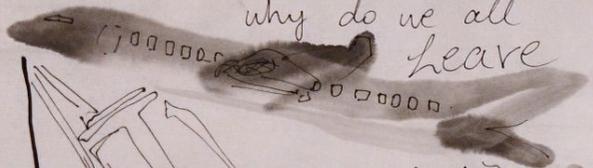


why do we all
leave



our families,
comfort food,
the warm climate,
a system we've
grown up with...

TO GO TO A FARAWAY PLACE

Oceans and time zones apart
from our bad habits and
mistakes? Is it so
that we might
grow into
a newer
version of
ourselves that
we like better?

WHY LEAVE,
only to reflect on

where we came from?



Here's something
that doesn't
quite



IS THAT A REFLECTION OF

AMERICA

OR OF A PLACE LIKE

HARVARD

OR MAYBE
ALL THE EXTRA
BAGGAGE

IS
FROM



W

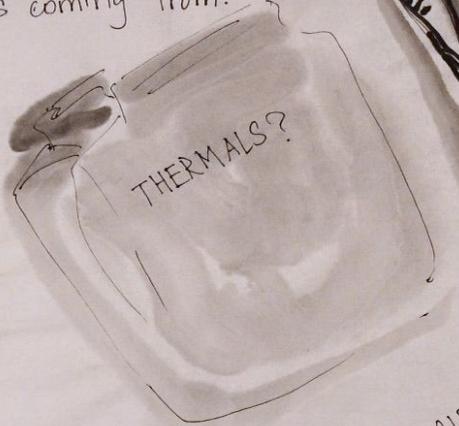


except... no one told me that it was still summer in August... or that I should have packed a dress to fit in...



THE HUGE WARM PUFFER I PRAY IS ENOUGH FOR THE COLD?

I unpacked my luggage into this new life to see where the weight is coming from.



LAYERS?



THE ONE PAIR OF SHOES THAT FIT MY 23 KG BAG ALLOWANCE?





YOU'RE FROM Singapore, RIGHT?

like... CRAZY CRICKET ASIANS right?

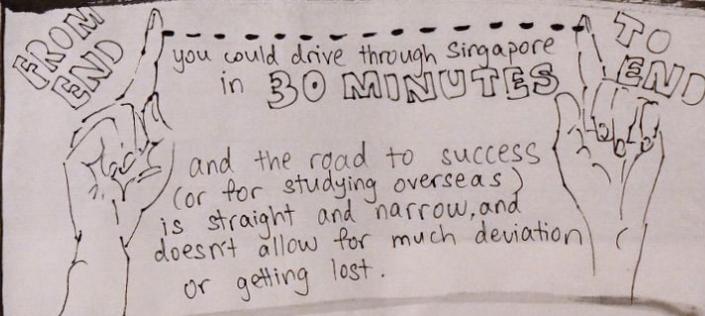
YOU KNOW SOME OTHER Singaporeans WHO CAME HERE TOO, right?

why do all the Singaporeans know each other?

IT IS A GUARDED PRIVILEGE TO EVEN BE ABLE TO

OPEN THE DOOR

TO OPPORTUNITY



And wait till they find out about my education in a Special Assistance Plan (SAP) school. How do I explain such a complicated legacy with our language and race, without their American realities interfering with their understanding?

I'm sure none of our experiences are comparable. We are very **small** and very **young**



(But **NO** we are not part of China)

THAT?

OVERSEAS LOOK LIKE

WHEN ALL OF US WHO MAKE IT

I



PROFESSOR
OK, so what
exactly doesn't seem
right to you? Let's
talk about it.

PROFESSOR
we can talk
about this after
class

WHAT'S WRONG
MUST BE ADDRESSED!
I'M SPEAKING ON BEHALF
OF MY CLASSMATES TOO!

