

Skepseis

The Political Science and Sociology Programme Newsletter

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"Education is simply the soul of a society as it passes from one generation to another."
 – G. K. Chesterton

Editors' Note

At the end of every semester, *Skepseis* publishes a newsletter covering the key initiatives conducted by the students and faculties from the department. This semester's newsletter offered a new challenge for student editors to independently plan, edit, and design the content with limited or no guidance from faculty members. This, however, in a way, has become what *Skepseis* in its inception had envisaged for, which is to give students a practical hand-on experience, and a platform that encourages independent learning. We believe that the pace and level of meaningful engagement of and among students through the *Skepseis* initiative has arrived, and so at a next level.

To abbreviate this semester, amidst limited resources and unprecedented challenges, students and tutors have put their efforts together in conducting various activities. In that, the *Skepseis* team, on behalf of all students of the programme, would like to extend our gratitude to the faculty members for their continued guidance and support in all of our events and activities undertaken. Furthermore, we would like to extend our grateful note to the college administration for the infrastructure and financial support that was readily made available when needed.

Finally, and surely not the least, *Skepseis* team would like to congratulate all graduating students, for their successful completion of their degree, and not least for the exemplary footprints they have left. We wish them all the best!



Choeying Selden Dorji



Namgay Dorji



Tshedrup Dorji

From the Desk of the Programme Leader

I am writing this PL column just after evaluating – with my colleagues – as many as 41 undergraduate dissertations. As we read, re-read, graded, and discussed each of them we realized that we were evaluating their strengths and weaknesses, highlighting their achievements and pointing out their faults, and allocating marks as though this had been an ordinary year, as though this was just another batch of undergraduate dissertations. It seemed we, as examiners, had forgotten, even if only for a moment, that these dissertations had been researched and written in extraordinary times, amid the extraordinary challenges posed by the global pandemic. There was no category in the rubric that simply read ‘successfully submitted during corona-time’, with the possibility of awarding marks for just that, even though all research projects had to grapple with corona restrictions, setbacks, and anxieties. Defeating many odds, all final year students had not just successfully completed their dissertations, but many had done exceedingly well. Topics were many and varied, ranging from working mothers, rural-urban migration, and the transgender community, to modern dance, obesity, and food security. A few students even decided to research the social consequences of the pandemic itself, which offered cutting-edge insights. As is tradition, the four highest graded dissertations presented their research in front of the College president and the entire programme. They did a stellar job. But not just them: all final year students did. Apart from the rigor of research, the originality of thought, and the articulation of theory that went into each thesis, the very fact of all students submitting their work in time amid the pandemic reveals their determination, their resilience, and their ingenuity. Once again, I would like to convey my congratulations to the 2018 cohort!

As this newsletter reveals, this has been an exciting semester. The usual classes and modules were supplemented by a variety of extra-curricular activities, ranging from movie-nights to guest-lectures with speakers from inside and outside the country, the latter group delivering their lectures online. Several of these activities were designed, planned, and organized by the *Skepseis* team, and I would like to thank the team for their passion, dedication and skills in making this possible. I wish everyone a happy reading of this newsletter.



— Dr. Jelle JP Wouters, PL

Professor Mohan Rao from UMass delivers Skepseis' Fifth Distinguished Lecture

Professor Mohan Rao from the University of Massachusetts Amherst, delivered Skepseis' Fifth Distinguished Lecture. He spoke on the topic "Is globalization compatible with happiness," or in other words, whether outward orientation is compatible with inward orientation. Outward here refers to globalization and inward here refers to the country's economy, and domestic affairs of the country in pursuit of peace and happiness of the masses.

Professor Rao started off by remarking that globalization has been the driving force for modernization and development. To facilitate globalization, he notes, a country's policy should be framed in such a way that external agents can take part in economic activities with minimal restrictions, which can be termed as laissez-faire economy. Openness is an integral part of globalization. Strict openness, although, is neither necessary nor sufficient for globalization. With regard to the relation between one's happiness and another's happiness, we agree having equal rights for all to happiness as a collective end. What then should the end be, GNH or GDP? Income is important and necessary to get access to food, health, education, services and all which in the end results in happiness if one has. However, income is insufficient for happiness because there is more in life to add meaning and contribute to happiness such as culture, community, compassion, which are best described and inscribed in the GNH concept.

GNH is a holistic approach which inculcates people with compassion, generosity which as a result people strive for collective happiness removing hurdles/obstacles obstructing communal happiness such as inequalities, exploitation and all. Globalization can raise growth which as a result can raise the preconditions for happiness. Although, in the pursuit to raise the national income and bring extensive growth, one could end up engaging in an unhealthy race or competition neglecting peoples' happiness.

