

ISSUE 24

**DECEMBER
2017**



Baismag

Dear Readers,

For some, this semester may have gone by faster than expected, and it is with a rising sense of panic that you realise finals are a matter of days and weeks away. For others, perhaps it went by far too slowly, and you are counting down the days until you leave. Either way, thankfully with the end of the semester comes Christmas, New Year's Eve, or whatever other holiday you celebrate back home, and this issue hopes to reflect the diverse nature of this time of year. There are articles detailing traditions across continents, reflections on the usefulness (or lack thereof) of New Year's resolutions, and a look into why New Year's Eve and Christmas are blended together in Russian traditions. The Equality Committee has focused on a less visible aspect of this time of year, looking into homelessness in The Hague, while other students of BAIS continue on this charitable theme with their account of volunteering in an animal shelter. There is also poetry, postcards, and paintings this issue, which hopefully will keep you occupied through exam procrastination and into January.

Elsa Court
(Editor-in-Chief)

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12 DAYS OF WIJNHAVEN

On the first day of Christmas,
Leiden Uni gave to me
Deadline anxiety.

On the second day of Christmas,
Leiden Uni gave to me
Two BASIS borrels and
Deadline anxiety.

On the third day of Christmas,
Leiden Uni gave to me
Three new web posts,
Two BASIS borrels, and
Deadline anxiety.

On the fourth day of Christmas,
Leiden Uni gave to me
Four lost LU cards,
Three new web posts,
Two BASIS borrels, and
Deadline anxiety.

On the fifth day of Christmas,
Leiden Uni said to me
Five isn't a passing grade,
Four lost LU cards,
Three new web posts,
Two BASIS borrels, and
Deadline anxiety.

On the sixth day of Christmas,
Leiden Uni gave to me
Six student surveys,
Five isn't a passing grade,
Four lost LU cards,
Three new web posts,
Two BASIS borrels, and
Deadline anxiety.

On the seventh day of Christmas,
Leiden Uni gave to me
Seven Albert Heijn runs,
Six student surveys,
Five isn't a passing grade,
Four lost LU cards,
Three new web posts,
Two BASIS borrels, and
Deadline anxiety.

On the eighth day of Christmas,
Leiden Uni gave to me
Eight orientalistes,
Seven Albert Heijn runs,
Six student surveys,
Five isn't a passing grade,
Four lost LU cards,
Three new web posts,
Two BASIS borrels, and
Deadline anxiety.

On the ninth day of Christmas,
Leiden Uni gave to me
Nine hours in the library,
Eight orientalistes,
Seven Albert Heijn runs,
Six student surveys,
Five isn't a passing grade,
Four lost LU cards,
Three new web posts,
Two BASIS borrels, and
Deadline anxiety.

On the tenth day of Christmas,
Leiden Uni gave to me
Ten cups of coffee,
Nine hours in the library,
Eight orientalistes,

Seven Albert Heijn runs,
Six student surveys,
Five isn't a passing grade,
Four lost LU cards,
Three new web posts,
Two BASIS borrels, and
Deadline anxiety.

On the eleventh day of Christmas
Leiden Uni gave to me
Eleven students sobbing,
Ten cups of coffee,
Nine hours in the library,
Eight orientalistes,
Seven Albert Heijn runs,
Six student surveys,
Five isn't a passing grade,
Four lost LU cards,
Three new web posts,
Two BASIS borrels, and
Deadline anxiety.

On the twelfth day of Christmas
Leiden Uni gave to me
Twelve post-exam shots,
Eleven students sobbing,
Ten cups of coffee,
Nine hours in the library,
Eight orientalistes,
Seven Albert Heijn runs,
Six student surveys,
Five isn't a passing grade,
Four lost LU cards,
Three new web posts,
Two BASIS borrels, and
Deadline anxiety.

By Julia Moore

POSTCARDS FROM THE DISCRETIONARY SPACE

Collected by Mathis Gilbach

*Fate determined that I ended up in just about the most boring city in the Proud North for my semester abroad, where your best friend is Tim Hortons aka your daily coffee supplier, where every night sky has the potential to become the beginning of your Instagram fame, where “winter is coming” jokes are legit made from September on, where there is no need to leave campus and face the serious world for at least three weeks straight, and where the country existing for 150 years is only an excuse to bring out all the patriotic/propagandist items you have and combine them into one outfit. Our only hope here is a glimpse of Justin Trudeau and his smile which makes the Canadian arctic melt, together with a portion of perfectly-balanced-meal poutine (which they ensured me was like kapsalon. It is not.), cheap mixed drinks, and long distance buses to save us from any possible dull moments. Which obviously have never happened in the past semester. Yet.
Love, Fabienne, Ottawa.*



大家好！ Hello everyone!