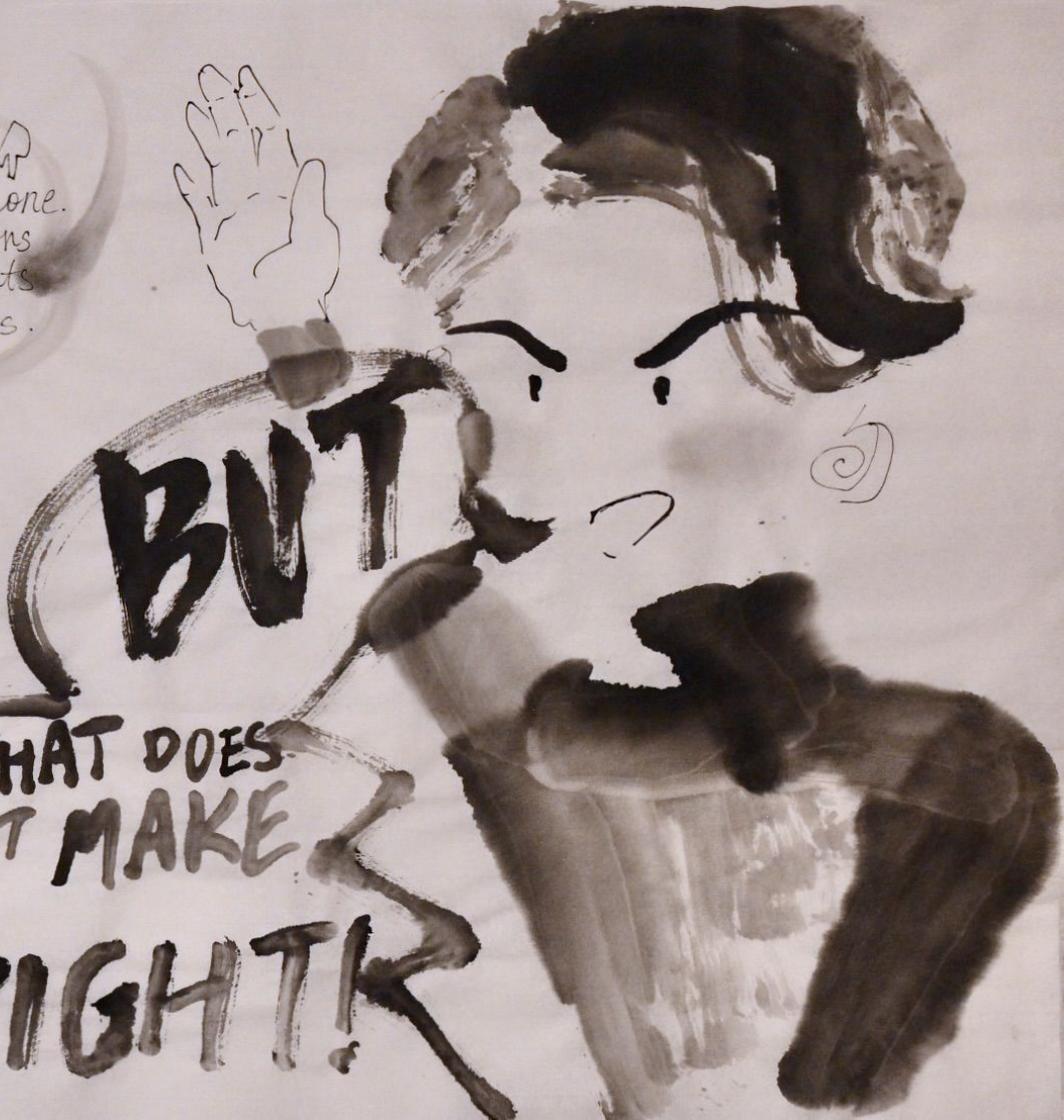
PROFESSOR
That's how it's
always been done.
Many generations
of students
survived this.

DOESN'T
MAKE IT
RIGHT

sorry, sibi tired.
what's going on
in lecture.

wow the
gall of
Americans

well, you see,
it's just some
americans...



BUT
THAT DOES
NOT MAKE
IT
RIGHT!

THAT THE FINALS IS WORTH 30%
OF MY FINAL GRADE

... wait till this guy hears about the

LEVELS

To be negotiating with the professor as though you're equals?

What gall!
I was shocked

Things are really different in America.





so, what are you listening to?

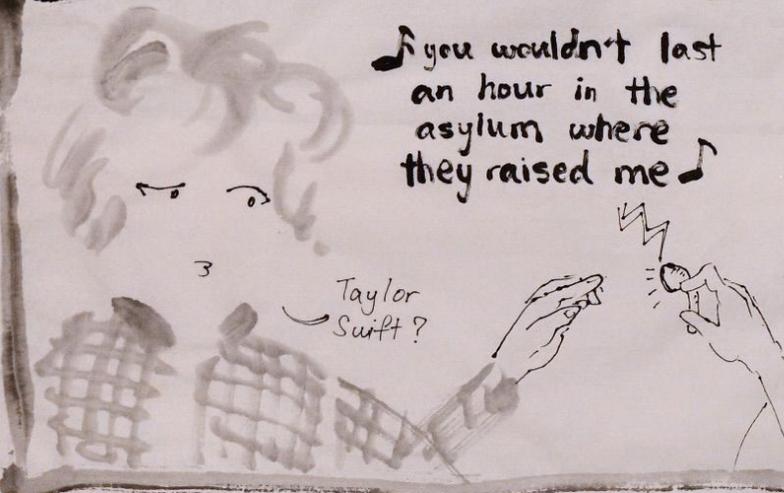
I feel like this isn't related, and it's not a well-formed thought ... but maybe the political situation is different from the case studies we have encountered so far because this is...

