

# YOUTH AND SOCIETY

BY DEMOCRATIC  
EDUCATION NETWORK

 DEN

UNIVERSITY OF  
WESTMINSTER 



# Acknowledgments

This magazine would not have been possible without the participation, engagement and encouragement from so many students from the University of Westminster in general, and the School of Social Sciences. Special thanks should be given to all the past and present members of Democratic Education Network for their collective approach and for believing and demonstrating that they can create their own world once they work together. There are so many names to include that we are likely to miss many and hence we cannot name all the students here and so we have included the main editors, designers and those who have contributed to the magazine.

While this is a student endeavour, we like to thank the staff in School of Social Sciences especially Dr Farhang Morady, the founder and academic director of DEN, Professor Dibyesh Anand, the head of School of Social Sciences; Dr Peter Bonfield, Vice-Chancellor of University of Westminster; Professor Roland Dannreuther, Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Education; Professor Andrew Linn, Pro Vice-Chancellor and Head of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and Dr Thomas Moore, Associate Head of College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. DEN is generously funded by the Quintin Hogg Trust since its launch in 2016 and we appreciate its vision and desire to support student initiatives.



# Strategy to Engage Students in Higher Education: The Democratic Education Network

This short article considers the Democratic Education Network (DEN), a model developed in 2016 at the University of Westminster. It aims to encourage students to participate in activities that support their transferable skills, and help them develop confidence in their creativity.

One of the most important aspects of higher education in recent years has been students' engagement outside the curriculum. A number of studies have presented considerable evidence to demonstrate the critical role that engagement plays in students' learning. In addition to this, various governments, especially in the US and Britain, have been developing ways of measuring outcomes that focus on engagement and point to improvements in quality.

The financing of higher education through student fees has forced universities to recruit their students from diverse population groups, with different abilities, ages, social, ethnic, economic, and educational backgrounds. As a result, universities have been under pressure to explore new ways of teaching and engaging their students. This has resulted in pressure to monitor the experiences of under-represented and disadvantaged students.

The biggest challenge has been finding ways in which students can be engaged outside the curriculum, especially those who do not meet the usual criteria for enrolling by the established or top universities. In addition, the internationalization of higher education has added to the diversity of the student population, posing new challenges in terms of the engagement of students for whom the university may be a culturally and socially alienating place. The growing role of information and communication technologies has also played a role in shaping the thinking of educators seeking to use the best practices to encourage and foster student engagement.

The important challenge faced by universities has been to support their students outside their coursework and field of study, in their educational journey as a whole. This has included various ways of developing student's skills and knowledge widely. This in turn has meant developing some new educational practices and greater compassion, mutual understanding, and respect, as having shared aims and goals has become a fundamental principle in the relationship between learners and educators. The challenge for some institutions has become finding what are the best practices in light of this. The responsibility of educators is not only to help prepare students for professional life, but also to ensure that they are equipped with a good understanding of their society locally and globally. This may also entail a willingness of the educator to go beyond their own subject expertise in teaching.

# The Democratic Education Network: A Different Approach

The University of Westminster is globally renowned for its multicultural and diverse student body. Nearly 40% of the 22,000 students at Westminster are international, and among them an equally high percentage are second-generation immigrants ([www.westminster.ac.uk](http://www.westminster.ac.uk)) This diverse and inclusive environment represents 169 nationalities from around the world. The admissions criteria are based on A-Level entry requirements, and as with many other universities in the United Kingdom, this is complemented by a clearing process. Westminster is a ‘majority minority’ University: the majority of its students are from Black Minority Ethnic (BME) backgrounds and a quarter are non-UK domiciled; many of these students are first-generation university attendees. With 58% of our students coming from London’s most disadvantaged areas, the University is constantly challenged to reinvigorate its pedagogical approaches in order to provide inclusive education for all and reflect upon and engage in ways of doing so.

The DEN started to take shape in 2016. It was supported and driven in its initial stages by staff and students of Politics and International Relations at the University of Westminster ([www.denwestminster.net](http://www.denwestminster.net)). The network has expanded and is currently welcoming students from all across the University, especially in the newly-formed College of Liberal Arts. With over 200 members, this is one of the biggest and most successful projects of the University, promoting international education, diversity, inclusion, and multiculturalism. DEN has been consistently expanding as a hub for student-led projects involving diverse and international communities, not only in London, but across the world. An example is DEN’s collaborative work with Hope Towns, a project initiated by both undergraduate and graduate students. Hope Towns is a successful project based on the integration of refugees and asylum seekers in London and has proved an valuable experience for students in helping them not only understand these problems but also initiate possible solutions.

Working with different communities has provided an umbrella for facilitating, supporting and engaging students and bringing them together with educators. This has inspired them to develop their skills and knowledge through teamwork, and building a collaborate learning community.

By acknowledging and celebrating the different backgrounds of our students, DEN has enabled the building of links between local communities, secondary schools, and international universities. Aside from engaging with their peers, students have been given the responsibility to create a new environment in which they are able to develop a relationship with their past, proactively think about their present, and work to improve and enhance their future; all the while keeping these efforts at the heart of their education.

DEN is built on the view that a student’s experience is shaped by familial, cultural, and social, including class, backgrounds. As the University of Westminster attracts students from diverse ethnic backgrounds—and sometimes poverty—the ability to engage students intellectually by taking their backgrounds into consideration has become vital.

DEN promotes its projects through its online magazine, Inside Westminster, and its social media profile. Every project is a collaborative work led, managed, and delivered by students. DEN has become a platform for engaging students, encouraging them to move freely among different projects, and express their interests and passions while promoting creativity and entrepreneurship.

DEN has encouraged students to develop as part of a community of learners engaged in various projects who also are developing transferable skills, enabling them to take their learning beyond the classroom. DEN’s pedagogical approach is to highlight social and political issues, letting students structure questions to address them with the support of their tutors. With this in mind, DEN has enabled different and difficult conversations to take place across and beyond the University.

To facilitate their involvement both within and outside the curriculum, it is important that students be immersed in the life of the university. In the perspective of DEN, academic success is not just about the acquisition of knowledge in the classroom. Students’ interaction with their fellow students, academics, and administrative staff outside this setting is vital. Thus, DEN has encouraged students to develop their leadership skills and build a bridge to their own communities, including by such things as addressing the European refugee crisis, examining the impact of globalisation on human rights, or the role of Muslim women in contemporary society. The projects, which are conceived and developed entirely by students, have involved building bridges between local communities and partner universities around the globe. Students have enjoyed field trips to Turkey, Vietnam, Uzbekistan, India, and Georgia, giving them first-hand experience of collaborative working in a global context.

DEN has provided a platform through which student engagement can be encouraged by building a network of teams that support each other. These have been both part of curriculum and in the form of extra-curricular activities that have built on students’ interests. For instance, different societies or groups and field trips have been essential for promoting and sustaining a team-building approach. In this context, DEN has encouraged members of the academic staff to support and motivate each other. Through problem-solving under the guidance of academics, or in collaboration with more capable peers, students have been able not only to develop academically, but also to become more resilient, and improve their confidence, motivation, and inspiring each other.



In designing, developing, and implementing such a strategy, DEN has built a community of educators and learners who meet regularly and discuss basic academic and non-academic strategies related to their subjects and passions. It has encouraged and recognised students' potential to create and present their own visions of the world.