Living in Beijing is a very unique opportunity. It is an extraordinarily exciting and busy city to live in, yet at the same time also a really weird one, both positively and negatively. I've had my arm hair stroked by a security guard, I've had to go through hours and hours of queueing just to get one form when I needed ten different forms, an old man on the bus wanted to record me read aloud an English dictionary and everything – including classes – in some weird language.

Be ready for a culture shock, but if you're open minded and patient you will have the time of your life. There is so much to see, do and learn, that you will not be bored for a single second; Beijing has many beautiful places to visit, the food is amazing and there is no better way to learn about China and study Chinese!

文森特 / Vincent, Beijing.



The black chicken protects the neighbourhood, walking on well-trained legs. She hasn't been eaten (yet). A colourful boat crosses the Chao Praya river. Only a virgin can stop the rain with lemongrass. The sex-pat doesn't care. A Dutch student has his man period every second month. It's been a while since the kettle burned a room. A woman stole a snail in Chinatown.

Anonymous, Bangkok.



SPOTLIGHT

vincent
van
gogh

By Delila Cataldi & Elena Mansour
Illustration by Delila Cataldi

A new dedicated Art and Culture feature of BAISmag; for this issue Delila and Elena reflect on the film 'Loving Vincent'.

By the end of his life, he had created approximately 2000 paintings and sketches, of which he had sold but one. Vincent van Gogh was acknowledged for his emotional and spiritual authenticity only after his death in 1905, and is today recognized as one of the finest figures of West-European High Culture.

Van Gogh was a self-tormented romanticist who 'failed' to conform to the increasing rationalized social norms of his time, which were in big part, a result of industrialization. Whether he could live doing what he loved was, at least back then, in the hands of the Parisian elite.

As a biographical investigation of his mysterious death, 'Loving Vincent' addresses important aspects about the individual in relation to society. The movie portrays the 'madness' which the painter has come to be identified with, as a 19th century societal prejudice, based on reason, against 'odd' - 'unstable' - emotional behaviour. This society could not comprehend the distinction between an artist's evident work, and his subversive expression of the self. However, upon the realization of his initial intentions, his audience developed a sense of sympathy, and this transition in perspective questions the limits that are set to and by society.

It would be appropriate to assume that there was a lot of love put into this production and it is evident in the amount of work that was put in over the past six years in order to paint an entire movie. The plot focuses on a young man who fights for the artist's recognition, and embarks on a journey in search for veracity concerning van Gogh's last days. At the end of the film, the narrative, which respects the notion of objective intelligence, succumbs to the ambiguity that is an inherent aspect of all quests for 'truth': the why, the who, the when, ultimately all remain indifferent and the sole way to truly honour Vincent van Gogh is by considering his overall influence in the world.

This approach is frighteningly contemporary, for we can accept that part of being 'human' in coping with uncertainty is by feeling. Furthermore, it becomes obvious that social classes dictate the realms of "reason" and "emotion", and their attributed social characteristics. A reassessment of the moral and ethical grounds of societal fields that supposedly rely more on 'reason' becomes inevitable and the real question becomes: what needs to change so that societies equally endorse, justify and recognise all of their components?

Who is the arbitrator of your fate?

By Nicole Kadlec & Marissa Preston

Over the past few weeks the Equality Committee has been visiting the homeless of The Hague, interviewing those who were willing to share their story. The project was carried out in the hope of a better understanding of the situation and of the people we see on the streets daily. Loneliness was a common theme in the stories of these people, as well as the temptations of drugs and alcohol. One woman in her 50s knew she was HIV positive but does not go to regular check-ups. She grew up in an abusive environment, and now has no family, friends, or even identification. Another lost everything when her husband passed away, and now sleeps to the heating room of an office building at night to stay warm. Drugs like cocaine and weed are her biggest temptations, and complained about the bureaucracy of the municipality and the waiting procedures. One man in his early 40s said that after a brain injury at 39, he lost his job, and then all his money due to not having insurance to pay the medical fees. He speaks good English, and still works on and off, explaining that you can simultaneously work and be homeless since his freelance paychecks don't cover rent. He doesn't tell his friends about his situation due to the shame. Another man, of a similar age but appearing to be in his 60s, has been homeless for 15 years. He said he feels like an outsider, and that people who have never experienced homelessness treat the homeless like objects. Below are the reflections of Nicole Kadlec following the project.

