Dear Friends,

Every day I am reminded that how we experience life has as much to do with our perception as it does with reality, and the Latin expression *fiat lux* (let there be light), UC San Diego’s motto, seems particularly fitting at this time in history. Since none of us can control reality, we are better served by seeking out information that allows us to inform our perceptions and reactions, as well as to do all we can to find and let in the light that sustains and promotes hope no matter the circumstances. As Aristotle said: *It is during our darkest moments that we must focus to see the light.*

It is likely that you, like me, have reasonably experienced some dark moments borne of the combination of social isolation and the absence of a reliable date by which we might resume our pre-Covid lives. Yet, there is also no denying that the pandemic has brought some unexpected and welcome changes: as one of our young Korean visitors shared, due to Covid-19 restrictions her parents were liberated from time-consuming, traffic-laden familial obligations and were able to enjoy Chuseok, a national holiday, in a way that brought them pleasure. This sentiment is one I hear oft repeated: it is liberating to be free of obligatory social functions, to spend less time rushing to get from point A to B, and to have time to engage in activities that bring us pleasure.

It has been incredibly uplifting to see/read about the creativity that this pandemic has unleashed as people devise ingenious solutions to overcoming obstacles—I recently learned of a couple who made it their mission to help choirs by providing technical skills and equipment to enable members to sing live from the safety of their own cars in a way that lets them see and hear one another in real time, yet remain socially distanced. The pandemic has revealed the resourceful flexibility of businesses and people to recreate themselves, whether it be to change what or how they deliver their products and services—how many of you have learned how to shop online or utilize curbside pick-up? The pandemic has made so much of the arts more accessible, as museums and institutions offer free virtual programming, concerts, lectures, etc. No doubt, most uplifting is the unending resilience and kindness on display around the world, even as the coronavirus pandemic continues its path of disruption.

So, at the risk of repeating myself, should you feel in need of a little light in your life, I recommend our Friends Zoom programs where we learn so much about one another, about life, customs, and beliefs. After each meeting we feel reenergized and optimistic, knowing that no matter our differences, we are always far more alike than some politicians would have us believe. And, since I write this before the November 3rd election and am not prescient, I hope that whatever the outcome, you will continue to foster friendship, understanding, and cooperation within the domestic as well as the international community as you continue to be beacons of light.

Please know that I miss our in-person events (never a social obligation for me) and collegial interactions, yet have come to appreciate even more than before the tiniest of gestures or texts, and encourage you to reflect on this quote from Buddha: *If you light a lamp for someone else it will also brighten your path.*

May your Thanksgiving offer you opportunities to be grateful and share your light.

Stay safe, keep wearing your masks, and please stay vigilant to protect yourself and your community!

*Katya*

Katya Newmark
PresFIC@ucsd.edu
Join the Friends Cooking Class

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Friends popular cooking classes had to be terminated in the spring. For the time being, the campus professional cooking demonstration kitchen is closed, causing chef Vaughn Vargus to be even sadder than Friends.

Because many of the talks on our virtual get-togethers focus on food, the idea of starting up a series of cooking sessions on Zoom cropped up. (Tuesday’s conversation group already had demonstrated how to make a Korean pancake.) Cindy Tozer volunteered to offer the first session from her kitchen.

Cindy first considered using one of her favorite fall ingredients, fresh cranberries, but was not sure whether these would be available this early in the season. So, she decided instead to prepare a vegetarian friendly cauliflower salad that can be served either warm or cold. It combines roasted cauliflower, roasted red onions, and spiced chickpeas with a tangy, lemony tahini dressing.

The session took place on October 12 at 2:00 p.m. and several in the “gallery” cooked along, while others watched. Cindy promised to send the link, as well as the recipe with a list of ingredients to anyone—anywhere (a number of the Friends former participants join our virtual chats)—who is interested. Cindy has lots of ideas for other dishes, mentioning a yummy carrot soup that is easy to prepare.

Of course, the intent is for others to demonstrate the preparation of some of their favorite dishes should there be an interest in this new program.