DEN's extra-curricular activities have integrated student engagement projects into a coherent and effective network, with different zones of learning that offer students clear pathways for community and international participation, opportunities for experiential learning, and a range of practical and employment-enhancing democratic skills. In this way, it has provided students with valuable experiential learning in an international community and public arenas. Interactions with academics in an educational setting have always been crucial for individual development. However, for many students to develop this into something they have not experienced constitutes a shift from the traditional pedagogical approach in higher education to a more critical one. This experience has inevitably engaged students at universities and has also improved their understanding of real-world issues that they will have to deal with after graduating.

With the rapid pace of globalisation, and the huge transformation of the demographic shape of major cities such as London, students' engagement with different communities has become crucial for higher education as whole. Partnerships between communities at the local, national, and international levels can aid in student engagement as well as building a real community of learners and educators in a broader way. DEN has introduced many students to the idea of independently participating in the process of developing their skills while critically understanding and responding to their social and political condition.

However, DEN is only an experimental model, operating at a micro level at only one university, which faces huge challenges ahead. Its present funding, by the Quintin Hogg Trust, is scheduled in 2020. This limits its operations and long-term planning. At the moment, most of DEN's practical work is managed voluntarily by students. This of course means a cyclical turnover of students completing their studies or leaving the University.

The sustainability of DEN is reliant on new students joining and continuing its work. DEN faces challenges such as strengthening its structure, along with all that is needed to keep this unique program going. In a world that continues to emphasise and encourage mostly individual efforts, DEN is an example that demonstrates that collaborative and democratic working together can have value both educationally and in helping to promote a more just society.

***Farhang Morady***  
***Principal Lecturer in International Relations and Development Studies and Academic Director of DEN***



## Student Journey at DEN



Tasneem Fadel BA International Relations and Development

*"I joined DEN as it allowed me to get involved in something and make a change within our local community but also in our global community as well."  
Eleanor Murray Second Year International Relations and Development.  
"Joining DEN allowed me to further explore my university studies and start making an impact"*

Oana Contrás - Law LLB Honours

*I joined DEN for the outstanding experiences of working with diverse individuals on revolutionary projects, as well as for the numerous opportunities that DEN offers students in order to develop a greater community.*

Mohammed Khaled, Second year International relations and Development.

*"Joining Den has taught me that students can make a massive impact on the world when we work together and look after each other, as well as, I have gained a mixed set of skills which I can use to further my career after university."*



# Unite Today for Tommorrow



International Women’s month committee is student-led that aims to raise awareness of gender issues and promote equality amongst all genders irrespective of background, class, ethnicity or sexual orientation. We welcome everyone to come and join us in helping to encourage parity between all genders. From 4th to 25th March International Women’s month committee will host an array of events.



This month is especially designed to inform and teach young people about women’s rights all over the world and how this should have an impact on the way we can all deliver a change, as well as change the negative attitudes some may hold about women.

Our ambition is to inspire young people to always aim high and flourish so that they become successful people in the future. Our intention is to reinforce the fact that women are equally important to men and hold a remarkable role in society. We will take these events fervently and believe that International Women’s month should be celebrated and praised worldwide. Women have a vital right to be acknowledged around the world and this event can and will revolutionize the stereotypical view some may hold. We wish to spread diversity, equal opportunities and justice all over the world through success, harmony and excellence.

- List of events organized:**
- March 4th - Exhibition and Panel (1pm to 9pm, Portland Hall)
  - March 8th- International Women’s Day – Cultural Ball (6pm to 10pm, Portland Hall)
  - March 18th- Women and Entrepreneurship (2pm-10pm, Deep End and Fyvie Hall)
  - March 22nd- Intersectional Feminism/ Women’s Month Comedy Night (6pm-11pm, Portland Hall)
  - March 25- BAME Officer and Women’s Officer Event (5pm to 8pm, Portland Hall)
  - DEN Conference 10-11 2019

A founding tradition at Westminster is that we strongly believe everyone can succeed, that they all have the right to an excellent education, and that they all have the power to go on and make the world a better place. In an unequal world, where women do not face equality of opportunity, we see the role of DEN as crucial in fostering a fairer and more equal society. Our aim is to inspire young people to always aim high, so they flourish and thrive, and develop into successful individuals, the future leaders, innovators and game changers of tomorrow.



The objective of these events is to explore gender issues and unite together with different communities in order to celebrate the achievements made by women throughout history. Therefore, DEN is the most suitable platform to work alongside staff and students to make these events a real success.

We hope DEN keeps the tradition of International Women’s month alive for the upcoming years until there is a day when the need for equality awareness is irrelevant.



# Youth and Development



We, young people are the future! The opportunities we are given today and the actions we take are crucial, because we help to shape the present and we will determine the shape of the global development (growth) in the years to come. Let's do better and fix mistakes of the previous generations, by focusing on sustainable development and reducing the divide between people.

There IS NO white, brown or black, we are all human race. There IS NO 1st world and 3rd world - we all live in the same planet. The previous generations divided us, giving some people more opportunities than the others, based of the origin or skin colour, which led to unprecedented level of inequality. We can change it and there are a lot of platforms available to do it! DEN is a network that brings us together by giving a chance to participate in various projects varying from social awareness campaigns to international food festivals and publishing books. This is a proof that if only we come together, we can make something great and powerful out of it. We can have a greater impact, opportunities for that are endless!

How can we all contribute to making this world a better place for us and future generations to come? What I found particularly empowering is helping others; a simple act of kindness or spending some of your free time volunteering, brings so much happiness for you and the beneficiary, but also is the way of contributing to the social change we all want to see. Last year I spent four months working for an NGO in the mountains of Nepal, where we worked to rebuild schools that collapsed as a result of an earthquake. Throughout that time, hundreds of people from every corner of the world joined us and together with locals we managed to build something that will empower kids and their families and be a fundament for their future. Thinking about it gives me hope, because it is a proof, that all the differences between people that they made us believe in, are in fact a lie. When driven by a common goal - we can challenge the current system and make a difference..

We, young people, should trigger the change! Lobbying toward equality will empower people both socially and economically, and therefore bring sustainable development. Everything around us is development: that school that we built in Nepal, the car that you drive, the food that we eat. Therefore, we all contribute toward it, by the choices we make, the actions we take, the attitude we have. Some places are more and some are less developed, which is a historically conditioned situation, but just like everything in this world, it is a subject to change if we work hard toward it. With constantly growing inequality, it's as important as ever to focus on positive development, which is not merely an economic growth of the poor, but also a political and cultural change that ends superiority of the few, and celebrates equality of all. This way, the world would be a better place for all of us and generations to come! We should be the change we want to see.

**Kasia Ozga**



# STUDENTS4REFUGEES and Hopetowns

The founder of Hopetowns, STUDENTS4Refugees and a team member share their thoughts on the collaboration between STUDENTS4REFUGEES and Hopetowns. Read on to know more about this unique collaboration connecting students and the local communities, where they use their experiences to empower each other



## **Marta**

As a Ph.D. researcher and visiting lecturer at the University of Westminster, with a long-standing interest in the interlinked themes of borders, violence(s) and representation, I have been delighted to act as a link between Westminster students and the Hopetowns project. By way of background, the London-based Hopetowns project emerged from the solidarity and support structures of the Calais ‘Jungle’ camp in northern France. Spearheaded by one of the former Calais camp community leaders, Hopetowns aims to support the well-being and a sense of belonging to wider society, by starting at the early stage of an individual’s asylum process.