the Hague

Over the years homelessness has evolved from being a national to an international disaster. Every one of us is at risk of experiencing homelessness; no one is safe from falling prey to this tragedy. Among other factors, it is primarily a shortage of affordable housing and insufficient income that causes homelessness. Homelessness refers to a situation whereby individuals don't have a permanent residence, yet not all homeless people exist on the streets. When problems within a family or household become insurmountable, people are at risk of becoming homeless. Some of these issues may include sudden loss of jobs, violence within the family, drugs and substance abuse, mental illness, emotional and even sexual abuse. Irrespective of the many challenges that homeless people go through such as rape, unnecessary arrests, and victimization, they are still humans who society should accept, embrace and try to assist where necessary. In spite of the challenging situation, homeless people have a deeper side that people rarely point out or even speak about. Many of those we interviewed were positive, intelligent, and hopeful for the future. We should avoid being biased against homeless people, as once you talk to them it becomes clear that they are human beings just like anyone else. Our slight accomplishments should not allow us to neglect humanity at all costs. Most of the time, society forgets that homeless people are parents, friends, brothers, sister, uncles, and aunts to people. Nobody ever wants to be homeless. Homelessness is rarely a choice, and hence we should show love to homeless people. Throughout the project, we found that homeless people can be some of the most down to earth people in the world. Some of them have stories that inspire individuals to be grateful for life. Their lives are adorned with candor and great humility. While many homeless are diminished and belittled every day, crushing their esteem, it should be recognized that they have the potential to become the leaders and entrepreneurs who can move society forward, just like anyone else. The weak, poor, and the homeless deserve nothing short of our humanity, kindness, and care.

THE TRUE AFRICAN NARRATIVE

By Lis Camelia

Wanuri Kahui is a Kenyan artist and storyteller. She is also the co-founder of AfroBubbleGum, a company that funds and promotes the telling of African stories that have no political agenda. Stories that are not specifically about tragedies and pain, but that promote the use of science and fantasy that takes in account the African experience. Therefore, the purpose of AfroBubbleGum is to tell African stories, just for the sake of telling good, interesting stories.

The AfroBubbleGum ideology is particularly interesting because it challenges the image that the world has created of Africa. This image that every time we mention Africa it can only be when talking about Aid, AIDS, poverty, migration, or corruption. On the other hand, we only talk positively about the continent when we mention the amazing pyramids or how fascinating it is that the “traditional” culture of Africa has been able to survive in such a modern world. This way of depicting Africa creates the problematic illusion that the beauty of Africa can only be found in the remembrance of the past.

We of the African Committee want to contradict this notion. We recognize that Africa has its struggles, but that they do not define it. For that reason, the main focus of the African committee is to highlight a different narrative about Africa. A narrative that defines Africa as colorful, rhythmical, rational, difficult, and modern. An Africa that is essentially unessential. We would also like to focus on aspects like race and how it is still a big influence on the African narrative. In addition, taking in account the African Diaspora, which is the biggest diaspora in the world, thus showing the African experience worldwide.

The African committee shares the Afro Bubblegum ideology. Therefore, we want to participate in this movement of highlighting the African culture, the African people, and their resilience. Reinstating that African excellence is also a prevalent part of our present and future. The African committee is here to create a space where we can discuss, share, and promote the African experience in a different light. A space where we can see the whole of Africa. And everyone who is interested in contributing to this awesome African narrative is welcome to participate in this committee.