Membership

It is with sadness that we report the death of Shao-Chi Lin, Emeritus Professor of Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering, who joined the nascent UCSD campus in 1964. Gae, as many of us called him, and his wife Lily Lin were early members of the Friends and loyal attendees at our events, who have been generous donors to the Friends scholarship program. “The university gave us many opportunities. Now it’s our turn to give younger researchers and scholars a helping hand,” they were quoted as saying when they funded an endowed chair in the Jacobs School of Engineering.

We send our love and condolences to Lily, cofounder with the late Luna Fung, of the Friends Ethnic Dinners and Resale Shop.
A Traveling Adventure in San Diego
With Family and Young Children

Friends program leaders have created a strong feeling of community among Friends participants and this includes Jennie Chin, chair of our Craft Circle. Here Jennie shares a little information about one of our currently most active international program participants, Jungsoo Jeong.

“Jungsoo arrived with his wife and two young children (Chloe and Jaden) at the end of January 2020 from Korea. On a grant from Samsung, where he works, he was going to start his research year at UC San Diego. Unfortunately, COVID-19 arrived and much of his work was put on hold; however, he is in frequent contact with the professor that invited him. Currently, both of his young children are in school doing remote learning as well as some in-school participation a few days during the week.

“During these last several months, Jungsoo and his family have been able to travel, visiting several national parks, such as Yellowstone, Yosemite, Sequoia, Zion, the Canyonlands, and Bryce. They even have driven to see friends as far away as Seattle, traveling up the Coast.

“He and his family also participate in the Friends Tuesday Conversation Table and in Wednesday Coffee, where he enjoys practicing his English and really appreciates the welcome of the many participants in the group conversations held virtually. On one Wednesday Coffee chat, he even called in for a few minutes to say ‘hello’ from Seattle!

“The following article is based on a friend’s observation on the difficulty of traveling with small children. Jungsoo’s fellow Korean found many places in San Diego that were children friendly and deemed the Hornblower ride worthwhile.”

Recounting his local excursion, Jungsoo Jeong wrote:

“Did you know that you can take a cruise in San Diego? If you go near the Waterfront Park or USS Midway Museum, you’ll find the Hornblower. Recently, my friend has been looking for attractions in San Diego where he can go with his 2.5 and 6-year-olds. (He and I now have only about four months left to stay in San Diego.) He found a good-priced ticket on Groupon, which was about 50% off, and suggested we take a harbor cruise together.

“The Hornblower offers either 60- or 90-minute cruises. We chose the shorter cruise that departed at 5:30 p.m., because we were looking forward to seeing the sunset. We were three families: six children, ages 2.5 to 8, were excited as soon as they boarded the cruise ship. The children were cared for by my wife and other parents, so I had free time.

“The ship moved smoothly and quietly; the captain’s broadcast, however, did not stop until we got off. It’s probably regretful that I didn’t understand his explanations very well, but I did see the beautiful sunset and a group of sea lions.

“I was worried that even if the cruise ship largely was open space that it would be difficult to keep to the social distancing demanded by the coronavirus pandemic. There were about 10 tables arranged to comply with physical distancing requirements, while the crew and passengers also tried to keep their distance as much as possible, but this was not easy. Especially for children, this was a difficult task. Most of the passengers, including our two children, wore masks. But, of course, when they ate, they took them off. Furthermore, most passengers drank alcohol (wines, cocktails, beers) or other beverages and ate snack food (hot dogs, chips, nachos, pretzels, croissants, cinnamon rolls, cookies). Food and beverage were not included in the ticket price and outside food was prohibited in the ticket description.

“Time on the ship was short and my brief break was soon over. The ship did not go to the Pacific Ocean, but only went as far as Point Loma and then returned. For adults, the 60-minutes ride was not long; however, 90 minutes might bore kids, so I think the longer cruise would have been unsuitable for our young children.”
Minju Kim: How A Cross-Cultural Study Leads to Becoming Part of the Friends Community

Friends Scholarship
I am Minju Kim, a Ph.D. Candidate in Experimental Psychology at UCSD from South Korea, and also a student volunteer at the Friends weekly Mommy, Daddy & Me classes. It is my pleasure to share my stories in this Newsletter to show how deeply grateful I am to be a part of the Friends of the International Center community, both academically and socially.

