

Skepseis

The Political Science and Sociology Programme Newsletter



INSIDE THE ISSUE

| | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| Editorial | 2 |
| From the desk of the Programme Leader | 2 |
| An Ode to Skepseis | 2 |
| Faculty Insights | 3 |
| Intern @ RTC | 3 |
| Department Activities | 4 |
| Department Activities | 5 |
| Alumni goes to Cambridge | 6 |
| Exchange Experience | 7 |
| Book Reviews | 8 |

The important thing is to not stop questioning.
- Albert Einstein

Editorial

'One is too small a number to achieve greatness,' John Maxwell noted, as he proposed 'the law of significance,' in his *17 Indisputable Laws of Teamwork Workbook*. 'Teamwork is at the heart of all great achievement,' he went on. Talk about accomplishments in history, from Lincoln, to Dorothy Day, or Gandhi, or Martin Luther Jr. King, all of them had a team, and they worked together, to achieve great things. As early as the first century CE, the Jewish texts noted, it was their custom to travel in pairs, especially at night. This, they interpret, was primarily to encourage and strengthen the other when they become downcast or depressed among strangers, and in turn to remain committed to the objectives.

Building a team, and/or working in a team is however usually very challenging - especially if one has to deal with team member (s) who we think is/are not 'performing.' This quandary adds to the already existing larger discussion on humans as a social animal, in need of socialising, in need of each other, to get almost anything done in a highly diversified world. Many students, if not most, detest group projects. Many find the idea burdensome. Skepseis team inverted that attitude, it defied the notion of an onerous team work. Each of the nine member team - from planning to execution, of many events that were undertaken throughout the semester - put aside their own individual needs and whims, to achieve the objective of the group. Putting their differences aside (although they had very few or none), they cooperated and collaborated with each other.

In all of these, two things stood out starkly: their generosity and humility. These two qualities made the team very effective and boosted the team synergy. They were generous in investing their time, and being selfless. They also showed great humility. The choice of deploying one's resources or influence for the good of others. The team used all its ability for the sake of others. Skepseis then exemplified the importance of deep and enduring community feeling, in their work. For that, I would like to commend them all.

— Roderick Wijunamai, Editor

From the Desk of the Programme Leader

As this newsletter reflects, this semester was a very happening one. For one thing, there was the first Skepseis Day that included debates, panels, quizzes, songs, dances, games and much more. The Skepseis team had prepared for this since the beginning of the fall semester, and their dedicated vision bore fruit in what became a memorable day. Additionally, this semester's Skepseis' Distinguished Guest Lecture was delivered by the Hon'ble Justice Lungten Dubgyur who spoke about the evolution of criminal law in Bhutan, and very engagingly at that. Skepseis also organised two movie-evenings, both of which culminated into interesting and critical debate.

Not only in relation to Skepseis, this semester witnessed plenty of activities, including students' fieldtrips, student and faculty exchanges (3 POL-SOC faculty will be going for an exchange to VU University in The Netherlands this winter), guest-speakers from within and outside the department, research projects conducted, or that are still ongoing, that engage both faculty and students, sporting achievements, and much more. Many such activities and initiatives are reported in this newsletter.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank Mr. Sarbajeet Mukherjee who is leaving our programme at the end of this semester, and so after 4.5 years of dedicated service. On behalf of the entire programme, I would like to extend my gratitude to him and to wish him all the very best in his future endeavours.

— Dr. Jelle JP Wouters, PL

An Ode to the Skepseis Team

The idea of Skepseis, which started as a Department Newsletter in Fall 2018 has evolved in diverse ways in just three semesters. As someone who has been on the team, I noticed that enthusiasm among students in the Department has no bounds. Since I am going to part ways with the team, I thought that I should express my gratitude of working with them.

Let me begin with the most recent events. Skepseis Day, as you can see in this edition was a grand success. The kind of activities planned out were diverse and there was something for everyone. The fact that almost all students stayed back on campus till 7:30 pm on a Friday says a lot. The basic idea of Skepseis to think in ways we are generally challenged to do was well displayed. While the Quiz encouraged competitive spirit and tested the students' knowledge, panel discussions on crucial and relevant topics provided the space for students to think beyond what happens inside a classroom. The happy spirit of the students was infectious in the Executive Centre. The most important fact to be noted here is the way in which students of all the three cohorts came together, despite hectic schedules. It didn't stop with fun activities. A majority of the students stayed back to clean up the place. They were not just intelligent and slightly better informed students by the end of the day, but also responsible adults. This goes well with RTC's vision of holistic development of students. Because, what sense does it make if we are the smartest and the richest, but...