If you'd like to find out more about the African Committee and the events they are planning, find their page on Facebook (@AfricanCommittee)



HOW THE RUSSIAN NEW YEAR STOLE CHRISTMAS



By Leah Cohill

Illustration by Lotte Timmermans

If you were to ask a Russian person what they associate New Year's Eve with, the answer would probably be: family gatherings, fireworks, presents, and a lot of homemade food - everything that a Westerner would usually associate with Christmas. In Russia though, the jolly man with a red nose and a wooden staff, known as Ded Moroz (Father Frost), does not give presents on December 25th, nor does he on January 7th, the date of the Orthodox Christmas. Rather, he drops by on New Year's Eve and is typically accompanied by his granddaughter Snegurochka (the Snow Maiden). The reason why Ded Moroz brings presents during New Year instead of Christmas is because Christmas celebrations were banned during the Soviet period, leaving Russians to combine traditional Christmas customs with New Year's Eve. As a result, in today's Russia it is New Year that is one of the most important holidays, trumping Christmas in significance. There are several things that make up for a Russian New Year's celebration that one needs to keep in mind, or else it isn't a proper Russian New Year's.

Christmas trees were banned shortly after the Bolshevik revolution but were reintroduced as the *Novogodnaya Yolka* (New Year's tree) in 1935 as a secular holiday symbol. Typically, the New Year's celebrations begin with decorating the *yolka* on December 31st followed by thorough mental and physical preparation for a long night. Presents are wrapped, food is prepared, and alcohol is stacked. Though one must know, a Russian New Year just isn't New Year without salads. The most well known Russian salad is the *Olivie*, which is not just a light green salad but a vegetable oriented, mayonnaise-infused work of art. It typically involves carrots, apples, some type of meat (mainly chicken), potatoes, eggs, topped off with any vegetable you can find in the fridge. The salad is usually accompanied with red caviar served on buttered bread. If you have that on the table with a bottle of champagne then you can officially start the feast. Watching the movie "The Irony of Fate, or Enjoy Your Bath!" is another inevitable part of Russia's New Year tradition. It is a film that you will probably stumble upon when scrolling through the tv channels on a New Year's Eve. It is a story of a young guy named Zhenya Lukashin who after some heavy drinking accidentally ends up on a flight to St. Petersburg where he mistakenly breaks into a stranger's flat thinking he is entering his apartment in Moscow, and finds the love of his life. It's a must see for those who really want to embrace the Russian New Year spirit and familiarise themselves with the ambiguity of the Russian culture.

After you've had some food and watched a couple of traditional New Year's films it is time to pour a glass of champagne and prepare for the midnight date with Putin. Before the clock strikes 12, all the family members gather together around the television to greet the New Year by listening to the President's speech, after which the national anthem plays and fireworks burst into the air. The New Year has officially begun. For Russians, New Year's Eve is a family celebration that involves raising a glass to say goodbye to the passing year, phone calls to relatives and friends with wishes for the upcoming year, and the never ending consumption of the *Olivie* salad. Also, New Year's never goes without raising a toast. So I raise my early New Year's toast to the irony of fate thanks to which all the exciting changes in our lives occur.

In order to truly understand how much the celebration of the New Year means to Russians one must go and experience it themselves considering that the best part of the Russian New Year is the week you have to recover from the hangovers before getting back to work. And if you ever want to send a letter to Ded Moroz his exclusive address is: Ded Moroz, Ded Moroz' House, Veliky Ustyug, 162390 Vologodskaya Oblast, Russia.

Christmas AROUND BAIS

By India Stotesbury & Yara Sewalt
Illustration by Jiacheng Ji



Here at Wijnhaven, we have a very multicultural community. A community that studies together, parties together, moans about gender neutral toilets together, and creates a brilliant Baismag together... But one thing we don't do together, is celebrate the festive season: on the 25th of December most students return home to be with their family, in whichever country that may be. Curious as to what all your international amigos are getting up to on this day? Let's have a look!

When does the 'Christmas period' start and end for you?

Great Britain: You might come across the first Christmas decorations on display in October and hear the first Christmas songs played in November, but Christmas really starts in December, with the revelation of the first chocolate behind your advent calendar door. Christmas trees are taken down after the Twelve Days of Christmas.

United States: For the worst types of people, it begins after Halloween. For the normal people, it's acceptable to start playing Christmas music after Thanksgiving.

Hungary: 24th December- 6th January, and we also celebrate advent.

The Netherlands: The 25th of December is 'Eerste kerstdag' and the 26th of December is 'Tweede kerstdag', so first and second Christmas day.

Italy: 24th December to 9th January.

India: The Christmas period is very short over here, in some families they start from 1st to 26th December and they celebrate it, but people who are poor or if their kids go to school then they just do it for 7 days 20-26 because its exam time in schools and colleges. Traditional Catholics who follow Catholicism properly don't eat from 1-24 December until midnight service, they fast.*

Chile: It starts after Halloween and finishes on the 26th of December.