In the later part of the lecture he talked about different forms of globalization envisaged by Keynes and other thinkers. Keynes states that the national economy should be kept independent from foreign interference and be organic. Ideas, knowledge, art, hospitality, travel and all should be international allowing them to freely flow. Keynes envisions a different type of globalization of genuine internationalism, global democracy and global justice which can be called as reinvigorated capitalism. A different globalization where there is free migration, imprisonment of capitalism, mitigating climate change impacts and world democracy to rule the world market can be taken into consideration.



Introducing Multi-species Studies, Dr Sophie Chao delivers Skepseis' first Semester Lecture

This semester, *Skepseis* introduced its first Semester Lecture, conceptualised to given platform for dynamic young researchers and scholars. Dr. Sophie Chao, a postdoctoral scholar, University of Sydney delivered a lecture titled, "Multispecies Studies: An Introduction." In an engaging 45 minutes, setting on the premise that "we need to tell better, bitter stories about the Anthropocene," Dr. Chao took the students for a tour from the emergence of multi-species studies, its key principles, and objectives, on to the distinctive methods involved in the process of multispecies research.

What became clear to the novice students is that multispecies research takes as its approach multi-sited, multi-thematic, multi-disciplinary, and multi-sensory, in writing 'lively ethographies' (Van Dooren and Rose 2016). Furthermore, the emerging field of multispecies studies is grounded in passionate immersion in all non-human lives, including fungi, micro-organisms, animals, plants, and other-than-humans, exploring the interwoven patterns of living and dying, 'of being and becoming' within multispecies communities.

The central take-away of the lecture is that life cannot arise and be sustained in isolation. The world that we live in is an 'entangled world,' and history likewise an entangled history. Only when we realise this will we understand how different life forms are shaped and made possible. Which is why, drawing inspiration and methodologies from the natural sciences and beyond, bringing diverse bodies of knowledge into conversation and pushing them in new direction, multispecies scholars now are asking how human lives, lifeways, and accountabilities are variously folded into 'entanglements' with other-than-humans.



On public policy – GNHC

As part of Administration and Public Policy module lesson, the third year Pol-Soc class was graced by Mr. Phuntsho Wangyel and his team, Mr. Passang and Mr. Gyaltsen. Mr. Wangyel serves as the Chief of Research and Evaluation Division (RED) at the GNHC (Gross National Happiness Commission) Secretariat office.

The lecture was on the formulation, approval and review of policy under the guidelines of the Royal Government of Bhutan. As it stands, all policies-to-be need the endorsement of the GNHC. They vet policies using the GNH framework. Some of their mandates include: policy review, evaluation, demographic implications and poverty reduction.

A 'Policy Protocol' was implemented in 2009 in order to ensure a smooth policy-making process. It has two stages: conception and formulation. 'Conception' is the issue identification or agenda setting stage which is followed by a robust 'formation' stage including review, discussion, draft policy phase, making action plan and using the GNH screening tool. We learnt that the Policy Protocol, ever since its adoption, has ensured proper deliberation and improved the efficacy of interorganizational work.

This was a very informative and interactive session that had immense relevance to our module and therefore helped achieve 'practical' learning in our otherwise theory-driven program.

— Kuenga Norbu, Year III

On Managing People - Dasho Karma Tshetrim

Dasho Karma Tshetrim currently serves as the Head of the National Service Core Working Group. In 2015, he was awarded the Red Scarf and the title of Dasho by His Majesty the King. Dasho's lecture on managing people was founded on Aristotle's concept of the human being as a social animal. Humans are social beings that seek to associate with others in order to be happy, and no one is capable of breaking the bonds of interdependency.

Dasho also stated that while managing people, it is critical to establish trust in any connection with the other individual or group in order to get better results. Dasho offered a few suggestions for improving one's ability to comprehend and get along with others. The first step in better understanding individuals, according to Dasho, is to recognize the role conflict or different identities individuals have in their lives. The lesson on managing people emphasizes the importance of our interpersonal relationships and the necessity of mutual trust.

Dasho's lecture also emphasizes the interdependent link between oneself and others, and as Dasho advises, we should not only devote time to develop our own potentials but also try to bring out the best in others since we get the best outcomes when we work together. To summarize, Dasho's lecture was an educational experience in which I learned a lot about leadership, the role of life, the personality framework, which is linked to emotional intelligence, and the social-psychological model in public administration. Overall, it was a thought-provoking session.