Since February 2018, Hopetowns has been working to achieve its aims through concrete solutions to everyday problems intertwined with a welcoming atmosphere and emotional support. Under Samer Mustafa’s leadership, Hopetowns has seen great success and widespread interest among refugees and asylum-seekers in London. To-date, the group has welcomed refugees and asylum-seekers from countries such as Chad, Egypt, Eritrea, Sudan, Syria, and Kuwait, including many unaccompanied minors, young women and mothers.

Witnessing the budding partnership between the STUDENTS4REFUGEES at Westminster and the Hopetowns youth has been a real privilege. It is evident that there is ample scope for future collaboration between the two groups of ambitious young people, who seem to share a genuine sense of mutual respect and a sense of belonging to common humanity.

## **Samer**

The idea of starting the Hopetowns charity emerged from my own experience while I was waiting for my asylum case here in the UK. Based on how I felt during that time, I knew something was missing for young asylum-seekers going through the same process as me. I wanted to find a way to address the disconnection which I felt internally, and the isolation I was experiencing externally. For all of these reasons, I thought I’d better start something good for other people, who are finding themselves in the same situation as I was before.

Hopetowns is here to help refugees and asylum-seekers with integration into their new communities, and to help build skills to get through everyday life in Britain. Importantly, we are also here to take all the stress and bad thoughts from their minds; to join together in friendship and solidarity. We give our participants free education within a friendly and supportive atmosphere; in Hopetowns they find a community and an oasis of hope. We offer all of our services with full dignity and respect. Dignity, I believe, is a sign of shared humanity and crucially important for all human beings.

I would like to thank every person who has believed in me and my idea. I am grateful to the students of STUDENTS4REFUGEES from the University of Westminster who have joined us as friends, reaching out a hand and building bridges with us.

## **Zeenat**

STUDENTS4REFUGEES is a student-led organisation created within the Democratic Education Network and aims to establish a platform that will allow us to serve refugee camps in a more subjective manner. This will include tailoring our goals and aims based on the camps we may be attending. A trip to Ventimiglia refugee camp of Italy will see STUDENTS4REFUGEES possibly purchasing shoes and socks – a necessity of those living in this camp. STUDENTS4REFUGEES are still growing as a platform and in working with organisations in London that work with refugees, we hope to make an impact, including Hopetowns.

# THE MISUNDERSTOOD CAMPAIGN

-A PROJECT IN THE DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION NETWORK

As an undergraduate student studying International relations and development, working with Hopetowns has allowed me to gain a perspective on the life that occurs after refugees reach their desired destination. It has shown me that current world politics is intricate and affects every single person. Hopetowns has become a symbol for me personally, teaching me that: in this world, all that is needed is mutual respect and the idea of common humanity. The work that Hopetowns have continually done has created the ability for many teens that have traveled searching for refuge to integrate and blossom.

‘Act local, think global’ is an amazing mantra inspired by the UN’s Sustainable development global goals. I believe Hopetowns is the epitome of this, working to help the people they can and having an impact in the global refugee crisis in such a positive way with refugees within London. This inspired me to think about the various scenarios that have occurred putting every Hopetowns attendee in their current context. This is not one – size – fits all and the continuing interaction we have with this amazing organisation will allow us to develop our understanding and continue doing what we intend to do at STUDENTS-4REFUGEES.

This relationship has been beneficial for both the DEN team of Westminster and Hopetowns allowing all of us to build a comforting and rewarding situation of blossoming friendship and admiration of amazing people such as Samer, who continue to do amazing work and inspire more people every moment with his amazing attitude and outlook on life. This is not an ‘us and them’ situation, this is a partnership of equality and one that I am looking forward to nurturing. This learning experience has created a context for a commitment and extended communication to be forged with people I would have never connected with and that makes me very grateful to Hopetowns and those within DEN who have been a catalyst in forging this relationship.

*Marta Welander: Ph.D. researcher and Visiting lecturer at the University of Westminster.*

*Founder of Refugee Rights Europe.*

*Samer Mustafa: Founder of Hopetowns*

*Zeenat Khan: Undergraduate student – international relations and development – at University of Westminster*

The Misunderstood Campaign is a project aiming to depolarise the narratives of migration here in the United Kingdom. Migration and identity are emotionally divided topics and define most of politics today across the world. Most people have a strong opinion about migration- they are typically either strongly for or against it – and there is rarely ever a gray zone in- between. This becomes dangerous and counterproductive, as people begin to demonize each other, and solutions about how to integrate migrants and refugees become almost non-existent. The aim of “The Misunderstood Campaign” is to create that gray zone, a place in which people could empathize with one another, and create a discussion that feels more inclusive and productive in solving the issues of migration- while simultaneously highlighting the misconceptions between each other.

We are beginning the campaign by launching a social media platform with the #Misunderstood, encouraging people from different social, political and cultural backgrounds to engage with how they feel personally misunderstood by others. Once the online campaign gains enough attention, we will be launching a series of events that encourage dialogue among different members in society who don’t usually speak to each other.

Our campaign will be powered by Tribeless, a conversation facilitation toolkit that creates safe conversation spaces promoting empathy and human connection. Tribeless is a global movement founded by Gwen Yi, who is based in Malaysia. Her work has been mentioned by the Nobel Peace Prize Convention. The toolkit has been proven to be extremely effective in any social situation where conflict usually arises – tested on 80+ different nationalities across 5 different continents.

## **Why Are We Doing This?**

As students and alumni from the University of Westminster all coming from a Political or International Relations background, we see very clearly that the world is becoming more polarised due to the fact that migration is being leveraged as a divisive narrative. As we all come from different cultures and careers, we felt that our joined forces of passion and experience could create something absolutely unique and productive.



## Who's Involved?

- Miholyn Soon (Current Student) – Film & TV Production BA, International Relations MA
- Tessa Browne (Alumni) – International Relations & Development BA
- Romana Bekai (Alumni) – Multimedia Journalism (Broadcast) MA
- Ira Lobanok (Alumni) – Commercial Music Performance BA
- Kasia Ozga (Current Student) – International Relations & Development BA
- Saudamini Sigdel (Current Student) – International Relations & Development BA
- Harriet Plant (Current Student) – International Relations & Development BA
- Lienus Rob (Current Student)- International Relations & Development BA
- Eleanor Murray (Current Student)- International Relations & Development BA
- Rares Harsan (Current Student)- Politics & International Relations BA
- Emmy Snickars (Current Student) – International Relations & Development BA
- Carrie Wang (Current Student)- International Relations MA
- Micaela Assaad (Alumni) – Film & TV Production BA



*Miholyn Soon & Tessa Browne representing the campaign at the United Nations Global Compact for Migration Youth Summit organized by UNMGCY in Marrakech, Morocco December 2018.*

# ARE YOU READY FOR THE MOST EXCITING YEARS OF YOUR LIFE?

**DEN**

- Inside Westminster
- Words Heal The World
- Hands Up Production
- Publications
- Mentoring Project
- DEN Youtube Channel
- Star
- Conference

## JOIN THE DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION NETWORK AND DISCOVER A WORLD OF POSSIBILITIES

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EVERY THURSDAY - 4 PM  
COMMON ROOM, WELLS STREET

# DIFFERENCE FESTIVAL: FROM THE EYES OF A STUDENT



On the 22 of February, the Democratic Education Network (DEN) organised a full day event of passionate poetry, music, and good vibes. Students, lecturers and members of the public got together to appreciate and celebrate diversity at Westminster.

The event was kicked off with an exhibition of photographs taken by students expressing important issues, events and showcasing the talents of our diverse students. Some of the photographs included successful events previously organised by DEN such as the Gala Dinner in December. Photographs of students studying International Development who visited Vietnam in December last year were also displayed.