Experiences, Anxieties and Aspirations amongst RTC students

Kuenzang Norbu (3rd year student) and Dr. Jelle Wouters, in their Insight presented *RTC as a site and space of societal change*. As an institution, they highlighted, RTC is situated at the vanguard of the Bhutanese society that is to come; as young adults hover around intellectual, emotional, and professional maturity, and usually just prior to the roles and responsibilities of family and employment, young adults, they posit, are engaged in highly personalized quests of self-discovery (or self-making) and both speculate and worry about the road that lies ahead. Against this background, their seminar discusses the aspirations, experiences and apprehensions RTC students articulate.



Regulatory capture and food safety policy in India

Ms. Adazia in her Insight seminar discussed the food safety standards adopted by India in relation to international food safety standards. Her presentation looked at the harmonization of this safety standards, in the context of trade and also the subsequent setting up of Food Safety and Standards Authority of India as the apex regulatory body. In her exploration, the seminar unraveled the workings of the mechanism behind the setting of the standard, and India's contribution to it.

An Ode to the Skepseis Team (contd.)

...lack responsibility and compassion as adults?

Rewinding a bit, the inaugural Skepseis lecture took place in Spring 2019. Bringing in a noted journalist to speak to the students, in a country where journalism does not thrive for several reasons, raised some eyebrows. There was also some applause. Overall, it was to make students note that, people have varied opinions and we should all learn to disagree, yet respect each other. By this semester, the students were able to understand what makes Skepseis and why is it important to engage in things outside the classroom. The movie nights, which also started during this semester added to the idea, where students got an opportunity to relax and enjoy a movie and then have some intellectual stimulation. Isn't it a great way to learn instead of passively trying to consume lectures inside the classroom? Finally, Fall 2018, the semester that Skepseis was conceived. Looking back now, it seems like we didn't do much. But, conceiving the idea in itself needs to be acknowledged.

Overall, it was a great learning opportunity for me to engage with different minds in the Department, especially students. Their efforts and enthusiasm need a mention and I wish the Department all the success in making Skepseis greater and more eventful.

— Rajitha Sanaka, Lecturer

Alumni's Internship Experience at Pol-Soc Department, RTC

My experience of was an year long, starting in September 2018, where I worked as a research associate in the Department of Political Science and Sociology. The research project is titled – Upland Livelihood Strategies funded by the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development and Himalayan University Consortium led by Dr.Jelle J.P Wouters. I, along with my four research associates Tshering Pelzom, Thinley Dema, Pema Gyaltsen and Pema Namgyel spent 3 months in the highlands conducting ethnographic research. After my undergraduate research in my final year in Royal Thimphu College, this was a major experience. The opportunity to visit different highlands, meet different people and learn about their culture and way of life was a valuable experience. Throughout this field work I developed skills in conducting efficient research along with several other essential life skills.

In the month of September, 2019, I was given the opportunity to present the paper written by Dr.Jelle J.P Wouters and myself on Cosmology and Climate Change in Arunachal Pradesh for a two days International Seminar organized by the department of Anthropology, Rajiv Gandhi University. After that I, along with Mr.Tshewang Dorji and another research associate Thinley Dema received the opportunity to present our individual papers in a conference for a publishing workshop titled Indigenous Mountain Knowledge, Modern science and Global Endeavours for a Sustainable Himalayan Region organised in Yunnan University in Kunming, China. I also presented my own paper here. It was a great experience to interact with scholars from diverse disciplines. Although it was intimidating to attend an international conference for the first time, through this experience, I realised that it is all learning and sharing knowledge. I am currently working on completing a paper that has been accepted for publication. — Kinley Choki, Class of 2018





A Glimpse of Events from Skepseis Day [8 November, 2019]

The idea of a seven-hour long event, on a Friday, after a day of classes might seem exhausting. But the Skepseis team and the students of the Pol-Soc Department definitely feel otherwise. On November 8, the energy in the Executive Centre resembled that of a festival, where the Department members were spotted participating in different activities with much enthusiasm. The preparation for this day started months in advance, and it was a proud moment for the members of the Skepseis team to watch the event unfold. The rigorous planning and co-ordination paid off in a much grander scale than expected and all of us went home with smiles on our faces.