I was introduced to the Friends of the International Center through a scholarship opportunity for international graduate students. With my 2018 fellowship, I was able to visit my hometown to run cross-cultural studies between children in South Korea and the United States by connecting Dr. Caren Walker’s lab at UC San Diego with Dr. Youngon Choi’s lab at Chung-Ang University in Seoul. This study looks at how children’s learning context (such as their linguistic and cultural background) shapes the way children think about relationships between objects. This study is still actively going through the data collection stage.

I consider this project very meaningful, because it takes one little step towards reducing a bias in academia, where most studies have been conducted with people representing the WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic) populations.

I am so proud that Friends of the International Center fellowships promote opportunities for both domestic and international students to broaden their perspective by being immersed in another cultural community, while also contributing to reducing some biases in science and education. I hope that this active cultural exchange among students from all over the world will resume, once the world becomes more embracing to safe international travel.

Volunteering at the weekly MDM class was an awesome opportunity to pursue this theory. Additionally, the MDM class held a personal meaning for me, because music has been a special thing that made me feel loved. When I was ten years old, my family and I visited the United States for my dad’s exchange program, and I spent about eight months of my 3rd grade in a public elementary school in Virginia. It was scary to look different from most of the other students and I felt shy standing up in the classroom. However, my favorite class was music, where we were learning to drum and play the recorder for a class recital. I had always enjoyed playing musical instruments, and this was the time when I thought I could feel good about myself. On occasion, the music teacher praised me for being on beat when others were not. These moments of support really helped me to gain confidence about myself, and about school in general.

Mommy, Daddy & Me
I was so excited when I learned about the Friends Mommy, Daddy & Me (MDM) program to which families bring their children for circle time and craft activities, and right in my own McGill Psychology building! With my advisor, Dr. Adena Schachner, we have been looking at what stage in life children start dancing. We explore whether dancing is related to gross motor abilities, and if it seems to be a social activity between infant and parent. We have conducted an online survey of these questions with parents with children from 0 to 2 years of age and are now actively writing a scientific paper to be shared publicly later.

I was surprised at how little developmental psychologists know about children’s dancing ability, even though this is such a crucial daily activity in children’s lives. It is my thought that even when infants and young children cannot yet speak well, dance might be one way that they readily express their emotions at a time that they are still freely testing what they can do with their own body.

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After a few weeks, I felt comfortable raising my hand in other classes and presenting in front of others. Soon I became a happy child having found new friends.

From this experience, I really believe that music is something that bonds people, no matter how they look or where they are from. I am glad that I now have the opportunity to be a music teacher myself, who can welcome new families and who can provide a happy dancing time for our MDM children every week.

Despite our regret that the class had to go virtual via Zoom, our MDM families are joyful seeing everyone’s faces and dancing to our songs that remind us of the in-person classes that we once had. We ask how everyone is doing, we congratulate the birth of new siblings, and we share the feeling that we are all in this together, as a community, and we can be as happy as ever.

**Wedding at the Time of Social Distancing**

As much as we feel the gratitude of big and/or small families, I also want to thank my husband Kyu Seo Kim. We had planned to fly back to South Korea five months ago for our wedding ceremony with family and friends. Unfortunately, and as expected, we had to postpone our wedding for an indefinite period of time due to the virus. It would have been an amazing ceremony in a grand ballroom at my home university’s alumni union, with 300 guests, where Kyu was planning to sing a (no longer a secret) serenade! Kyu and I thought that we did the right thing for everyone’s safety, but we couldn’t help our parents being so disappointed and heart-broken. Instead of dragging our sorrows for another year, we applied for a small ceremony at the San Diego Administrative Building in a small room with an ocean view. Once again, our original appointment was cancelled by the coronavirus, hitting the U.S. a bit later than South Korea, bringing everyone down.