As the day went on, our amazing guest poets and singers passionately took to the stage to perform soulful poetry and songs, composed by them. One of the most mesmerising performers for the night was spoken word artist, Tanaka who performed songs about growing up as an African boy in East London, and love. With his positive aura and charming voice, Tanaka captivated his audience as he performed his poems.



We were lucky enough to host London based spoken word artist/poet and Westminster alumni, Shareefa Energy. Shareefa has an Indian heritage and uses her voice to raise awareness and challenge topics about women explicitly in the South Asian community and migrants. One piece that particularly stood out for me was her poetry on Grenfell Tower, and how she describes how children would “close their eyes to escape reality”. She continues to travel in the UK and abroad to share her story and mentally grow and empower women to be strong and powerful.

We also had the pleasure of hearing from one of our own multitalented students, Adeela Ejaz, a current student at Westminster who not only writes beautiful poetry but also has an engaging blog about mental health. Adeela bravely shares her experience about growing up with mental health issues specifically in the South Asian community. In her poem The Little Brown Girl, Adeela shares how she learned how to embrace her differences and love herself. This left us all admiring Adeela’s courage and a little more understanding of people who face the same issues every day.



This was followed by a performance from the spoken word artist Emy P, who performed her own songs and poems. Her songs lyrics focused on her struggle growing up with ADHD, Emy gave listeners an insight about her experiences as a child. She made us appreciate the emotions that people with disorders have. She made us understand that mental illnesses cannot be seen and we mustn’t be judgemental and instead open-minded when meeting people.

The Difference Festival 2019 gave us a chance to meet a bunch of beautiful and gifted creatives, who will hopefully continue to love their unique qualities.

Having events like this is important to enhance the university experience, as it allows students to get involved and participate in extracurricular activities that are not related to their course. It also allows students to be comfortable and free to speak up on matters that they think are of significance.

Check out and support the artists who came to perform by searching their socials.

*@t.ffuego*

*@shareefaenergy*

*@dailywithdils*

*@emypmate*

Rida Jan,



**ART EXHIBITION**

**DIF FER ENCE**

**A FREE FESTIVAL EXPLORING RADICAL IDEAS TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE**

**25 FEBRUARY – 1 MARCH 2019**

DEN	WHAT?	WHEN?
The Democratic Education Network - DEN is delighted to be kicking off the Difference Festival at the University of Westminster.	Join us for a night full of art and poetry to celebrate our multicultural backgrounds and experiences.	Friday, 22nd February 4pm to 7pm and Monday, 25th February 1pm to 4pm Fyvie Hall, 309 Regent Street London - UK

**DEN**  
The Democratic Education Network

# GLOBAL CRISIS: LOCAL VOICES



Democratic Education Network (DEN) hosted their second international student conference on 11th and 12th May called Global Crisis: Local Voices. The Democratic Education Network is an academic student-led organization of the Department of Politics and International (DPIR). The conference like last year was a two-day long affair packed with stimulating panels, a theatre production and two documentary screenings (Produced by Westminster students). The conference was entirely hosted and organized by student part of DEN and DPIR and the panellists were students as well. The conference had students flying in from various countries including Uzbekistan from Westminster International University in Tashkent and students from universities around U.K. The conference offered a wide range of different ideas and topics all surrounding the theme of global crisis-local voices.



The conference involved a varying range of panels encouraging many intellectually stimulating panels from Globalization, Migration, Gender to Media, Democracy-Populism, Middle-East politics and many more. Some of the other interesting bits included the theatre production called “Hands Up” entirely run by the students presenting some phenomenal performances neighbouring the theme of Black History Month.



The first day of the conference had a documentary screening in the evening called “Behind the Scarf” focused around the theme of gender, Islamophobia, deconstructing the myth that Muslim women are submissive. The concluding ceremony of the conference too had a short documentary presented by a student Julia Jana Lemcke sharing her volunteering journey in Jordan as a part of the volunteering programme of the university. Something special about both the documentaries was that they both were not only made entirely by students but were also a part of a wider DEN project called Words Heal the World, one of the many student projects run by DEN. Another special element of the conference was that this year DEN presented their own published book that was a combination of papers from last year’s conference. This book was a part of another student-led project of DEN which included them planning the whole venture leading to a publishing book from last year’s paper submissions.



The conference also attended by our Vice-Chancellor Dr. Peter Bonfield who encouraged students and shared his vision for the university with them. The conference was supported by Dr. Farhang Morady, Dr. Dibyesh Anand, Dr. Thomas Moore and other staff members of DPIR. The conference was covered by the online magazine of DEN called Inside Westminster. Over the period of two years, DEN has presented some path-breaking student projects ranging from theatre production to online magazine, publishing a book and magazine and many more. DEN has hugely been supported by Quintin Hogg Trust who have played a crucial role in the development of the students who are part of DEN. You can find out more activities of DEN from- <https://www.denwestminster.net/>.

**Palakh Dutta**

DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION NETWORK PRESENTS

# GLOBAL CROSSROADS

RETHINKING DOMINANT ORDER(S) IN OUR CONTESTED WORLD

STUDENT-LED CONFERENCE ON CURRENT EVENTS

*University of Westminster  
309 Regent Street, W1B 2HW  
May 10th and 11th, 2019  
9:00 AM - 6:00 PM*

*The deadline to submit abstract: 18th April. Please contact:  
[denconference2019@gmail.com](mailto:denconference2019@gmail.com)*

DENWESTMINSTER.NET



# DEN Journal and Conference

**Zara Patel**

**Edited by Megan Jessie-Asplin and Zeenat Khan**

For months, under the guidance of Westminster Alumni Gabrielle Piazza, our team have been working on putting together the second DEN journal. The journal will be entitled 'Local Voices, Global Crises' after the conference of the same name hosted by DEN last year. The publication will showcase papers written by students from universities across the globe, which were originally presented at the conference last year. Papers cover a wide range of topics including a look into the dehumanising effects of UK counter-terror policies to an eye-opening article on the current political turmoil in Yemen.

For the third time, DEN will be hosting their annual conference entitled - Global Crossroads: Rethinking Dominant Order(s) in our Contested World. The conference will spread over two days with panels, debates, social networking events and an art exhibition. The panels this year are expected to cover topics such as globalisation, climate change and gender issues. Even though the team has had two previous conferences as blueprints, they are keen to distinguish this conference from previous years. Presently, the team has four main groups focusing on outreach, events, marketing and academic coordination, all student-led and student-run. The outreach team have been working on a comprehensive list of universities and schools around the world who DEN will invite to be part of the conference in May. The events team have been working to create events on both nights to allow attendees to network and socialise after two days of panels and debates. The events this year will include performance of spoken word and music, food and drink all provided by Westminster. The marketing and promotion team have been advertising the conference on social media, designing a conference-specific logo and working on items to give away in goodie bags to our guests. The academic coordination team have worked on a brief and email to send to prospective panellists and teachers to ensure we have a wide range of topics discussed and diverse range of people in attendance. Whilst we appreciate the support from the University of Westminster, we are proud that universities we have invited in the past wish to return in May and their students to write a paper! We have also had students who are keen to start a DEN-like organisation in their universities.

The conference this year will take place on the 10th and 11th of May and we encourage all students to attend and attempt to write a paper. The paper should be between 4,000-6,000 words and can be on any topic of your choosing (a more detailed brief is available here: <https://insidewestminster.co.uk/den-conference-2019-global-crossroads-rethinking-dominant-orders-in-our-contested-world/>). The deadline to receive papers is Thursday 18th April.

