

# INTRODUCTION

Dear Readers,

Welcome to volume 13 of the SOAS Journal of Postgraduate Research. It is our pleasure to introduce you to our writers and their work, whom we have selected to celebrate the first – and hopefully, not last! – fifteen years of activity of this volunteer-and-student-led academic publication.

The SJPR came to life for the first time in 2005, when a group of members of the Research Student Association decided to start a publication to showcase the interdisciplinarity and diversity of SOAS postgraduate students' research. The original name, Polyvocia, reflected their intention which for several years was carried forward by new researchers and members of the RSA. The torch of the Journal was hence passed from student to student for many years, until the enthusiasm faded away and the publication was stopped.

It was in 2010 that, thanks to the brilliant minds and vision of Romina Istratii and Monika Hirmer, the Journal came back to life as a open-access and academic publication. The hard and enlightened work of Romina and Monika made the Journal one of the publications recognised by the British Library; established the Journal's annual conference; and, ultimately, rekindled the students' interest in engaging in a cross-department and interdisciplinary conversation. Research students, once again, had a place where to express themselves and to nourish that warming feeling of being part of a community.

In 2019, Romina and Monika's vision was further developed by Federica Gamberini, Natalia Metveeva and Iris Lim. Engaging the Doctoral School into the conversation, the SJPR was restructured into a more organic, compartmentalised and professional publication; a new review process was established, reaching an amazing record of thirty-three submission in one round; the first handbook of the journal was (finally) written; and a conversation to restructure the Journal's webpage started.

The SJPR's journey, as the academic publication you see now, was long and full of pitfalls. Yet, the commitment of all the people involved and the passion of its writers (and editorial team) kept the publication alive. The SJPR has been and will be for many a lighthouse for those of us who navigate the conundrum of academic research. It is a space for our community to thrive and for our mind to be broadened to new perspectives and horizons.

For this reason, the writers you read in this issue are the best of the best of our community, chosen to showcase to the world what a SOAS research student is all about. Spacing through time and places, the issue is a celebration of SOAS community as an interdisciplinary and open space of discussion, just as our founders envisioned it.

This year's issue opens with a Maya Bhardwaj's article "**FEMINIST SOCIAL MOVEMENT UNIONISM FROM SOUTH TO NORTH**" on trade unionism, coalitions and social movement as labour relocates between the Global North to the Global South. In particular, Bhardwaj's article offers an interesting perspective on how a successful collaboration between unions and non-union social movement can exhibit explicitly feminist and decolonial modes of organising.

The first part of this issue will, then, take our readers to Asia, exploring artistic movements, traditions and social issues across time and space. This section opens with Sakhi Nitin Anita's article "**GEET GA RAHE HAI AAJ HUM**" on music sung and performed in the contemporary women's movement(s) in the 1970s India. Tracing the genealogy and context of the songs, Sakhi also traces the 'flow' of the women's movements and maps the emergence and shifts of a feminist discourse in India. On the same note, Aditya Mohaman's article "**SOUNDS FROM A SILENCED DIVINITY**" explores the ritual art form known as "Theyyam", an annual recurrence in the South India state of Kerala. By exploring this ritual, Mohaman's work highlights how knowledge is ultimately a product of social hierarchy and form of expressions embedding social discrepancy.

In this section, we also find articles exploring both Mainland China and the complicated situation with the nearby Hong Kong and Taiwan. On one hand, Chih-en Chen's article

“**RHETORICAL SPACE**” explores the hybrid innovation of *yangcai*, as a revival of pictorial techniques on porcelain familiar to the Buddhist tradition but with influences from European pictoriality. Chen’s argument that this blend of techniques is a reflection of Emperor Qianlong’s multicultural background offers a compelling and fascinating perspectives on painted porcelain in China as an artistic form bridging the East and the West. On the other hand, Aubury Huang’s article “**LATE MING COURTESAN CULTURE AND CHINA’S GENDER SYSTEM**” sheds a new light into the late Ming gender system. Adopting a gender perspective on late Ming’s courtesans, the writer explores how the role of the courtesans was both defined by the market economy and the patriarchal system, ultimately preventing domestic women from entering the public realm while reinforcing the husband–wife hierarchy.

Lastly, taking us back to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century China, Eva Mazzeo’s article “**THE “HONG KONG FACTOR”**” offers an interesting perspective on the political scenario in Taiwan in the aftermath of the events occurred in Hong Kong in 2019. In particular, Mazzeo’s article tackles sheds some light on the political discourse strategies put into place by the Democratic Progressive Party and the Kuomintang in Taiwan as influenced by the “Hong Kong factor.”

The second part of this issue will take the readers to Africa where Danny Sanders’ article “**100% TZ FLAVA**” enlighten us all on the hybrid nature of hip hop from Tanzania and Zanzibar. Following this genre’s development since 1990s, the article shows how hip-hop artists draw from both local and global influences, letting this musical genre acquiring a new social meaning for the Swahili community in the East African Coast.

The third part of this issue will take our readers to the Middle East, with two articles challenging the perception we have of the cultural groups in this area. David Spence’s article “**FROM VICTIMS TO COLONIZERS**” uses historical analysis to explore the idea of repatriated indigenous communities, shedding light on the migration of Israelis and Liberians. In the article, Spence analyses how Israelis and Liberians people’s migration from Europe to the West Africa and Palestine can be considered a form of aggressive colonisation of these two areas. Instead, Anastasia Modestou’s article “**FAIRUZ AS A NATIONAL SYMBOL**” studies the disputes of the religious communities in Lebanon and

the ways these communities are unified through the music. This aspect, which is seldom examined in current academic works on Lebanese national identity, is explored in the paper by taking into account Lebanon's brief history, hence reinforcing the idea that music could be a powerful tool to create a sense of national identities among Lebanese communities.

The fourth and last regional section will take our readers back to Europe. Finlay McIntosh's article "**LET'S MAKE THEM HEAR IT IN EUROPE**" explores how social media have become a powerful tool changing the face of protest in the modern world. McIntosh's fieldwork and interviews, in particular, explore this argument by showing how London-based Chilean protest group, *Asamblea Chilena en Londres*, uses social media to mobilise Chilean communities both locally and globally.

Last but not least, this year's issue concludes with an opinion piece and a book review. On one hand, Abhishek Mohanty's piece on human and big data judgement discusses how the negotiations of big data by users should be resituated in the everyday space, and repositioned as not between human and computer-based judgements, but between the potentialities of *becoming*-human of big-data and *becoming* big-data of the user. On the other hand, Mihaela Cojocaru's book review of Iginio Gagliardone's "The Politics of Technology in Africa" explores how African countries, particularly Ethiopia, are not only passively accepting Information and Communication Technologies, but these countries are also actively using these technologies to develop.