France: 22nd December- 5th January.

What kind of food traditions do you have?

Britain: Turkey, stuffing, roast potatoes, sprouts, pigs in a blanket, mince pies, trifle, Christmas pudding... Yule logs and Quality Street for the ones with the sweet tooth.

U.S.: Food tradition is a big meal with the family inclusive of turkey, ham, mashed potatoes, stuffing... Basically everything from Thanksgiving but kicked up a notch.

Hungary: Fish soup-halászlé, stuffed cabbage-töltött káposzta, bejgl.

Netherlands: Kerststol (Christmas stollen cake).

Italy: Panettone (cake), Cappone.

India: Rich fruit Christmas cake, kidiyo (deep-fried curly dough balls, dusted in icing sugar), neureos (small pastries stuffed with dry fruit and coconut, sesame seeds and fried), dodol (toffee that has coconut and cashew inside). We also have the 'consuada', when people make sweets before Christmas and give them to their friends and neighbours.

Chile: No traditions, we just get a fancy dinner at home with the family (could be tuna, rabbit, a good steak).

France: Foie gras, oysters, turkey, champagne.

What's a popular Christmas song?

Britain: Last Christmas by Wham! is a classic you will not be able to escape. Another is Do they know it's Christmas by Band Aid.

U.S.: No better Christmas song than Mistletoe by Justin Bieber.

Hungary: A Kis Jézus Megszületett by Emese Kindrusz.

Netherlands: Santa's Party by Nick en Simon.

Italy: Gesu' nascette a napule by Mario Maglione.

India: Many of the people over here prefer the classic old We wish you a merry Christmas sung too much by children and students. Yet women in particular sing some traditional music as well, and they sing carols in churches and when they go to each other's homes for greeting the family.

Chile: Dulce Navidad (the equivalent to Jingle Bells), also some people listen to Villancicos (all the Christmas classics, like noche de paz noche de amor).

France: Vive le vent!

Do you get a white Christmas?

Britain: Nope, sadly not. We do get to build a snowman the odd year, but it doesn't happen often.

U.S.: There used to be white Christmases before global warming.

Hungary: No.

Netherlands: If we're lucky (which is rarely).

Italy: Not always.

India: Maybe in the North, but mostly people put out some cotton balls as snow, to make the children happy. Some in their gifts, some in the tree and some on the floor around it.

Chile: No, summer just started so it's about 35 degrees.

France: Not often.

How do you wish someone a good time over the Christmas season?

Britain: Merry Christmas!

U.S.: Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

Hungary: Merry Christmas- Boldog Karácsonyt! Happy New Year- Boldog új évet!
Happy Holidays- Kellemes Ünnepeket!

Netherlands: Vrolijk Kerstfeest/Fijne Kerst!

Italy: Merry Christmas- Buon Natale! Happy New Year- Felice anno nuovo!

India: In Hindi: क्रिसमस मुबारक - Christmas Mubaarak/Happy Christmas

Chile: You could say 'Felices Fiestas' – Happy Holidays or 'Feliz Navidad y un prospero año nuevo' – Merry Christmas and a good start of the New Year.

France: Joveux Noël!





photos from israel
photos from israel
photos from israel
jan dorus sleutels
photos from israel
photos from israel
jan dorus sleutels
photos from israel



photographs from



om israel

WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE WORLD?

By Amina Sahbegovic

South-East Asia: Cambodia: the forbidden opposition, the end of democracy

The small democratic illusion that existed in Cambodia disappeared on November 16, when the Supreme Court issued a rule which banned the main opposition party of the kingdom- the Cambodian National Rescue Party. With less than a year from the 2018 general election, the Hun Sen government, in power for almost 33 years, ousted the only opponent that could hope to take power away from him. The consequences of this decision are that the CNRP deputies will lose their seats, and the 489 mayors of the party, elected at the polls last June, will be dismissed. The Supreme Court also banned 118 party members, including two co-presidents, Kem Sokha and Sam Rainsy; the first is imprisoned and the second is in exile. If the government is so willing to manipulate the next elections, it is because its party, the Cambodian People's Party, recorded its worst score in the last general elections in 2013. The opposition then denounced treachery in the elections' organization. The Western pressure does not seem to affect the regime, which is supported by China. Beijing and Phnom Peng created a 'think tank' to deal with how to avoid revolutions from the population. The idea that Cambodia was moving towards democracy - promised by the Paris agreements signed in 1991, after the genocide perpetrated by the Khmer Rouge and then a decade of Vietnamese occupation - has gone.