Just when we were about to give up on this chance to make our parents happy, we received an e-mail from the San Diego County. They said that they were happy to arrange wedding ceremonies for those who had qualified before the shutdown. Although it was a limited version, merely at a walk-up window outdoors with no guests allowed, this did not stop us from experiencing our happiest moment. We dressed up, made a bridal bouquet for ourselves from a local flower shop, brought two camera stands, and live broadcasted our ceremony virtually for our friends and family in both San Diego and Seoul. We could see all of their faces as a gallery view on Zoom; they could take screenshots of our cute moments, share virtual toasts, watch Kyu and me exchange vows, so that we could fully celebrate our meaningful moments altogether.

Although it was 4:00 a.m. back in South Korea, our families were happier than ever, and Kyu and I felt like we have achieved another milestone that we will remember as the best moment ever in our life.

**Happiness**

I hope my stories added a little bit of delight to your day, and that we can still find happiness despite the seemingly endless quarantined life. No matter if it’s in-person or virtually on Zoom, I feel fully loved by the people around me—my husband, my MDM families, and everyone who provided priceless support for my academic and social life. I hope to continue volunteering at MDM classes, adding a little bit of happiness to the MDM families. And I hope that one day we will be gathering again altogether to celebrate a new year with more joy to come.

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**KUDOS**

Dear Friends of the International Center Team,

I returned safely to Germany after spending one year in beautiful La Jolla and wanted to leave you a quick feedback.

A gigantic THANK YOU goes to all the wonderful volunteers [I learned about] from IFSO. When I first came to California, I was quite overwhelmed. If it wasn’t for the creative Cooking Classes, the perfectly organized Kitchen Exchange, and in particular the Craft Circle, it would have taken me quite some time to find a connection to country and culture. Thank you for keeping up the great work and giving all the newly-arriving international scholars, and of course their spouses, the chance to grow some roots, meet new people, practice the English language, and pick up new skills (I’ll continue at the sewing machine for sure!!). You guys and girls are doing fantastic jobs and probably help even more than you think (quite a lot!).

Again a huge thank you: you are doing valuable and generous work. It was a pleasure meeting
you and knowing to have someone to turn to for any kind of questions or help.

All the best all the way from Germany, stay safe and take care.

Lena Wawrschin

Another letter of praise for the work and fellowship of the Friends came from Yukina Nakazawa, who returned with her family to Japan at the end of September.

Dear Katya,

Finally I have an opportunity to write my appreciation to you. At first, I was nervous about taking over the job of program chair from Mariko [Usui], as she had been taking care of Mommy. Daddy & Me so very well, and I thought that I was not capable enough. But with much help and patience from you, I was able to keep MDM active.

I learned so much from being program chair and I’d like to say that this was the best challenge that I took during my 5-year stay in San Diego. Even just reading the Friends monthly Newspaper was a learning opportunity for me. And you gave me more by giving me a chance to be featured in the Newsletter.

I really enjoyed being a program leader and think this as a gift from you. I could not have done this without your kind and thoughtful heart. You always cared about me (well, about everyone!) and your kind gestures warmed my heart. I am very lucky to have met you. I was so sad to leave San Diego, not because of the weather, but because I have met the best people in the world there and you are one of them.

Thanks to the current situation and the technology that make it possible, I hope that I will continue to see you online at Mommy, Daddy & Me or at Wednesday Coffee chats.

Yukina

From the Editor:

Because there were not the customary Friends events to announce (alas, no October Friends Dinner Social nor November Ethnic Dinner), we decided to forgo an October Newsletter, publishing a fall issue in its stead. Those who still get their Newsletter delivered as a hard copy may have noticed that the June and September issues have been printed on white rather than our traditional grey paper. The reason for this change is simple: our printer does not currently stock grey paper and we require too few pieces for Imprints to do so; ergo, we settled on a slightly better quality white paper.

While the physical aspect of the Friends Newsletter may have changed, I continue to find my job as editor illuminating, in large part because it lends itself to learning new things. Thus, in researching the correct word for a group of sea lions for Jungsoo Jeong’s article on his San Diego harbor cruise (see p.3), I learned that the word is not, as one might have thought, a herd (after all, we speak of a herd of lions) but a colony, although there are different names depending on the sea lions’ activities—in water they are called a raft, during breeding season a rookery, while a group of females in male territory is referred to as a harem. Similarly, there also are a number of words to describe a group of pelicans, the most common being a pod, but they may also be called a pouch, a scoop, a squadron, or if they are fishing as a group, a fleet.