DEN is an opportunity for students across the university to meet and encourage them to discover new skills. We are excited this year to welcome students studying a variety of subjects including law and politics. Even though we enjoy the weekly meetings and the social elements that DEN gives us, knowing that we have participated in the publishing of a book or the organisation of an academic conference gives many of us a sense of pride. For those of us in third year, the DEN conference in May will be our swan song for our time here at Westminster; and we couldn't be prouder to share it with those we have met along the way. We look forward to seeing many of you at the conference and hope you will be inspired to submit your own paper.



*DEN conference team 2019*

# OUR JOURNEY: FIRST STEPS INTO UNIVERSITY LIFE



University so far has been quite an extraordinary experience, three weeks in and you have lecturers who not only guide you but listen to you. They try to build a relationship with you to help students achieve their goals. It's more than just a collection of buildings and classrooms, it is a culturally rich society, where teachers, students, and admins work together. Many students find it difficult to adapt to the atmosphere of the university, but in fact, there are a lot of opportunities that help you get accustomed to the university life; three of which are; making friends, joining extracurricular activities and building relationships with your lecturers/seminar leaders.

First, you have the lecturers, who are always there for you every step of the way. The transition from A-Levels to University is quite a big jump, you have to learn to be an independent individual without anyone breathing down your neck. The lecturers play a huge role in guiding you through this transition during your time at University.

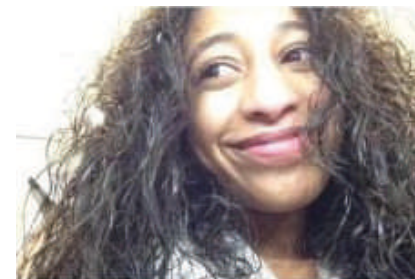
They are the ones who put in the utmost effort to give the best seminars and lecturers, in order to give you an understanding of your course. They are people who won't say no when you need help; for example, if you're confused or worried about something, drop them an email or talk to them in person and they will reply and give you all the information you need. You also learn a great deal from all the staff, students and administrators within the university as they are there to help you too, they are there to make sure you know your way around, meet new people and make your university life worthwhile, which is a useful aspect within itself.

Second, you have friendship an interesting and important step within the university life. You will meet people from all over the world, you will get to learn about the different cultures and learn something new every day. It is a chance where the friends you meet will soon become your family. It is not just about the chance of having a family at university, but it is what will make you feel at home and something that will help you settle in nicely knowing you have all these good people around you. People who will help you with your course and will lead you to a successful path.

Lastly, you have the Students Union, one of the most helpful things within the university to get you involved. You have a hobby but is not related to your course? Join the society that suits you; ranging from dance to debating, to henna society. If you don't enjoy the ones that are already there, you can start your own society, all you need to do is gather a small group of people. It is also a way to meet people who are not in your course and make friends.

One of the student group that I have personally joined is the Democratic Education Network (DEN), a place where you work in teams to build a number of different opportunities, the Westminster magazine, STAR (working with refugees), a conference (write an essay and projecting it to an audience from all over the world) and many more. If you have an idea of your own and want to make it happen, gather 5 -10 people and then you're all good to go. One of the best things about DEN is that it not only enhances your skills, but it is an opportunity to work with people and make new friends where you can express your ideas. It's a place that will get you out of your comfort zone and join and make you feel a part of something inspiring and life-changing.

Overall, during my time at university, my perceptions of it has changed, I thought it would be this big place where it will just hand me the work and tell me to do it, but it is not like that at all. It is a welcoming and friendly environment, there are many opportunities to get you involved too. University is a big change, and some may think that it is a scary change. It's really not. You will make friends for life, build relationships with your lecturers/seminar leaders, and have an adventure That's what university is all about, yes, it's about getting your degree, but it's also about making memories and creating a family there.



**Tasneem Fadel**

# GET INVOLVED, BE YOURSELF AND EXPERIENCE NEW ADVENTURES



Besides the excitement and eagerness to learn about Politics and International Relations, the constant reminder of starting university all seemed scary. Numerous questions flooded into my head; do I want to go to university? Where am I going to go? How am I going to get there?

I studied at the same school and the sixth form for seven years, in an environment that was comfortable and felt like home. Yet, I had many negative perceptions about the idea of university life including how to manage money, traveling long distances and most importantly making new friends.

As a student who was able to engage and grasp many opportunities within an educational institution, I feared that I may not be able to fulfil particular interests in an unknown setting. However, this perception completely contrasts the experiences I have currently already had at university. Three weeks into university and I am loving it – they have been the best weeks of my life. I am very much looking forward to the remaining journey and what the future holds at Westminster.

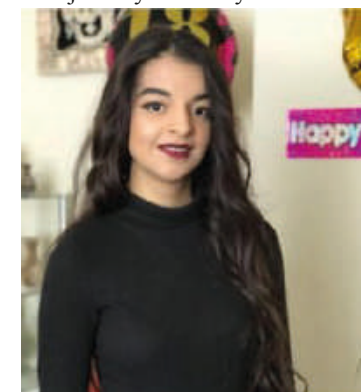
The University of Westminster presents a real opportunity to get involved and build a strong sense of community through being able to develop different skills and interests. I have already joined many groups and societies within my individual interest. The university has provided me with a real taste of independence, enabling me to gain a fruitful insight into how to manage my time wisely between educational and community work. For example, I have made a commitment towards the Democratic Education Network (DEN) by leading a group of people in order to organise and host a month of activities and events based on the issue of gender inequality.

As a first-year student, I have already been given the initiative to work alongside different communities to challenge injustice, express my passion for equal rights and to engage and foster debate about controversial topics. Being apart of Westminster clearly demonstrates that it is not only about attending lectures and seminars but also about taking advantage of the opportunities available and building a family.

Furthermore, Westminster is dedicated to welcoming people from all parts of the world irrespective of background, culture or religion. It respects and values diversity within the whole community, in particular through supporting equal opportunities. Westminster is all about looking out for one another. University life has offered me the opportunity to get to know a diverse range of people and cultures. I have made friends with people from diverse backgrounds that I have never come across before. From this experience, I am confident that I will be able to learn different languages, visit new places and increase my knowledge about the world we live around in.

Personally, I believe the best part of the university is being able to choose the right course to study. Politics and International Relations at Westminster is extremely intriguing – deep discussions, deep thinking, and deep decision making. University Is NOT only about learning one specific subject but also about understanding what is happening around us, making yourself politically active, being responsible and making a real change in the world.

University, after all, is about independence, expressing your individuality and preparing for the real world. The beginning may be nerve-wracking, but it only gets better and better. The journey will only become more exciting and enjoyable to get involved, be yourself



and experience new adventures. If you want to fulfil your wants and aspirations whilst studying, the best place to do this is at Westminster. So much goes on around here and you can definitely call Westminster home.

**Noor Ali**



# DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION NETWORK: BUILDING A BRIDGE BETWEEN UNIVERSITY, SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES



As part of Democratic Education Network (DEN) this academic year we visited City and Islington College in London (CIC). This project is part of DEN's community-based work involving students from both the University of Westminster and the Further Education College. We hope to develop a meaningful collaboration between our students and staff by aiming to support each other both academically and through extracurricular activities.

This is another new and innovative aspect of the DEN's outreach programme by encouraging students and staff to look out to different communities in London. HopeTown is a similar project where I got the opportunity to visit the Sudanese community and working with them to learn and support refugees and asylum seekers.