Eurasia: Russia acknowledges it is at the cause of radioactive pollution

On November 20th Russia acknowledged an "extremely high" concentration of radioactive substance, which was detected in several regions of the country. At the end of September, several European radioactivity-monitoring networks found radioactive traces in the form of ruthenium 106. This is a product of the nuclear industry, in the atmosphere between the Vol-

ga River and the Ural mountains; but without being able to specify the exact location of the point ejection. France's Institute for Radioprotection and Nuclear Safety (IRSN) affirms that it was also detected in France. In mid-October, Rosatom, the public company that manages the nuclear sector in Russia, stated that there was no trace of it outside of St. Petersburg. The Russian authorities deny that the pollution is linked to one of their nuclear sites – they are talking about the "disintegration of one of their satellites into the atmosphere". For France's Institute for Radioprotection and Nuclear, the detection of ruthenium alone inhibits the possibility of a nuclear reactor accident, as this would have resulted in the presence of other radionuclides. The origin of the pollution is found in the combustible process or the manufacturing of radioactive elements according to the IRSN. The Russian branch of Greenpeace has called for an investigation of the possible concealment of a nuclear incident.

Africa: Zimbabwe, the oldest exercising leader has stepped down

Zimbabwe – a country subject to a serious economic and financial crisis for many years – used to be led by Robert Mugabe, who has been the country's undisputed ruler since its independence in 1980. Mugabe ignored the demands for him to step down after he got expelled from his own ruling party, the Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front; this was also demanded by the military takeover, which controls the capital and calls for a democratic transition of the regime. Yet, eventually he resigned as the parliament started impeachment procedures. The army intervened in an open crisis between Mugabe and the army's chief after the president dismissed the Vice President, Emmerson Mnangagwa, and gave the position to his wife. Zimbabweans, after Mugabe's resignation, celebrated the news all over the country and are hoping for a better future.

Tens of thousands of people gathered on November 24 in the capital Harare to welcome the new president Mnangagwa, who paid tribute to “the father of the nation” (Mugabe) and asserted that the new government “will create jobs for our youth and reduce poverty for the entire population”.

Europe: The ‘Butcher of Bosnia’ sentenced to life prison

After more than twenty years since the Bosnian War, Ratko Mladic was sentenced to life imprisonment by the judges of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) on the 22nd of November. General Mladic, who had led the Bosnian Serb army at the very beginning of the war in 1992, was found guilty of crimes against humanity - including the siege and bombing of Sarajevo (which led to more than 10,000 dead), and the policy of ethnic cleansing in Bosnian towns and villages and the genocide of Srebrenica (at least 8000 victims) in July 1995. Since the first trials of this UN-created tribunal in 1993, his name has haunted all cases against Bosnian Serb soldiers, officers, militiamen, and politicians. Until 2011, Mladic was in all the incriminating evidence: orders, testimony, wiretapping... but he was still missing. Even though there will never be justice at all for the Bosnian population, who lost around 200,000 people in the war and were reduced to a life of fear and anxiety, this is a historic verdict, hailed in Sarajevo. However, it is perceived as an unbearable injustice across the border: Milorad Dodik, president of the Serbian entity of the country, the judgment is “a shameful slap inflicted on the Serbian people”. On 31 December, the ICTY, the first international tribunal since Nuremberg, will close. “Justice has yet to pass” stated Serge Brammertz, the tribunal’s attorney general. It remains that more than 5,000 perpetrators still have to be judged in the courts of Bosnia, Croatia and Serbia.

Middle East: Syria’s end to ISIS.