My vocabulary has also increased in a different vein. During a discussion on politics, one of the speakers revealed her habit of incessantly scrolling through and seeking out bad news. She called it doomsscrolling, but others may refer to it as doomsurfing. (I noted that in one of Georgina Sham’s recent reports on Wednesday Coffee’s Zoom chats that this topic cropped up as well.) In any case, the habit is generally thought to lead to anxiety.

To alleviate anxiety, the Dutch have found a new solution. In the Netherlands you may arrange with a farm to let you come for a few hours to cuddle a cow; evidently, such experience is relaxing to both human and bovine. Startled, I looked into this practice and learned that even here in the U.S., you can arrange for such an experience, though at a rather hefty cost, in particular if you wish to have a cuddling session with both a cow and a horse. For now, I have decided to limit my cuddling to our cat, a loving pet with an international pedigree, having been born in Qatar, brought to San Diego legally (she has papers to prove this), now living the life of a pampered member of our family, complete with bimonthly nail trimmings by a veterinarian. The latter while I must forgo my visits to the nail salon!

Wishing you a Happy Thanksgiving!

Ruth Newmark

Friends Volunteer Hours
for August 2020: 239 = 1.36 FTEs
for September 2020: 309 = 1.76 FTs
Dear Friends of the International Center,

I hope that this letter finds you all well during this difficult period. The pandemic has adversely impacted various communities across our country and the world. Hundreds of thousands of people have lost their lives, while millions more have suffered enormously.

While my age cohort remains relatively healthy, many of my peers have had their graduations cancelled, internships and jobs lost, and their college and life plans thrown into disarray. Many American students have had their international study experiences curtailed, as they were sent home mid-semester to a country plagued by the deteriorating conditions of the pandemic. The Junior Year in Munich program, the oldest American exchange program in Germany and the program in which I participated, had to take the difficult decisions of sending their students home early and cancelling the upcoming fall semester. This historic and venerable program is now facing a funding crisis.

In light of the current situation, I have had the opportunity to reflect upon my experiences and would like to express my gratitude to all those who have helped me along my path, which includes your organization and the generous donors that supported me financially during my junior year abroad. Your scholarship gifted me financial security and peace of mind, which enabled me to use my time to learn, explore, and stretch myself further to achieve stratospheric goals. Your generosity allowed me to discover and fully appreciate the joys and wisdom gained from spending time in an international setting.

I continue to reap the benefits of my time in Munich not merely through the nostalgic reminiscence of old photos and videos, nor through the warm camaraderie of shared memories with lifelong friends. My experience in Germany and the language skills I acquired have inspired me to apply for and win a Fulbright English Teaching Assistant Award for the upcoming 2020-2021 academic year. While the program has been unfortunately truncated to start at least after January 2021, I am extremely grateful and excited to receive this grant, and have been placed in the state of Bavaria, my top choice.

Upon completion of the Fulbright program, I plan to apply to graduate school to study International Relations once again, with the ultimate goal of representing our country as a U.S. Foreign Service Officer.

As I prepare to embark on this new journey, I look back upon and draw inspiration from the great distance I have traveled (literally and metaphorically). My year abroad was a pivotal moment in my life, a rewarding time of living and learning, and a validation of my intended future. I will never forget the financial help that you gave me, and your words of encouragement prior to my departure. My dreams and my experiences continuously influence each other to forge my path forward, and your support has played a direct role in shaping that path.

I want to thank you again for your generosity and for your tireless promotion of international education and friendship as you continue to help other globally-minded UC San Diego students such as myself.

I wish you and your loved ones all the best in the future.