Preparations for the day begun at 11 am and the Skepseis team came together to start decorating the executive hall. The primary purpose of the day was to provide the space for all the three cohorts and faculty members to spend time together outside of the classroom and this was something everyone experienced.

The event had included a variety of activities — panel discussions, quiz competition, book barter and political campaign. While some students participated in the panel discussion or political campaign, the others made the event more entertaining by bringing out a few dance performances. It was a success for the Skepseis team whose main goal was to bring the three cohorts together. There was also a panel discussion which had members working in different jobs talk to students about employment and opportunities that are available for young Bhutanese graduates. The day ended with awarding gifts and certificates from the President of RTC to the participants followed by a delicious dinner for everyone. — **Dechen S Choden, Year - III & Karma Pem Dema, Year II**

Second Skepseis' Distinguished Lecture

Justice Lungten Dubgyur delivered the Second Skepseis' Distinguished Lecture, on the *Evolution of Criminal Law in Bhutan*. Tracing from Namgyal's 1652 *Legal Code*, to *Thrimzung Chhenmo*, a 1957 Substantive Laws and Penal Code of Bhutan, his talk interestingly wove Buddhism principles with the laws in Bhutan. Besides the enthralling talk, which was seasoned with humour and his personal experiences, the discussion post the talk kept the students and faculties engaged far beyond the expected and estimated time.



Department Guest Lecture

Dr. Gerald Roche, a Senior Research Fellow, from La Trobe University, delivered a lecture on *Language Revitalization in Tibet*, and the Himalayas more widely. In his talk, Dr. Gerald highlighted a wide range of topics related to language revitalization research and practice, and the critical issues that emerge from it. While language shift is often perceived as the speaker's choice, he posits, it can be questioned if this kind of choice is really free, being so strongly influenced by unequal power relations between dominant and minority language groups.



Pol-Soc comes second in Inter-Department Basketball Tournament

The final Basketball match between the students of Pol-Soc Department and the Anthropology Department was a close one, with the audience at the edge of the seats. Both the teams gave tough competition to each other and in the final moment, the students of Anthropology Department beat us. However, it was a proud and a happy moment for us despite being the runners-up. We are all proud that as a team we put it in a lot of hard work and didn't give up till the end. Our opponents were physically stronger and had an advantage while we were quick on our feet

and in coordinating as a team. It was fun to play and there is always a next time. We are going to work harder and not lose motivation. We will come back stronger next semester, and may be even clinch the tournament.

— **Tenzin Namgyal Dorji, Year - II**



Picture courtesy: bfi.org

Screening of the movie, The Green Book

As part of Skepesies events this semester, the movie, *The Green Book*, which mainly highlights racism and white saviour syndrome, was screened. It tackles these issues with humour, good music, and has stellar performances by the actors. The discussion after the movie was interesting where the students, including some non-Bhutanese, talked about the existence of racism across societies and how we often tend to judge people based on their physical appearance. The movie was a good way to connect subjects we learned in class. The ending of the movie is my favorite scene, where the Black pianist realizes that he doesn't want to be alone and joins the

Christmas celebration at his chauffer, the white man's house. It made me feel that despite our differences, when we are accepting and embrace diversity, we make a better society.

— **Tenzin Choden, Year - III**

Alumni goes to Cambridge

After graduating from RTC in the year 2018, Tshering Pelzom has made the Department of Pol-Soc proud by receiving the King's Scholarship to study at Cambridge University. She will be studying Masters/MPhil in Social Anthropology. She talks to the Skepseis team about how excited she is to be there and her experience at RTC.

Studying communities in Lingzhi to Cambridge

After graduating, I came back as a research associate for an ethnographic research project – Upland Livelihood Strategies in Thimphu, a project funded by The International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) and the Himalayan University Consortium (HUC). I had to travel to Lingzhi to collect data and it was a great learning experience. I realised that I am interested in looking at people's lives from an anthropological perspective and that is why I chose to study it. This is why I chose to study Social Anthropology. I want to study Bhutan as there is a lot of scope here to study the individuals and also the Bhutanese society as a whole. There is a lot of hidden culture in the rural areas and we need to explore that.

Anticipation, anxiousness and...

I was informed about the course by Dr Jelle and Dr Dolma. I wasn't quite sure, but I applied. I then left to Lingzhi for my research work. The first thing I heard when I got back was that I made it, but the only concern was it wasn't fully funded. The application process was quite stressful and now I had to look for funding. I then wrote to His Majesty, with little hope. I waited and one day I was called into his office. I was extremely nervous and when I went in I was asked what I would do if I didn't get the scholarship. I said that I would continue research in Bhutan, and before I completed the sentence, I was told that I received the scholarship. It was a happy and teary moment for me. Emotions were running high and I told my mother the news. It was quite an intense moment.