After months of violent combat in Raqqa, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) - an alliance of Kurds and Arabs - regained control of the city in October. The extremist group ISIS had controlled the capital since 2013. But since June, the SDF, with the help of the U.S., has gradually reclaimed the city. Negotiations have been on-going between the Syrian forces and the extremist forces to evacuate the city. The region of Deir ez-Zor, on the border of Syria and Iraq, is occupied by two separate offensives; in the West: Syrian forces and Shiite Muslims- supported by Russia; in

the East: the military council of Deir ez-Zor, an Arab militant group attached to the SDF - and helped by the US. They have regained 500km of the region since September. This progression in the Euphrates Valley is an issue of competition between Syrian forces and ISIS. On November 23rd, Syria declared the town of Abu Kamal liberated; it used to be the last stronghold of ISIS near the border with Iraq. They are still chasing militants in the desert, but the victory in this town means the end of the group’s territorial control. The Assad regime does not hide its determination to restore its legitimacy and security on all of its borders, but some analysts believe that, while losing territory, ISIS global network has grown -which might lead to a new phase of violence for the terrorist group.

Latin America: Brazil defends free trade agreement with Europe

Brazil’s economic crisis has made foreign trade more critical for the country, prompting Brasilia- which has an economically protectionist tradition- to change its trade strategy. The transitional government of Michel Temer now defends the free trade agreement between the European Union and Mercosur (a free trade market between Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay), whose negotiations started in 1999. The U.S. President has perturbed trade agreements worldwide when he left the Asia Pacific Free Trade Agreement and threatened to do the same with NAFTA. In this context, an EU-Mercosur agreement would be a political symbol- as affirmed by the previous foreign minister of Argentina. She also insisted on the need for concrete decisions in a time where protectionist measures are multiplying across the world. An agreement between the two regions should be announced at the beginning of December and should provide for a transitional timetable, with targets for lowering vehicle import taxes. This would give opportunities to many of the region’s countries industries and help the economic situation in Latin American countries.

A Dog isn't just for Christmas...

By Andra Ciuperca, Lara Govea, & Verena Zimmer

The winter holidays are approaching! And while the university grounds are alight with holiday cheer (and deadlines fear) perhaps you have been missing snuggling up with your fluffy friend from back home as of late. Or maybe you just have some extra time on your hands and want to contribute to the Den Haag community. Andra and Lara are doing exactly this, by volunteering at the Stichting Haags Dierencentrum, and there are plenty of reasons why you should get involved too! Not only will you get some time to spend with many four-pawed friends (and newly made human friends), but on top of it, some quality time de-stressing from university.

Interested yet? Well, you can volunteer several days a week, although the shelter would prefer volunteers who are available on weekends, and you can spend your time either working with cats or dogs. Andra and Lara are working with dogs. In total, 25 lovely dogs call the animal shelter their home. Most of them are either Pit bulls, American Staffordshire Terriers, or a mixed breed, and were either brought in by their previous owners or the local authorities. Don't be scared if you don't have previous experience handling shelter animals! Most of the dogs are simply happy to spend some time with you, and are not at all scarred or misbehaved (although if they were, even the more reason to share your time and attention with them).

A typical day at the shelter as a volunteer begins quite early, namely at 8.30 am. You will start by being tasked with cleaning their individual shelters. You will then receive guidance by a more experienced volunteer, and you will not have to deal with tasks or animals that are too difficult for you to handle. At 11 am you will have a break in which you can enjoy some coffee with your fellow volunteers. Which is followed by the best part of the day: you get to play with the animals! And if you are taking care of dogs, as Andra and Lara are, you will be able to take one for a walk. Maybe even go with your dog to the local lake?

It's also quite easy to get started at the Dierencentrum. In Andra's and Lara's case, they went to an open day in October, and after expressing their interest and sending a couple emails back and forth, were invited to an information session. At this session, the staff showed them the facility, answered their questions, and explained them their tasks. But in your case? Just get in touch with the shelter! You can do so through the following email-address: receptie@haagsdierencentrum.nl or by filling in the online volunteer application (in Dutch) available at their website. It is also not a problem if you don't speak Dutch (even if the application is Dutch), so don't worry about having to face a constant language barrier. Almost everybody at Dierencentrum speaks English and the volunteers will always make an effort to speak English. Besides, sometimes a love for animals is enough to circumvent any language barriers!

Are you convinced yet? If so, apply soon! Plenty of cats and dogs are awaiting to make your acquaintance. Andra and Lara are already in love with Lady, an intelligent and loving Pit-bull who they take for a walk every week and who brightens up their day every Saturday.



*Volunteer at the
Stichting Haags
Dierencentrum*

DEAR NO ONE:

new year's resolutions

Warning: This letter contains spoilers of the first episode of Deep Space Nine and the movie New Years Eve.