Warmest Regards,

Theodore Widjaja
UC San Diego Class of 2019

While the above letter from Theo Widjaja arrived out of the blue, the following reports came in response to a note I sent to this year’s Friends scholarship recipients inquiring how they had spent the summer and how they were coping with the coronavirus pandemic that must be affecting both their daily lives and their studies. By no means did I receive an answer from each of the 31 award recipients, but the many that did respond expressed genuine thanks for my—the Friends—concern. Their accounts launched further e-mail exchanges, and I was pleased to note that the students were eager to discuss the big issues, far beyond how they were handling the situation individually. We touched on changes in education, the role of technology, the psychological effects of social distancing—in other words, our coming to the realization that there are societal issues that outweigh our own. The impact on the environment of flying led Bolivian composer Gabriel Zalles to state that he will not attend future scholarly conferences.

A few direct quotes (edited for brevity) will show the very different situations that each of these students
is in. Alec Terrana’s report appears in full.

❖ Thank you so much for your kind words. Yes, 2020 is certainly a year for the record books, but for all the wrong reasons! While this was not the school year I was expecting, especially with respect to my research in Baja, the wheels of progress are still turning, slowly but surely. Things are going okay for me. My family and I are healthy and I am still in San Diego. My fieldwork has essentially been “cancelled” until further notice, in part because our colleagues in Mexico have been super hard hit by the virus. My dream would be to take the field in summer or fall (2021). In the meantime, I am working on full fluency in Spanish, which is useful for fieldwork and conversing with my family in Peru. —Erica Ferrer, Ph.D. student in marine biology, Scripps Institution of Oceanography

❖ I appreciate your and Center’s concern and I’m grateful that you got in touch. Over the summer I went back home to Beirut, using the funds granted to me. I flew to Lebanon on July 18th and stayed there for almost a month and a half. In Beirut, I managed to do some archival research at the National Archives and the Jaffet Library special archives at the American University of Beirut. I also got to spend time again with my friends, family, and loved ones, which I hadn’t seen in over a year, during which Lebanon has gone through a series of acute detrimental economic crises, so I am grateful that I got to go and see them. Obviously, as you might have heard on the news, this means I was there during the explosion of August 4th. Luckily I am fine, so are most of my friends and family, barring a couple, who needed stitches. We’re all just a bit shook. I published an essay with The Point [a literary magazine] about my experience of coming back, the explosion, and trying to make sense of a collapsing Lebanon for the past year, you can find it here: https://thepointmag.com/examined-life/lights-out-beirut/ Please do share it with the Friends of the International Center. I’m grateful again for your support and belief in me. I hope we get to meet properly soon.—Zeead Yaghi, Lebanese American Ph.D. student in the History Department focusing on the Modern Middle East

❖ Forgive the delay in response. I have been completely focusless due to the insane war here. [Territorial dispute between Azerbaijan and Armenia]—Marianna Hovhannisyan, Armenian Ph.D. candidate, Art History, Theory, and Criticism, Department of Visual Arts

❖ As you can imagine the last six months or so have been extremely difficult. I was able to travel to Jamaica, which is home and also where my research is based, and ended up being stuck there until about two weeks ago when I returned to the States. On the economic front, things were also a bit tricky, as I was not able to secure employment over the summer, but still had to be paying all my bills in San Diego, as well as managing living expenses in Jamaica and supporting family members who were in need. The financial support I received from FIC was very much a lifesaver. I was not able to do field work as was the hope, because of the need for social distancing and just making sure that my own health and the health of those around me was prioritized. Nevertheless, I managed to do quite a bit of work that is useful for my overall project, such as the completion of a book chapter on Caribbean feminist movement building that will be published by Routledge before the end of the year. Again, I want to say thank you so much for this support and for your understanding and flexibility to work at our own pace during this pandemic.—Rochelle McFee, Ph.D. student, Department of Ethnic Studies

❖ Thank you so much for this email. I am well despite the situation. I didn’t go to Greece as I had planned to do. My travel was going to happen this September, but I didn’t even buy the ticket. In summary, I would say that the heaviest impact, at least for me, of this situation is mental fatigue. I taught two summer courses, which was an extreme task but it went really well, with rewarding evaluations and—for the first time since I came to the US—not having the pressure of financial hardship. However, as life has shifted totally in the virtual world (in the US more than in Europe, as I learn from my friends there), it is impossible to keep up with socializing virtually, on top of my other commitments. When you have to teach, apply for jobs, answer emails, prepare your lessons etc., and you are in front of your laptop screen 8-12 hours, meeting on Zoom to “hang out” makes the situation worse than helps. And to be honest, it is not funny or “cool” at all.—Ioannis Mitsialis, Greek composer pursuing a Ph.D. in the Music Department