At RTC

When I was in my third year, I planned to study further and that's when I thought of getting myself a scholarship. I could not burden my family with the financial pressure. I also wanted to be independent. I wasn't the best in my class in the first year, but I slowly developed. I found interest in Sociology so I pursued it.

Interest in Anthropology

It was only in my third year that I realized I was interested in learning about different communities, the people and their lifestyles. It actually started when I was doing my field research in Begana on an old age community, and after living with them day after day, I somehow became interested in learning about their lifestyle. It turned out well for me, as I used to be a closed, introverted person which gradually changed after I got to interact with people, how they behaved in different social settings and their lifestyle in general. So that is how I knew I wanted to learn Anthropology more.

Support from RTC

Initially, I was hesitant to try, thinking I might not get through and other negative feelings about my academic performance, until Dr. Jelle encouraged me to go for it. So, I ended up applying for the scholarship and I got it! Also, I am very grateful to sir for his continuous help and support starting from the application to the interviews and throughout the editing of my application letter. Even now, he is helping me by giving tutorial classes on what to expect in the University of Cambridge and how to deal with the various programs there.

Requirements for King's scholarship

The Kings scholarship is the most prestigious scholarship awarded to students who are considered to have performed exceptionally well in their academics or have shown great leadership skills. It is an honorary scholarship awarded in hopes from the youth to contribute towards the growth and stability of Bhutan.

I had to write a letter of application to His Majesty on why I wanted this scholarship, why I wanted to study social anthropology and how I could help the country with the knowledge in the long run. I think if you can express your feelings and opinions clearly and convincingly enough, you might have a high probability of getting it. Since it was the King's scholarship, academic performance did not really matter. What they looked at was if we are capable and deserving of his scholarship.





'Some of the best moments of my life were at Pitzer'

Visiting different places and getting to savor their beauty is the best thing anyone can ask for. And when the opportunity is to visit the "land of opportunities," it is an offer that no person would refuse.

When I was selected to attend the RTC study abroad programme at Pitzer College, California, USA, I was overwhelmed with joy and anxiety at the same time. To get to visit and study in the USA was definitely a learning experience.

While in the US, I got to take those classes that I would not have a chance in Bhutan. One of my favourite classes was

public speaking which groomed my public speaking skills, increased my confidence and helped me to speak extemporaneously.

The best part of the study abroad programme was the opportunity to meet people from all over the world. It was a great way to understand diverse cultures and was interesting to learn the similarities and the differences we share. No matter how different we thought we were, all that we wish for is peace and happiness for all.

I also learned that almost all the students were a part of an activist group which allowed them to gain other essential knowledge besides academics. Students were allowed to take part in the student senate body like the student government body we have here at RTC. This and other jobs at the college help students earn some extra pocket money. In a nut shell, the study abroad experience was one where I had some of the best moments of my life and was definitely once in a life time experience. — **Namgay Tshering, Year - III**

'Travelling as part of Erasmus+ enhanced my learning'

For the academic year fall 2018 to fall 2019, I was fortunate enough to study at two universities, Szent Istvan Egyetem in Hungary and DHBW in Germany as an exchange student. The experience allowed me to really broaden my network and meet people from various cultures and backgrounds, and experience different education systems. I was also able to travel to different countries in the Schengen Region and make lifelong memories.

Being able to apply what we learn in class to real life is essential, especially as a student of Political Science and Sociology. Travelling to different places has really enhanced my understanding of the content that I was learning in my course, and the exposure improved my personal skills too. I made

some of the most wonderful friends from across the world, who I met through this exchange programme. I am grateful to Erasmus+ and RTC for the experience. Erasmus+ is an international mobility programme for students, which gives an opportunity for young people to live abroad and experience a foreign culture, alongside their academics. — **Jurmey Choden Rinzin, Year - II**