Dear No one,

The loud whooshing noises are deafening and the stars are dazzling. "For the love of Godiva, Don't push that button!" I shout at my screen. Thankfully Bashir listens to my expert advice and doesn't do it. Or maybe it was Dax' choice to craft a device to stop the brainwashing. Either way, all is safe at the space station.

To avoid the cold I strongly recommend staying inside and watching reruns of your favourite tv shows whilst sipping on a hot beverage. My netflix show of choice, Deep Space Nine, is an old tv show from the Star Trek series. It follows the adventures of captain Sisko and his team during their stay on an intergalactic space station. When watching the first episode of Deep Space Nine, I became intrigued by captain Sisko's development during his adventure - he has to relive his past in order to move on from it. After the episode, I decided to watch some old holiday movies, and settled on New Year's Eve (yep, the story in which everybody keeps talking about New Year's resolutions). I'm not going to lie to you: I personally think that setting New Year's resolutions is a big hoax.

Resolutions are meant as a way to demand yourself to do better. Normally, I'm all for setting goals, but in this case, it doesn't sit well with me. The year hasn't even begun and people are already making plans to drastically improve their lives. They vigorously start going to the gym, or stop swearing, or give up smoking and alcohol.... For a solid month. Then they usually fall back into old habits again. New Year's resolutions almost always end in stress and disappointment. Not only that, you tend to make these big, bold, life-changing promises, without honestly looking at and processing the things that have caused you to not reach these goals in the past year.

There was however a repeated theme in this particular movie that struck my interest. Moving on and letting go was often discussed by the main characters, just like the DSG episode. I have already written about accepting and moving on from your horrible mistakes in the present and not being overwhelmed by the pressure of the inevitable future. One would assume that I have nothing more to write about time. There is however one part I left out: the past.

Whenever someone tells you a story about their past, they usually admit to their own flaws, or laugh uncomfortably when they recall their own inexperience. Granted, the stories people share tend to be the most shocking ones, and they might be a bit dramatized. However, the storytellers never fail to reassure you, by telling you that they aren't the person they used to be. I think that's an insult to your past self. The poor thing didn't know as much then as you do now. Disregarding this usually leads to making fun of yourself. Now don't get me wrong, a little bit of humor and not taking yourself too seriously are great qualities to have, but you shouldn't forget that the people we were have made us the person we are today.

What if, instead of condemning your younger self, you forgive him/ her?

What if, instead of making a list of resolutions you want your future self to achieve, you write a letter to your younger self?

What if, instead of being ashamed of all that your younger self has done that year, you forgive and thank them?

I know this might sound strange, but bear with me. What if you write a letter to your younger self? Maybe about the lessons you've learned this past year in friendship, school/university, your career, love, family. What if you could forgive your younger self for some mistakes, and thank him/her for the triumphs?

I've imagined writing something like this for a while now. A lot has happened this past year which has had a great effect on me. Some of them were amazing, others terrifying, but they made me the person I am today. The thought of similar events happening to all the people around you is amazing, but the realization that nobody ever seems to stop and think about their own little piece of amazing, is baffling. Let's try to remember ourselves as we used to be and to celebrate the person we have become.

Happy Holidays and a very happy new year.

Love, Warsha

p.s. If writing to commemorate your past year doesn't work out, you can also just continue watching Netflix.



By Kinan Aldaioub

*The woman in winter
As if she did not feel the cold
And the cold did not feel her*

...

*Do you know that feeling?
When even the wind is afraid to come out
In fear of the nipping cold
When even the sun is silent, as if meditating above
When the clouds are painted still
And no flight nor song of a bird can you live
And as if your heart took a pause
To try to find a sound to touch
Any
But you found only stillness
This error that is peace, which nothing can explain
Like going to sleep
Like the time lost in a kiss*

Where does it go?

*The volume of nature has been muted
And for the next three months
The only warmth is the smiles of strangers
Cycling in these frost-glazed bike-paths
The Earth has taken a breath and held it
And won't exhale till come spring
Meanwhile when we breathe
Our own warmth travels ahead of us
A fog that speaks to us and says; "it's cold"
For now, the sun is a sin
And as Emily Dickinson's "forever is composed of
nows"
This now seems to be composed of forever
Until one March morning it seems warmer than usual
But happiness is the only now, the only forever
Couple it with Christmas, and with holidays
And no cold you will ever feel*



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