❖ I’ve been able to make much progress with my qualifying exam and am working toward the goal of publishing the material in the journal of Race Ethnicity and Education. The FIC fellowship has significantly helped me focus on this important task, as it alleviated some financial and psychological burdens my husband and I were going through. While I’ve been able to continue to work as a TA at UCSD, my husband lost his job as a restaurant server with the outbreak of Covid-19. While I was not able to make a field trip to Korea as originally planned and had to make some adjustments accordingly, I still believe that I’ve had some fruit-
ful results over the summer thanks to the FIC fellowship. Thank you again for your email and I’d like to send good thoughts and positive vibes your way.—**Sarang Kim**, Department of Education Studies

- Thanks for this warm email. I am hanging in here in San Diego, trying to turn my paper into a publishable draft and starting to think about my dissertation topic. So, even though I was not able to fly back to Taiwan for the summer due to COVID, the good thing is that I get more time to concentrate on my own work. In addition to my study, I took some time off in summer to visit Santa Barbara for the first time. It is a beautiful city. Too bad that some historical sites, like the Superior Court and the Old Mission, remained closed.—**Yen-Ting Hsu**, Ph.D. student, Department of Sociology

- I was fortunate to be in San Diego with no near-future travel plans when the pandemic hit, so it has mostly just affected me the way it’s affected everyone—working from home for a while, and the mental load of uncertainty. I was able to successfully complete a sampling campaign in Oregon two weeks ago, and I think the value of this field site for me is even greater because my other (in Chile) is now much more difficult to get to. But the fires and smoke affected that trip somewhat; a collaborator did not join, which delayed a day.—**Jessica Ng**, Ph.D. candidate in Climate Science, Scripps Institution of Oceanography

- These times have certainly been challenging, overturning all travel plans. Many countries in Latin America continue to be under strict lockdown as cases continue to rise. While most of my loved ones in Argentina feel particularly far away right now, they are thankfully still healthy. As you well know, an anthropologist’s work is generally focused on people’s inti-

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**Roots of Resilience in San Diego’s Somali Community**

—by **Alec Terrana**

I’ve been interested in the idea of psychological resiliency for a while now. I first began to seriously consider the concept while assisting with clothing distribution at a refugee camp in Northern Greece as I saw camp residents demonstrate drastically different responses to the collective trauma that they had suffered in the Syrian Civil War and the long journey through Turkey and across the Mediterranean. While some were inspired to start small businesses in the camp like making falafel wraps or giving haircuts, others seemed unable to leave their tents for anything more than a visit to the porta potties. What was it that sparked some to jump into The answer traditionally given to this question is “resiliency,” an ambiguous trait that has been commonly defined as the ability to “bounce back” through a positive adaptation in the face of a challenge. The history of the concept is an odd one, with its origins lying in material sciences’ descriptions of the “springiness” of different states of matter before further developing within the fields of engineering, economics, and ecology before entering the world of mental health. Once “resiliency” was taken up as a psychological construct, its history of being used as a description of an inherent property of objects or inanimate systems, combined with the field’s tendency to primarily consider individual psychology, led to the term almost exclusively referring to resiliency as a personality trait that individuals possess to varying degrees.

This particular way of thinking about resiliency has had many consequences, one of which was the development of measurement tools that primarily probed into aspects of an individual’s disposition, such as their ability to persevere and their sense of control over events in their lives. But does this way of thinking about individuals’ response to hardship have much value in communities that do not prioritize individualism as much as we do here in the Western societies in which these questionnaires were developed? Furthermore, how might the values of different cultures inform the way in which those individuals
become resilient and how we assess their resiliency?