— Kinley Wangmo, Year III



Pol-soc alumni speaks to the second year students at the Research Methods Class

Two of our Pol-Soc alumni, Kuenzang Norbu and Samphelma Rigsel Yargay visited and gave a lecture on their 'Journey of Undergraduate Research Project,' in the Qualitative Research Methods Class (2nd Year) of the Political Science and Sociology Programme.

In their lecture, they discussed the processes and challenges involved in conducting a one-year-long research project. In a rather fun and frolic interaction, they talked about the processes, challenges, and issues involved in an undergrad research, while also rendering advice to the second year cohort to start thinking about the research topics. They reminded the second year students that the research topic should be something that is specific, clear, and an area of interest so that when the research proceeds, one is keen to delve further and carry out the research.

The RSM 301, also called the Qualitative Social Research module is the basic foundation course for the independent yearlong research in the third year. Both of the seniors emphasized on not taking the RSM30 lightly, but rather to build the foundation rigidly so that the yearlong research can be completed smoothly. Mr Kuenzang conducted an ethnographic study on power relation in the workplace of Thimphu while Ms. Samphelma carried out a research on art and artists in Bhutan.



Needless to say, the interaction was a really fruitful and insightful one. We came to realise, sometimes a fresh senior graduate can deliver and tell so much; drawing insights from their own journey immediately ahead of us, they make us see, with clarity, what is coming. Students walked away inspired and thinking about their research topic for the semesters that is to come. As such the discussion ended with a few question and answer session, Mr. Roderick, the module tutor thanked them for coming and sharing their insights despite the heavy downpour that day.

— Namgay Dorji, Year III

Top four research projects of 2018 cohort

Kuenga Norbu, Jurmey Choden Rinzin, Anu Mongar, and Sonam Choden, the top four researchers of the 2018 cohort gave a public presentation of their research projects on June 18, 2021. Kuenga, who was ranked the top, carried out a research on farming practices in Bhutan, taking the case on rice and chilli growers in Paro. Jurmey's research was on the trans-gender community in Bhutan, with a special emphasis on the issues and challenges they face in education, employments and opportunities. Anu, a dancer herself, conducted a research on modern dancers in Bhutan, and Sonam carried out a research on the effects of Korean drama on the love expectation of RTC female students. All of their research impressively inspired their juniors, particularly the second year cohort who are set to carry out a yearlong research project starting next semester. What is evident from their short 12 minutes presentations was that, they had put a lot effort and hard work thus yielding good results. Amidst the challenges posed by the pandemic, all the third year students, the module co-coordinator Mr. Roderick noted, had completed their research project distinctively well. According to him, the four evaluators unanimously agreed that this batch was one of the strongest batch, and they had a tough time settling the scores. The presentation was followed by a time of Q and A, and the program ended with a certification of top researchers, for their excellent achievements by the Programme Leader (i/c), Mr. Rabi.

The event was followed with a cake-cutting, and congratulatory lunch organised by the faculty members.



In the picture (left to right): Anu Mongar, Kuenga Norbu, Jurmey Choden Rinzin, Sonam

Blindspotting

Skepseis successfully held two movie screenings during the Spring Semester of 2021. The first of which was 'Blindspotting,' a 2018 American comedy-drama. Blindspotting is a movie that steers itself into the power sermonizing message about race and social issues much better compared to any Oscar snare film that calls itself "significant." In spite of every so often falling into certain adages in specific regions, yet that never interferes with the normal stream that caused it to feel so genuine and staggeringly unnerving.

The subjects of brutality, race, social, dread and outrage - connecting in a tight bunch that strings components of current culture. It has a ton to say and leaves space for conversation.

It's a methodology of applying rap in certain scenes which I discover to be a remarkable and intriguing choice that pushed the message forward instead of letting characters examine it, particularly the last ten minutes that felt like an arrival of injury and torment. It is exceptionally idyllic and practically Shakespearean. Individuals have mixed sensations of this methodology, since rarely do you see something like this done, and that is certifiably not something terrible.



Article 375

The second screening was of a Hindi-Language courtroom drama film called Section 375. It tried to explain the subject of rape extensively. Further, the film tries to understand law and justice as detached entities through the tale of alleged rape. In both the events, the audience turnout was impressive and was followed by thoughts sharing at the end of the movie. The story is based on section 375 of Indian Penal Code, which deals with cases of rape and sexual assault. A junior costume assistant of a movie is allegedly raped by the Director. The public prosecutor presents a strong case as per rules of law, demanding maximum punishment. Expectedly, defence lawyer pleads "not guilty" for his client and reasons possessiveness and subsequent revenge as motive for a consensual sex affair gone wrong.