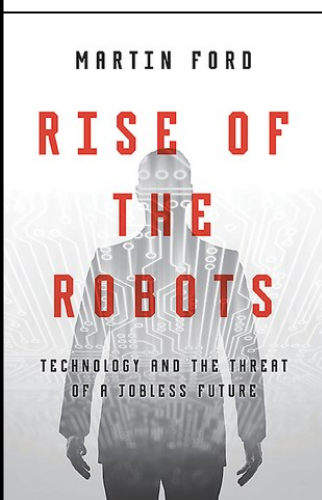
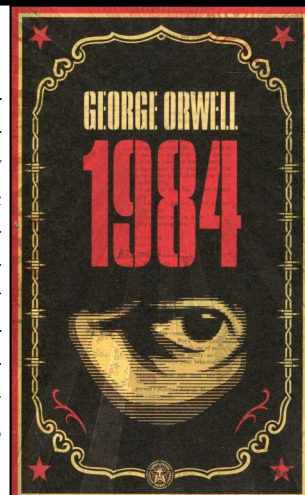


1984 by George Orwell**Reviewed by Jurmey Choden Rinzin, Year II**

1984 starts with a melancholic and ominous set-up in cold London, Oceania as Winston Smith is conscious of the eyes observing him, even inside his own home. The Party, under the supervision of a moustachioed leader known as “Big Brother”, constantly watches people using devious devices such as cameras, listening devices, and the “Thought Police”, a force dedicated to exposing rebellious thoughts and general misbehaviour to the authorities. The Government controls everything including people’s histories, the language (attempting to implement a new language: Newspeak) and their thoughts, interdicting Thought crime. Winston’s occupation is a low ranking profession, monotonous in nature. He is sceptical and unconvinced of the Party’s propaganda, detecting an incoherence between the information declared and his nebulous memories. He visualises a utopia, rejecting to be merely a puppet of Big Brother. He defies by writing a diary and yearns to make allies which is a precarious task. Winston meets beautiful Julia and daringly, reveals his rebellious sentiments to her. Fortunately, Julia believes similarly- longing for the eradication of war and tyranny. They share a passionate chemistry, starting an affair which is also a prohibited act.

This can be related to how most Governments today also impose similar albeit subtler propaganda and control. People are imprisoned by certain parameters, questioning the degree of freedom and human progression. It is also easy to compare it to real life examples as well as concepts put forward by certain thinkers.

Though this book was written in 1948-49, and during this year, the People’s Republic of China (PRC) was just established by Mao Zedong. That very year, after the Communist party of China won the civil war, the Republic of China had to retreat to Taiwan. Orwell predicted the future so accurately. It is currently 2019 and the Government of the PRC in my personal opinion, has become the Government of “Big Brother”. They have used technology to invigilate people and have started the Social Credit System. The Government is able to monitor the actions of the people and reward or punish them based on their record. Millions of Chinese citizens have been banned from using the flights or trains and this has attracted global attention to the system. Their competitor, the other giant neighbour, India, has also created a biometric identification scheme known as the Aadhar card where personal details of every individual in the country are recorded on their 12-digit Aadhar number. This however has also become increasingly controversial, as the Government officials have been accused for publicising the personal information and selling them online for as less as INR 500. Another interesting aspect is the idea of Newspeak and how language is used as propaganda. Likewise, today, the same strategy is used in many political debates. When George Bush (2003) in his speech on war and terrorism said, “We don’t conquer people, we liberate them”, he used a similar technique that Big Brother used with Newspeak. He could turn a concept like war into one with a positive connotation using language. Language is used as a tool to prove that one side is better than the other. Though the book is set in 1984 as a warning to people like politicians, today it seems as though they use it as an instruction manual. Things predicted are happening. Governments are turning into Big Brother; people are being controlled. The dystopia is becoming a reality.

**Rise of the Robots by Martin Ford****Reviewed by Wangchuk Lhamo, , Year II**

The book revolves around the effect of robotization of jobs. In the 21st century, however, increase in the productivity is decreasing the number of people being employed. In this book, the author Martin Ford also explains the frightening achievement of the robots. He goes on to explain that a human's cognitive capabilities have been taken over by robots. This cognitive dominance, Ford believes could mean that even the most intelligent person is in danger of not being employed.

Ford explains that the automation had caused destruction not only to the primary sector, but also caused destruction in the service sector. Ford predicts that the rise in the number of robots and artificial intelligence will ultimately result in the collapse of the economy by depriving the human workforce. He also addresses implicitly, in addition to the economic consequences, the social and environmental effects that people are likely to face. Treating his predictions as a threat to the labor

market of the future, he ends the book by providing solutions to the problem. This book does not only show us the threat to labor market, but also a threat to human survival. It shows the irrationality of people who have a profession create robots that could potentially destroy millions of professions. The future is not about growing the economy, but saving it.