In order to start formulating answers to these questions, I began developing a project with the guidance of Dr. Wael Al-Delaimy, a UC San Diego professor of Public Health and Global Health with vast experience working with communities in the Middle East. Our hope was to better understand how Syrian refugees living in Jordan conceive of resiliency on their own terms and the various sources in their life that allow them to be resilient. Due to travel restrictions resulting from COVID-19, the project was no longer possible as we had originally conceived it but were thankfully able to develop a local adaptation of the project due to an existing relationship that Dr. Al-Delaimy had established with Somali Family Services of San Diego (SFS) and the local Somali community.

Having partnered with SFS, we set out with a mixed-methods study that would qualitatively assess how members of San Diego’s Somali community understand the concept of “resiliency” and the areas of their life that challenge their resilience and those that support it through focus group discussions. The findings from these interviews would then be used to inform the development of a quantitative questionnaire that could assess the relative presence or absence of resiliency in Somali individuals based on the criteria that had been previously outlined as being important to their particular community.

As I write this, I am currently in the process of wrapping up the focus groups discussions and, while COVID has limited our discussions to Zoom, they have allowed me to chat with many members of the local Somali community about the challenges they face here in San Diego and the ways in which they are able to overcome those barriers to physical and emotional well-being. In doing so, I have had the opportunity to speak with men and women who were raised both here in the United States, as well as in Somalia, Ethiopia, and Kenya.

Our discussions have been positively illuminating. Although we are still in the preliminary stages of analysis, my experience in facilitating these discussions strongly suggests that individual personality traits play, at best, a minor role in dictating Somali individuals’ ability to bounce back from adversity. Far more important than the individual is the culture of their broader Somali community, its deep roots in Islam, and the hope for a better tomorrow that both culture and religion can provide. Among Somalis in San Diego, resiliency appears not to be a characteristic of individuals, as much of the literature would suggest, but one of the community as a whole.

Furthermore, individuals’ ability to be resilient appears to be just as much the product of the material conditions in which individuals live as it is a product of individual or communal traits. Many of the challenges to Somalis’ resiliency in San Diego boil down to access to resources, whether those are fair job opportunities, affordable housing, accessible healthcare, convenient public transportation, or political representation. Far from being anomalous, the greatest and most common sources of suffering that community members face are simply the consequences of the political and economic conditions in which we all live but that we each experience differently depending on our race and class.

This finding begs a far larger question than the one that I began this project with: is the concept of “resiliency” of any value at all if we are seeking to truly support and uplift the individuals and communities that we deem to be most at risk? Given that challenges to resiliency are primarily structural realities like low wages and lack of housing rather than traumatic episodes such as a car accident or the death of a family member, speaking about resilient individuals, or even resilient communities, seems to be a bit insulting by displacing the responsibility for suffering. Putting the responsibility of being “resilient” on individuals or the community organizations that support them to overcome the challenges of systemic injustices completely misses the point of the underlying problem: it is not that individuals suffer because they are insufficiently resilient, but because the systems that they are embedded in are insufficiently supportive.

Rather than helping suffering individuals, continuing to employ the language of resiliency may just serve to further perpetuate the conditions that lead to suffering by condoning unjust systems and continuing to place the onus for well-being on the individuals who are subject to that injustice. It seems to me that we need a new discourse of resiliency if we are truly going to solve these issues instead of continuing to settle for suffering that is simply better managed. These are monumental problems, ones that go far beyond the scope of a summer research project and that directly address some of the most pressing crises that our country, and much of the world, are reckoning with right now.

While my work this summer has raised far more and far bigger ques-
tions than I had when I began, I am immensely grateful to the Friends of the International Center for having given me the opportunity to spend my summer probing these areas, which would not have been possible without your generous support. I also owe a great debt to Somali Family Services for their support and to my collaborator and focus group co-facilitator, Najia, who has brought a wealth of knowledge on qualitative research and on San Diego’s Somali community to this project.

Above and beyond my gratitude to all others, however, is my appreciation for the members of the Somali community who have taken the time to speak with me about these issues and who have been willing to open up about the challenges that they have faced in San Diego, some of which were quite personal. They have helped open my eyes to a side of San Diego that I almost certainly would have remained ignorant of otherwise and I hope that I am able to do some justice to their views through my depictions, both in this post and in any future writings on this work. Thank you all!

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