Similar to all DEN's programmes, students play a vital role. Through this outreach project, we can develop our skills and knowledge and, in my case, I hope to teach when I graduate. We also hope that CIC students could join some of our projects such as International Women's Day or our annual conference in May.

A group of us have been collaborating with Plumstead Manor School, a secondary school in South London. Having studied in the UK education system all my life, I was looking forward to interacting with current students and comparing our experiences at college and how the reforms in education policies have impacted them and their opinions on it. So, four students from DEN including myself visited the college. We were briefed about the course, they all study the first year BTEC. All the students were given a task of reading a book on artificial intelligence and review it. They briefly told us what the book is about, the strength and the weakness of it.

I was super interested to listen to what student's views were about the university and if we could bridge a gap. The students were quite keen on engaging with us. There were about 20 students who seem to be from different cultural backgrounds, looking around the college, it seems to be a very diverse space, just like our University.

We discussed their research focusing on presenting their work at the DEN conference in May. We offered to help them to develop their ideas, write their reports and later on their proposal for the conference. They began to explain to us the meaning of artificial intelligence and the following elements of science and technology. They expressed the implementation of artificial intelligence in computer science, neuron science, human psychology, mathematics, engineering, etc. We heard how our courses shared similarities such as globalisation and how it continues to keep changing how our world is working and the role artificial intelligence is playing.

This was followed by our second visit 3 weeks later when we discussed their progress. They summarised their findings in a specific way and their teachers have also been doing some work with them to narrow down their question and develop it. It was extremely interesting to hear and see their development.

After the second meeting, we have arranged the third meeting that will take place in March the 21st at the University of Westminster. They will be presenting their work to us using PowerPoint. We look forward to supporting them with their presentation to develop it and get it ready for the May conference on the 10th and the 11th of May 2019.

**Yasmin Ahmed**



# DEN TRAVELS

## GEORGIA IN MY HEART

When our lecturer first told us to talk to each other and we only vaguely knew who he was referring to, I don't think Lienus or I could have imagined that it would lead to the day when we met with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia. When we first started discussing the possibility of arranging a trip to Georgia, we certainly didn't dream of such an amazing experience; in fact, there were many moments where we both doubted it would ever even happen. Yet here we are, freshly returned from Tbilisi with a group of students from the University of Westminster's Democratic Education Network (DEN), as well as the lecturer, Dr. Farhang Morady, who first told us to talk to each other.



It has been a mind-blowing experience from the moment we stepped off the plane (or perhaps before that, as we travelled through the night with a stop-over in Istanbul) and were met by our most hospitable of hosts, Giorgi Tsiklauri, and our fellow Westminster student and Georgian resident who would be our incredibly capable interpreter, David Kenkadze. Our first

day saw us whisked away to St Andrew the First-Called University of Georgia (SANGU) where we received a highly informative lecture on Georgia from the rector of the university, Sergo Vardosanidze. We received the warmest of welcomes from the moment of arrival in Georgia, from everyone we met. Our first evening was spent with mountains of fresh and delicious Georgian food and wine as well as first-class entertainment courtesy of father and son, Kakhi and David Kenkadze. These Georgians know how to host!

Our second day saw us really getting down to business. Firstly, a SANGU lecture on Georgia's tourism industry from Niko Kvaracelia followed by a meeting at the Ministry of internally displaced persons and refugees. The lecture on tourism was really interesting and made me reflect upon the role of tourism in the development of a country. From the ministry of IDP's, my overwhelming impression of Georgia's approach here is that they are doing all they possibly can for their vulnerable population with the limited resour-



es available to them. The social care system is aiming to do all that you could ask; providing housing, healthcare and benefits through effective and well-planned strategies.

Our final meeting of the day was with the Georgian chapter of Transparency International. I felt this meeting was very informative and crucial in giving us a more balanced insight into Georgia. Given that corruption was Georgia's biggest problem,

Transparency International has played a vital role in the transforming the country.

Day three...and many more meetings ahead of us, starting with a lecture at SANGU on Georgian economics from Levan Kistauri. This lecture really highlighted Georgia's determination and focus on becoming a liberal capitalist free-market economy. Currently, a large proportion of Georgian's is self-employed (mainly in agriculture) with very small revenue, which is just one story behind the official unemployment statistic of 13.9%. Our afternoon consisted of a meeting with the Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies, where we heard some more of Georgia's history and hoped for future from Kakha Gogolashvili and Giorgi Badrizdze.



On to one of the most exciting moments of our trip...when we attended the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. We were all somewhat overwhelmed by the lavish building, and the room in to which we walked only to discover a very formal sight, with all of our names around a table. Now we really felt like professionals! Such meetings gave us a real insight into what our future careers may look like. I believe I can speak for all of us when I say that it is



an experience that will leave a mark on our minds for a very long time. Our final meeting was at Parliament with Sofio Katsarava who talked to us about Georgia's position in Europe and its path towards the EU.

As well as our many meetings, we did manage to fit in a spot of sight-seeing. Saturday morning was spent visiting the jaw-drop-

pingly stunning Mtskheta, where we visited Jvari Monastery and had a tour of Svetitskhoveli Cathedral. I can't begin to tell you how much I loved this place, it was beautiful beyond words. I can't wait to go back again. We were also able to spend some time seeing Tbilisi, including the exquisite Old Town, enchanting Botanical Gardens, and enchanting clock tower.

Tbilisi is an alluring city that we all fell in love with. Most notably, everyone treats you with such hospitality. I have never felt so well looked after. I highly recommend that everyone visits Georgia and I will be returning myself for a trip of a different nature when I go skiing in Gudauri. I will definitely be scheduling a few days in Tbilisi en route, where I will stay once again at the gorgeous Stay Boutique Hotel where I know I am guaranteed an elegant room and top service from the lovely Natiya.

**Rebecca Price**



## VIETNAM: FROM EDUCATION TO CULTURAL IMMERSION



Vietnam is a country deeply rooted in a rich culture, history and an increasingly stimulating stance on the current world stage. Whilst visiting Vietnam in December 2018 it infatuated me to gain a first – hand experience of an amazing country with an unfortunate pattern of social, environmental and economic impacts. Accompanied by Dr. Farhang Morady and Professor Dib-

yesh Anand we knew we were in safe hands, allowing us to fully get involved and immerse ourselves into the education, culture, and lifestyle of Vietnam.

We started off at the Ho Chin Minh Mausoleum and the Temple of Literature. These visits significantly portrayed and demonstrated the rise of Communism and higher education in Vietnam. Whilst traveling to the Mausoleum, we were mesmerized as the local people were in awe and conveyed their idolization their founder of communism: Ho Chin Minh. This was not only surprising but for some of us, it was also a culture shock. This experience was also similar to the Temple of Literature. On arriving at the Temple – Vietnam's first university – we were greeted by 150 University students graduating and using the



amazing setting for a commemorative photo of their journey through university. This was truly great to see, as the history of higher education is not something celebrated in the UK. After attending both, we were all hungry and went into the old quarter, which in time developed into the social hot-spot for most of its students to spend their free time. The hustle and



bustle, culture, constant moving and friendliness of those in the old quarter grew into an aura that made it place that students loved after a day spent doing classes at the The University of Hanoi. These classes were not foreseen as the most exciting part – especially when met with our jetlag, but it gave an overview of the way that seminars are structured and presented in the lessons that the students who we had grown so close to experienced.

After attending seminars in another country, the trip to the United Nations was incredible.