This movie showcases a woman believed to be falsely accusing a filmmaker and there comes the protagonists as lawyers who go head on head proving their point right at the court. The Defendant acts as the lawyer of the filmmaker and the Prosecutor represents the alleged victim. The movie engages the audience by creating curiosity over whether the woman is falsely accusing the filmmaker or she is right in her accusations. The writers must be given credit for showing us the loopholes of the Indian Legal system which is a mirror to the society as whole. A small section of society is misleading some law by portraying consensual sex as rape, done for personal vendetta and/or blackmailing. The plight of accused in such cases is even worse because of lifelong social stigma, shattered family life & perception based media trial. Little do they know that such false accusations cast shadow and delay justice for genuine cases. The movie also highlights another morally dilemmatic issue: use of power or position to influence an individual to offer sexual favors for reaping professional gains.

Review on Chimamanda Adichie's Short Essay: DEAR IJEAWELE OR A FEMINIST MANIFESTO WITH FIFTEEN SUGGESTIONS and WE SHOULD ALL BE FEMINISTS

To very briefly elaborate my personal analysis, the essays made me question the status quo in Bhutan and where the gender discourse in my own environment stood. In comparison to the examples Adichie stated, Bhutan is at a rather similar stage. However, this came with a hint of optimism. If the issues are similar, her recommended solution's applicability could be tested and practiced in the Bhutanese context. Adichie eloquently and elaborately discuss the key themes of patriarchy, gender differentiation and misogyny. Nevertheless, it would have been more relatable if she included the experience of women from other cultures as well. As a woman, I could relate to most of the highlighted issues. However, as an Asian woman I yearned to be more represented in her literature. Further, her lack of inclusion of any LGBT related issues also were a shortcoming. Considering that her essays were so elaborate and included many arguments, the element of LGBT inclusion in gender discourse would have really completed her work fully. Nevertheless, her narration through her strong opinions and relatable experiences paint vivid takeaways and convince the audience as to why feminism is imperative even in the world today.

— **Jurmey Choden Rinzin, Year III**



Interning at the UNDP: A lifetime opportunity

As I graduated from RTC, I went out into the world with no real idea of what was next. Luckily, for me, I saw that there was a slot open for a UNDP internship where I applied and thankfully got in. The prospect of exploring a new environment and meeting new people was exciting and as I entered the gates of the UN house for six months, I realized that this was the opportunity of a lifetime. For six months, I had the pleasure of working primarily with gender related projects and other programmatic areas mainly to do with governance. Working with different projects allowed me to engage with diverse groups of people all while learning how to be a flexible, efficient and an adaptive employee (considering the uncertain times of the COVID-19 pandemic). Moreover, the people that I met throughout the internship not only brought along new perspectives but also life lessons. It was the opportunity of a lifetime because it gave me something to look forward to everyday and even if it was for a 6-month period, I learned and experienced many things that I will always remember fondly.



— **Kuenzang Norbu (Class of 2018)**

Research Snippet: From 'A Sociolinguistic Study of Gongduk Language'

For my undergraduate research project, I conducted a sociolinguistic study of Gongduk language. I wanted to understand the factors that led to the endangerment of Gongduk language. In a nutshell, I had four key findings, two of which relates to the decline of Gongduk language usage. First, in the present day, exogamy has become very prevalent among the Gongduk people. This happened at the expense of cross-cousin marriage which was very common in the olden days. Reportedly, only a few people in the east is following the latter traditional practice of marriage.



Now, with more number of Gongduk people practicing exogamy, my research suggests that they are unintentionally abandoning their language. Furthermore, I found that most of the Gongdukpas having married to a non-speaker, the only means (or perhaps preferred means) of communication becomes a language that was familiar to both, which was usually was not Gongduk language. This language shift extended from generation to generation, resulting in their children not inheriting or learning the language. Besides exogamy, out-migration plays an equal role in the decline of Gongduk language usage. With time, people started migrating in the western part of Bhutan for economic and social reasons. People in their newly migrated place, were not familiar with their language. Thus, to communicate, or to "fit in", they adapt to language commonly spoken in the migrated place. All of these, which I elaborately discuss in my research project report, shows that they unintentionally abandoned their language.

— **Tsheten Lhamo, Year III**

Skepseis Podcast Series

Skepseis released its first podcast series early this year. The podcast features Easterine Kire, the first Naga Novelist in English, reading her book "A Terrible Matriarchy" (2007), and anchored by our third year, student Jurmey Choden Rinzin. Please visit the link below to listen:

PodBean link: <https://www.podbean.com/eu/pb-ajj2g-f8c0df>

SoundCloud link: <https://soundcloud.com/.../a-terrible-matriarchy-a-novel...>