Here's what
And what
think about electoral college...
feel is missing from...



I MUST CONFESS: I FEEL GREAT

On top of lacking stress management skills, I realised that most people here didn't listen to their own voices, didn't do the readings, meandered far from the question asked, and **STILL** talk incessantly.



If you wouldn't last an hour in the asylum where they raised me

Taylor Swift?



I took perverse pride in the punishing regiment of failing essays in Singapore when I couldn't "Answer The Question".
H.A!
Imagine how these classmates would deal with the Singapore testing system. How would they react to failing their exams?



I've made it out of the pressure cooker as a **WINNER**

Well...
a winner?
or a Mutation
of unnatural
selection in a
greenhouse of
unhealthy pressures?

I don't have to imagine how
people would react to failing.
I remember how
my friends who
struggled with
the rat race
handled it BADLY.
Really badly.

And the
worst
thing was,

I was taught to
be proud that I was
"NOT LIKE THEM".

What a twisted sense of
superiority to get from
not being in the "O" levels
class in an IP school.

**AMERICA PUTS
THINGS INTO
perspective.**

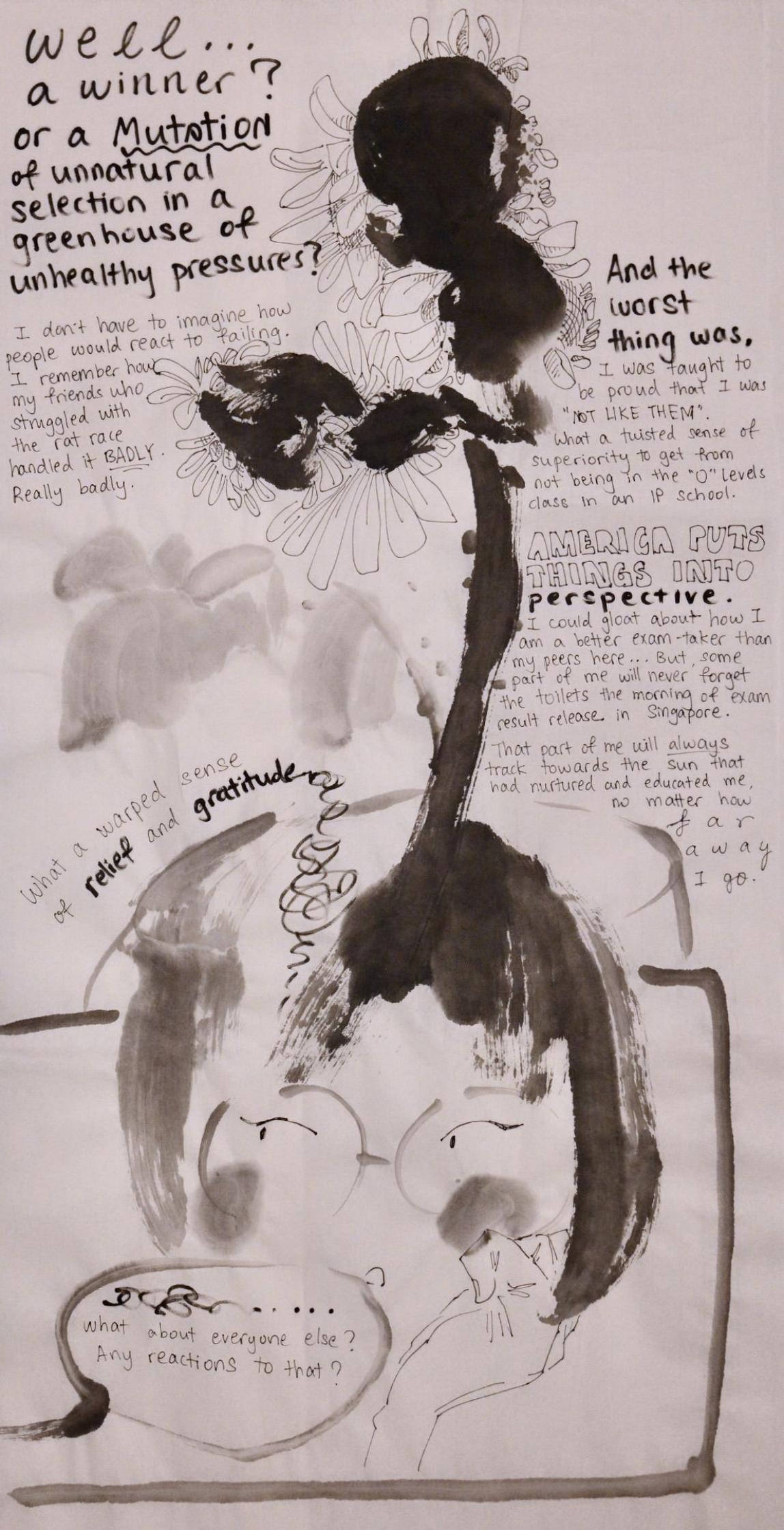
I could gloat about how I
am a better exam-taker than
my peers here... But, some
part of me will never forget
the toilets the morning of exam
result release in Singapore.