Attending the talk from UN-Habitat allowed us to gain knowledge of what international organizations are currently undertaking and how we would be able to work and get involved with the UN after university. After immersing ourselves in the educational organizations, Farhang decided that we needed one more amazing experience. A night on a boat in the remarkable setting of Ha Long Bay. Sur-

rounded by emerald waters and towering islands as far as we could see. This soon became one of the most rewarding times of the trip. Being able to wake up and see that as soon as you step out of your cabin door, is a sight I will never forget. Vietnam is a place deeply sown into my heart as the experience allowed me to feel inspired and grateful. The culture and atmosphere is one I shall not forget anytime soon. I hope the mesmerized feeling I developed is one I can endure on every trip I take in the future.

I have confidence that this trip has truly benefitted me greatly in the continuation of my second year studying International relations and development and my passion is fuelled further that will keep me fascinated until my graduation. My course has allowed me to realize that every country has an essence of development, no matter the definition. But this can also be flipped, every country is also plagued by different issues that hinder development. In going to Vietnam, I believe this was part of my journey that has allowed me to become a true, well-rounded global citizen – an obvious win for me. While the lessons within the classroom allowed me to gain knowledge and history, there is no class that is equivalent to going to a country and immersing yourself in the culture. ‘Learning in an International environment: a short-burst module’ is one that offered an amazing balance between the typical education journey and a unique, holistic approach. I would definitely recommend a module similar to this for the level six portion of my course.

Vietnam was above and beyond; as it was fun and educational, when these two things are combined it allows for students to want to get good grades and delve deeper into the region being explored. I also believe that for the Democratic education network (DEN), a trip like this would be excellent. It would allow students who may not get the opportunity

to do this course within their degree to gain access to an unequivocal once in a lifetime trip. I believe that a module similar to this is amazing and if I could I would recommend it to every course and every department as a way for students to really connect with the world around them.

What motivates me? Cultural exploration, experiencing new things, broadening my knowledge, meeting new people and understanding different ways to live. As a student I believe these are similar desires from all students were the things that bonded Hanoi and Westminster students. The students for me were one of the best parts of the trip, with an astounding outlook on life, generosity, and kindness that cannot be matched. The work they put in to make sure we enjoyed ourselves is one that I will always be grateful for. For me, the students had no problem with showing me how to adapt and fully enjoy my time there – even accompanying me to an Indian restaurant, when I began to crave some. This was not an easy place to find in Vietnam, and many of the students that came were trying this cuisine for the first time. Clearly, for both us and them, this trip created bonds and friendships that will never be forgotten, it was a learning experience that created a context for a commitment and extended communication to be forged with people I would have never connected with prior to this trip. All of these factors put together, I believe perfectly summarises my trip to Vietnam in 2018.

**Zeenat Khan**



# ENGAGING WITH CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN TURKEY



The trip to Turkey initially promised both a great academic and social experience. Upon arriving at Istanbul's Ataturk airport in the evening we boarded minibuses towards the city of Kocaeli as the core part of our trip was centred there.

The following morning, we headed to the Kocaeli Academy for Solidarity which was a walking distance from our hotel. We were

met by the lovely staff, academics, and students from Kocaeli University as well and were treated to much-needed refreshments. The day's sessions ranged from presentations on Turkey's history dating back to the Ottoman empire all the way to the current (controversial) government headed by Erdogan. Other topics that were presented on included women's rights, Turkey's financial situation and the state's relationship with the media.

One of the most striking things I found in Turkey overall and in part emphasized by the day's presentations, was the struggle between Islamists and secularists. However, the day's presenters did extremely well in presenting a contextual framework albeit in limited time, where one can attempt to understand how Turkey's contemporary issues have come to be.

Our final 2 days were spent in Istanbul doing the classical tourist thing: tourists (just made that up). After charting a ferry from Kadikoy, we entered Turkey's city centre. We visited the famous Blue Mosque, the grand bazaar, and many other places. On our final day, we visited Taksim Square, Gezi Square, the site of the 2013 protests.

Overall, the trip was very impactful. Many of the students found the rare opportunity to bond with each other in ways London does not accommodate. Our host Ishmael was uniquely fantastic. We all appreciated his patience and endeavour to make our trip truly worthwhile.

**Muna Hassan**

## The view: Youth on the Society today

### The fall of the traditional left in Europe

We are living turbulent times in Europe. Economic, social and migratory factors are affecting, not only the citizens, but also the political parties. It's clear that migratory phenomenon is generating a strong nationalism which is translating on the creation of new extreme right parties and the empowering of old fascist-stained parties that were "hidden under the carpet" and where losing the majority of their voters in the last decades. But in this article my objective is not talking about the extreme-right parties but to analyse their participation, together with the remaining of the 2008 economic crisis and the distrust on the global financial system, in the slowly degradation of the traditional left parties in Europe toward their disappearance.

In which way? The setback caused by the major economic crisis since 1930 and the apparition (or reappearance) of the extreme right is making bigger one sector of the electorate that is always been there but asleep. The contraposition to the market economy and the need of stopping the trend of right movements, is enlarging a more extreme left sector. Which is affecting the traditional socialist parties.

One of the cases is the Spanish one: after the creation of Podemos as a result of the economic recession that hit Spain and now with the advance of extremists groups as Vox, the strongest left groups of society are mobilizing more than ever; which puts the PSOE (the historic centre-left party) in a trouble. After the serious corruption accusations of the PP's government, PSOE accomplished the presidency in this country through a coalition government, but cooperating with Podemos. So Pedro Sanchez is trying to keep his mandate by negotiating with the more extreme left groups, the ones that, for example, defend left-wing dictatorships rulers as Castro in Cuba or Maduro in Venezuela (decision that no centre-left parties would never defend). Not only this is making a change in normal functioning of PSOE but also, the president of Spanish congress is making several pacts with Quim Torra (president of Catalan government), Carles Puigdemont (former Catalan leader, now in exiled in Belgium escaping from Madrid's justice) and Iñigo Urkullu (face of the Basque Nationalist Party) just to keep his possibility of governing.

The answer of the opposition for this political chaos is "you can't govern Spain with the ones that want to eliminate Spain". The opposition critic is added to the internal break to these decisions taken by Sanchez; historic members of the PSOE like Alfonso Guerra and Felipe Gonzalez (two socialist politicians of the democratic recovery after Franco's dictatorship and two of the main characters of the political scene) are seriously condemning how the new president is making decisions and in which way he's taking the party, just to keep the power and to try to win some of the more extreme left electorate that now is lined up behind Podemos.



The other relevant case is France: even though the presidency was won by a centre-republican leader as Emmanuel Macron is, the change in the centre-left movement in this country has been abrupt. In the 2017 elections the PS (Socialist Party) led at that time by Benoit Hamon was fifth in the primaries with just 6.3% of the popular vote, obtaining not only the last position in that election but the worst result since 1969. Instead, the more radical leader Jean-Luc Mélenchon with a newer and more extreme platform, “La France Insoumise” founded in 2016, gathered around 20% of the electorate thanks to the support of anti-capitalist parties as “Parti de Gauche” and the “Parti Communiste Français”. Mélenchon, known because of his strong opposition to the European Union, defending left-wing authoritarian government in Latin America and his leaning toward countries like Russia and Iran, had a big electoral growth. In 2012 he barely reached 10% of the votes and competing against the PS led by François Hollande, who won the election that year. It’s undeniable that his growth has been related with his powerful opposition against the xenophobic and conservative platform of the “Front National” that took Marine Le Pen into the national sphere.

