this is the tempo that rules the campus. Your colleagues are the musical notes that teach you how to dance it, and the worldwide events are the instruments to play the song. You are free to move as you wish, though once infected by this dynamic life style, you will get to the final year of your studies wanting something more than a diploma from a prestigious school.

In addition to all these flow of movements, feelings and experiences, you have to write essays, do presentations and pass the exams. *'Dear London School of Economics and Political Science: Are you kidding me?'* Thus, there are some rules that you need to know in order to survive LSE life. Rule number 1: learn how to 'dodge obstacles' in Houghton Street - otherwise, you won't get to class on time and meet your essays' deadlines. Rule number 2: create your

own criteria of involvement by selecting clubs or causes that you are interested in, or else your experience at LSE will have been for nothing. The fight for rights in China, the earthquake in Haiti, the European rescue of Greece and Ireland, the Egyptian revolution, the tsunami in Japan, the intervention in Libya, all these changing human phenomena suddenly take part of your life from thousands of miles away. You might not know what is going on in Yemen, or you may not even know where Yemen is located, but if the student body is concerned, it is very likely that you will join them in their concern. In addition to the LSE campus, the city of London is invaded by a continuous wave of culture, knowledge, opportunities, colors, and languages: each one of us has to decide how to embrace it. And the best part of this is the fact that your only responsibility as a student is to let this wave absorb you and help you express your thoughts. Why not joining the Pakistan's traditional dance going on at Clare Market? Will I ever have the opportunity to do this again?

Students here have the energy to follow this rhythm, and big cities like London are able to provide the musical outlet. Committing to obstacles and taking part in campus life is a unique curriculum. When you arrive to LSE, you normally question why international media come to campus to ask students for opinions every time political or social events occur. We - the young people that get drunk on Fridays- suddenly are a relevant and essential source of opinion and information. However, after learning how to walk through Houghton Street, all these makes much more sense.

*'Why would you choose a country, such as England to study at coming from sunny Spain?'* This is the key question everyone asked me in the elevator when complaining about the British weather. Now I have learned not to grumble about the cloudy, foggy and rainy British climate. Students in London do not complain in the elevators, they act - or at least they scream- and that is the main difference. Instead of watching the drops fall through the window, they teach you how to wear boots and raincoats - even in the galas. Because as the song used to say: *'I am never gonna stop the rain by complaining...'*