That part of me will always
track towards the sun that
had nurtured and educated me,
no matter how
far
away
I go.

What a warped
of relief and sense
gratitude

... ..

... ..
what about everyone else?
Any reactions to that?



After listening to everyone, I kinda wanna change my answer...



Sometimes they still get long-winded

sometimes, what they say might make sense, or maybe it doesn't, but we learn something too.

They DARE to sound stupid, and they don't CARE about what others might think.

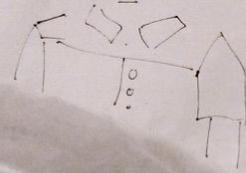
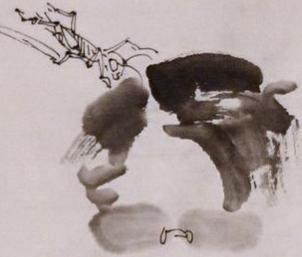
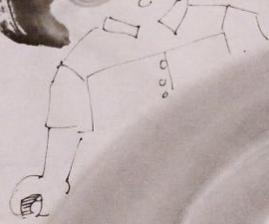
Aren't those admirable traits too?

I mean... Well... But I imagine that... suppose... agree with...



or still only care about themselves.

crickets



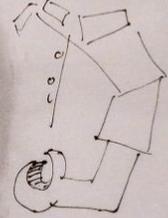
Was this what I preferred?

Was this the high ground I'm standing on when judging my peers?

YAP YAP



YAP YAP



Sometimes when I start day-dreaming or judging the discussions too harshly, I'd think back to how class participation was like back home.

Importantly, they have something to care about.

This is a country
full of people who
watch **FOOT
BALL**

and **ELECTIONS**
with the same
enthusiasm.



This country full of things never unchanging, is very different.



They get worked up
over other's apathy.

They take action
without having
to ask for
permission.



They don't just have a
blank slate in the
BALLOT BOX

people take 5-hour
long bus rides to
canvass for votes.

Oh NO ...

I THINK THAT IS ENVIABLE.

I admire that they care so much, and they don't have to leave the country to find this care and concern.

BUT...

Most times, I am glad that I am Singaporean, and Americans and I are not the same.

We wear RED for very different reasons. We might only stand up for Singapore on certain days, but I would rather that, than a riot, or storming the parliament.

(sometimes I wonder if this is my own close-mindedness masquerading as a superiority complex)