We could analyse the German case, which is a bit different due to his electoral system and proportional distribution of seats in the Bundestag (the federal parliament). Despite this factor, there are also changes in the traditional political system: even though Merkel’s hegemony is unquestionable, the electorate has been changing in these last years. The great historic party, the Social Democratic Party of Germany founded in 1863, has been always a clear reference of the centre-left politics of this country but it has been suffering changes with the appearance of a new player, “Die Linke”. Not only over decades it has been losing members and elections (in the last twenty years has lost basically 20% of the popular votes) but this has been intensified with the creation of The Left (Die Linke) in 2007. This populist extreme left-wing party, that questions capitalist system and criticizes the EU, has started with a solid 8.7% of the votes and it has been growing election after election. They base his campaign mainly opposing to the new far right-wing, racist and Islamophobic party, Alternative for Germany, that has almost tripled his membership base since the time of its creation in 2013. Fortunately, none of them have a strong representation in congress, mainly because of the proportional system implemented in the German electoral arena, but we should consider the possibility of a big growth in the next years.

At the end we could mention the more recent changes in the British political arena too: with the recent Brexit situation there has been a strong crash between very opposite positions. Despite the informal bipartidism, there’re internal positions within the Conservative and Labour party that are pushing to more extremist views of politics. The Conservative Party seems to be controlling these internal groups, the Labour Party instead, since 2015 with Jeremy Corbyn’s leadership has been pushing the party into a more leftist position and leaving the traditional centre-left ground that the party historically had. This shifting has the objective of catching some of the more radical electorate that sees Corbyn as a popular and revolutionary leader. But this shift has costed some critics, the opposition and some internal branches have agreed that this new radical leadership in the party is betraying some of the central values of Labourism; the accusations of antisemitism, the criticism

to Israel and the US together with a defence of Hamas and Hezbollah. This is added to the demonization of a national leader as Churchill and the defence and acceptance of Derek Hatton and other “Militant” (Trotskyist group inside the Labour Party in the 70s and 80s) leaders of back again in the party after 34 years of its expulsion. We could quote Theresa May in a parliament session at the beginning of the year: “Attlee and Bevan would be spinning in their grave. That’s what the right honourable gentleman has done to a once proud Labour Party”.

In any case, if we analyse the economic disconformity of society and the fact that different kind of social problems are boosting the more far-right parties all over Europe, there is a common event in all of them. The electorate is turning into a more extreme left answer at the time of choosing their politicians, which is making the traditional and historic social-democrat parties, that once made Europe proud, to have serious problems at the moment of keeping their voters and adapt to the new reality of the 21th century brings to politics. Are the far left and far right feeding one another and we are now trapped in a retro-alimentation circle of extremism? What should we do now? Should we trust again in the conventional politics and try to move the discussion back to the centre? These are all questions that we have to think about, in a world that’s every day more unconnected and violent.

**Ignacio Albor Vazquez**

**LET THEM IN.  
- SHASHANK IYER**

**Let them in,  
Why won't you let them in,  
Been through war, through  
terror,  
Been through such times you  
wouldn't have heard,  
All they need is a home,  
A little piece of bread to pacify  
their hunger,  
A little love to get their beautiful  
life back.**

**Let them in,  
A little piece of heaven you will  
have given them,  
A little piece of their life back,  
Getting shot in the head and for  
what?,  
For saving themselves?**

**Washed ashore on the sea shore,  
Half dead, lifeless and sore,  
The other half trying to survive,  
For the terror they bore they  
can't have no more of this  
senseless war,  
People dying and for what?**

**Let them in,  
Oh let them in,  
Because they will be grateful  
within,  
Why are they being kicked out  
for having committed no sin?**

## **SPOKEN WORD TO SPEAK OUT FOR WOMEN**

Muna Hassan is a third year International Relations and Development Studies student. She recited some of her poems on International Women's Day at the University of Westminster's exhibition in March 2018. Here are her thoughts on poetry and one of her poems-

I performed a spoken word piece at the University of Westminster's event for International Women's Day. The piece consisted of some of my old writings about my experiences growing up Black and Muslim along with being the eldest daughter in my immigrant family; as well as some new writings about the importance of the debate on women and intersectionality. The two themes capture exactly what the term intersectionality means to me. For me, the term encapsulates the experience of women who deal with the double repercussion of race, religion, culture and so on. I use the word 'repercussion' intentionally because of the inherent power dynamics inherent in race, cultures, and religion.



The first part of my piece is titled 'reflections' and was aimed at highlighting the importance of acknowledging gender and equally acknowledging that other women who aren't typically associated with the normative form of gender exist: women of colour, disabled, queer, gender-nonconforming and trans. When feminism has been discussed historically, women of colour have always existed on the periphery not benefitting much from the gains women have attained throughout time. This continues to be the case in modern times although countless women of colour have sought to gain access in these circles. Some have even developed alternative movements which centre their experiences; women like Alice Walker who founded the term 'womanism' which calls for the liberation of all women in all intersections. It's important that if the aim is for women to gain equality in all measures that all women are included in this.

The second part of my piece titled 'thoughts' focused on my own experiences as a woman of colour and as one of the eldest immigrant daughters in my family. I found that my intersections shaped my experiences uniquely. A lot of girls from my background growing up burdened with unresolved generational trauma. Our families, including my parents, came to this country with so much baggage and leaving behind their comfort zones. A lot of our parents also fled war zones and came to this country seeking safety. Many of us, therefore, grew up dealing with that and learning the ways of our adopted societies that have their own deeply entrenched issues. Understanding these issues and unpacking how they affect people like me have helped me cope. Spoken word is just one of the methods I use to do this-

*All this talk about women and their treatment got people asking why gender matters.  
It matters that girls are married off in fear men might assault their bodies; as if marriage ever prevented an assault on the female's body.*

*It matters that women are systematically used as weapons for war, call it the highest form of collateral damage.  
It matters to me, that if freedom for all women does not include the black, Muslim, queer & disabled, then it isn't freedom at all.*

*A world of boxes, designed to entrap lives and restrict minds: boxes whose terms and conditions weren't signed by us, but defined for us to abide by*

*If I truly mirrored all the ugliness around me, I'd be unrecognizable.  
Imagine the state of a plant that constantly bears harsh weather and is never given the opportunity to become its true potential.*

*Is the plant then questioned or the conditions it endured?  
Reflections cannot be blamed for what they reflect cause they only show what is in front or around them, it's just basic science:  
signs of hurt and neglect reflect that which we were exposed to from infancy.*

*Like Parents projecting their insecurities and lost souls abusing the first sight of clemency.  
What becomes of someone who learns to care for others before themselves is a replica of others and never themselves.*

*In all the applications I have filled out in my life, I swear to God I never once signed up to be "that" person.  
We were the children that played the adults that were absent,  
we filled the voids for our parents and our sacrifices were never recompensed.  
I have laid my back down to bridge far too many differences.  
My own problems have legs and they too need to run their course.*

*Life's an individual sprint and I can no longer cover the tracks for you.*

*This doesn't mean that I don't love you, it just means that I'm tired of you not loving me.*

*Tell me, how does one go about claiming something they have never owned but was always rightfully theirs?  
Like telling a girl to be free and expecting her to spread her wings without teaching her to fly.  
We can't take our lessons from the boys because they were given a manual, supervision and the supply.*

*Supported by the good and the bad and given the platform to do what they like, despite culture and religion,  
cause both culture and religion weighed the girl down to mere expectations and what came before.*

#### Meet the team-

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