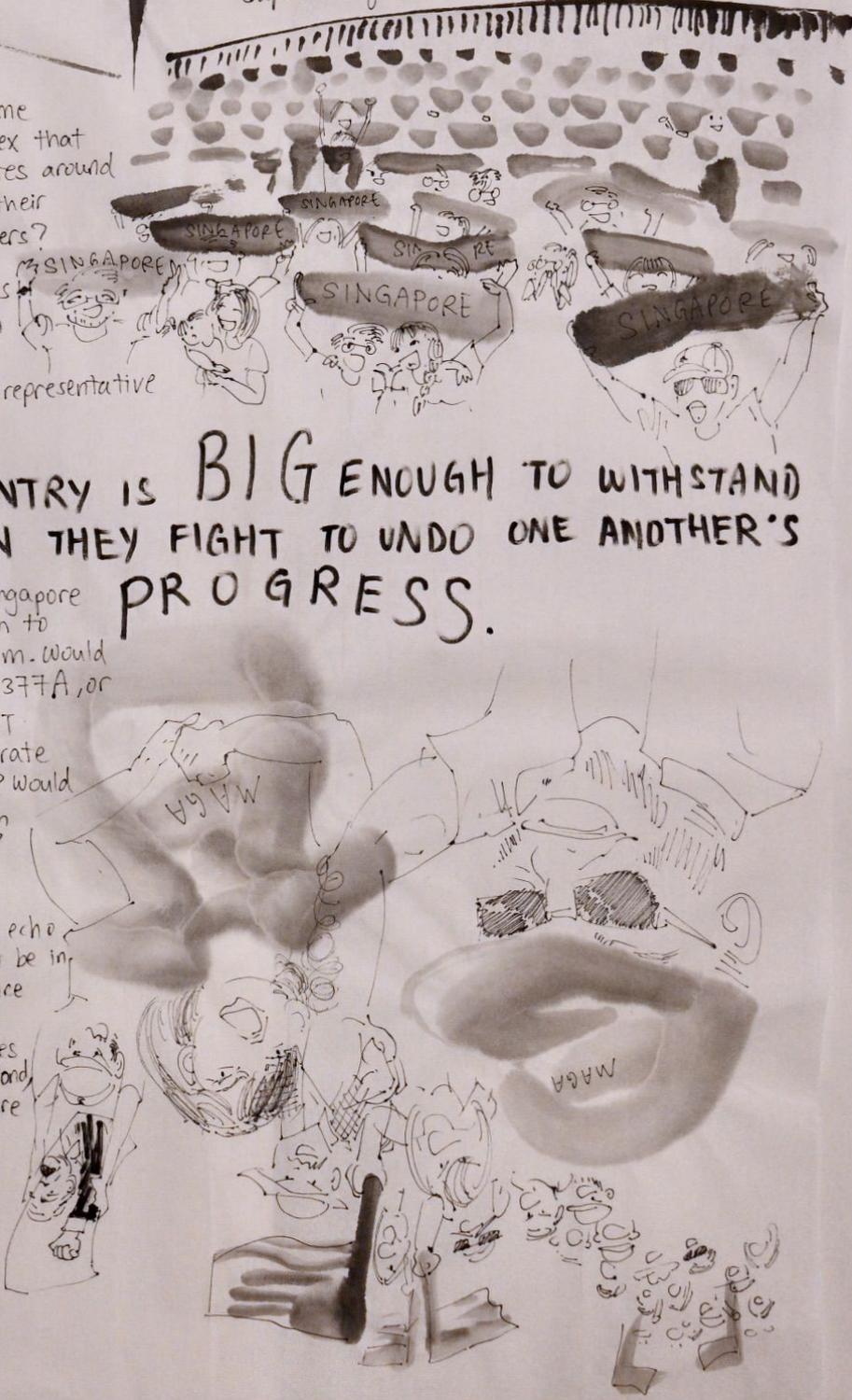


Is this the same superiority complex that the Harvard elites around me harbor in their own echo chambers? They despair when the masses celebrate. I am reminded that Harvard is not representative of America.

THIS COUNTRY IS BIG ENOUGH TO WITHSTAND IT WHEN THEY FIGHT TO UNDO ONE ANOTHER'S PROGRESS.

I wonder if Singapore is even big enough to withstand a schism. Would debates around 377A, or our CPF, or a GST increase, even generate the same division? Would we withstand such social splintering?

I wonder what echo chambers I might be in. Maybe the distance obscures my own privileges, and makes my heart overly-fond, and I only compare Singapore at its best to America at its most diverse.



I'M PROUD TO BE
AN
S

I can't help but compare it to the MBTA or MTA and the perpetual smell of piss, the furtive glances to check for safety, the list goes on...

I revel in how I can brag about my garden city. Even if it's artificial and reliant on migrant labour, because it is still beautiful, I can vouch for it being better than tents and shivering bundles of homeless folks bargaining with their own dignity.

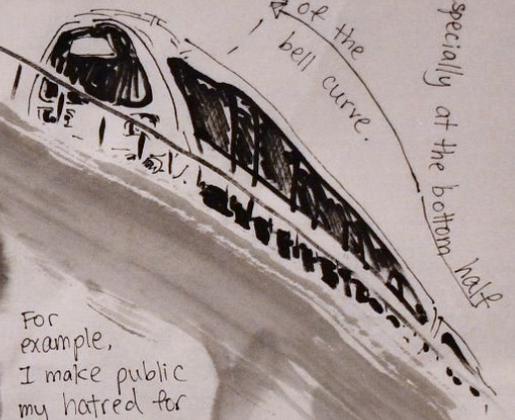
On these days that I feel spoiled by the convenience of Singapore life, I can't help but feel ...



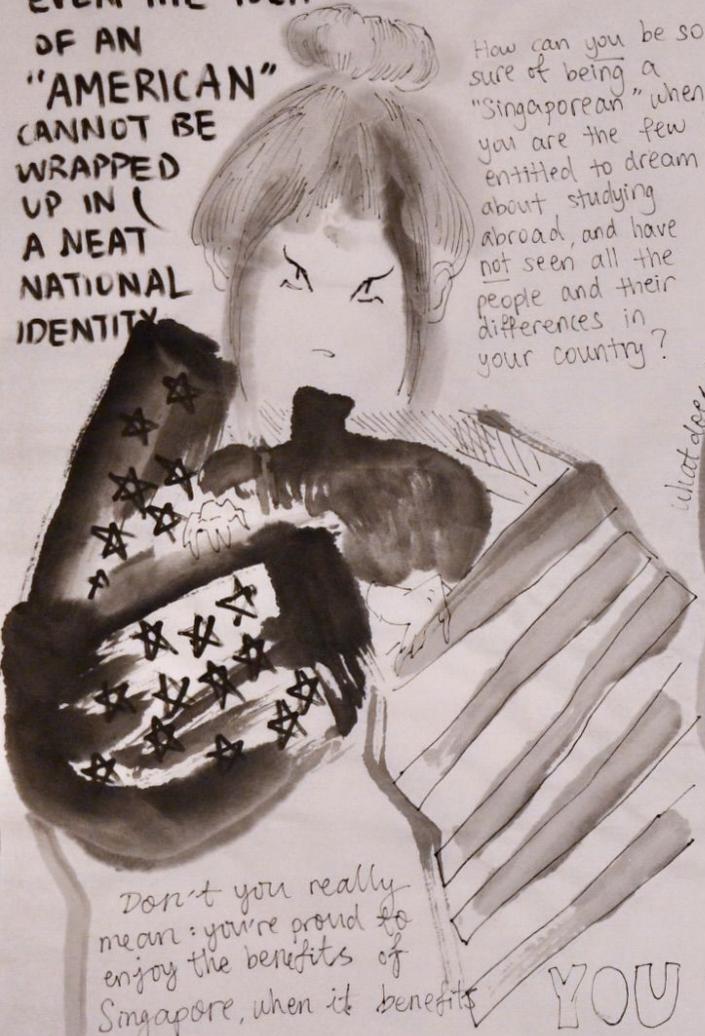
For example, I make public my hatred for the American public transportation (or lack thereof.)

I revel in how I can sleep and leave my belongings unattended in the MRT. How **CLEAN** and **RELIABLE** it is.

I must admit... sometimes I cannot stand the diversity in the US, especially at the bottom half of the bell curve.



EVEN THE IDEA
OF AN
"AMERICAN"
CANNOT BE
WRAPPED
UP IN
A NEAT
NATIONAL
IDENTITY



How can you be so
sure of being a
"Singaporean" when
you are the few
entitled to dream
about studying
abroad, and have
not seen all the
people and their
differences in
your country?

What does it mean
to be proud to be Singaporean
when you only feel grateful for
the things you left behind?

A small sketch of a person sitting at a desk, looking at a laptop screen. The person is wearing a patterned shirt.

What does it mean
to be proud
when all of you left Singapore to study
in America?
Why do you laugh when people
say that NUS is ranked
in the world?

A small sketch of a person sitting at a desk, looking at a laptop screen. The person is wearing a patterned shirt.

What
does it mean
to be proud when you
don't want to go back after college?
or that you're only going back because of a
scholarship bond?
or that you're not even willing to
go back for that?

A sketch of a person walking away, carrying a large suitcase on wheels. The person is wearing a patterned shirt and dark pants.

WHAT DOES
THAT EVEN MEAN



Don't you really
mean: you're proud to
enjoy the benefits
of
Singapore, when it benefits
YOU?

My friends often say things with a bite to them:

Are the things
you're grateful for
all luxuries that
were normalised
because you
grew up with it?

Why should you
compare a small
city/state to
the **HUGE**
USA?

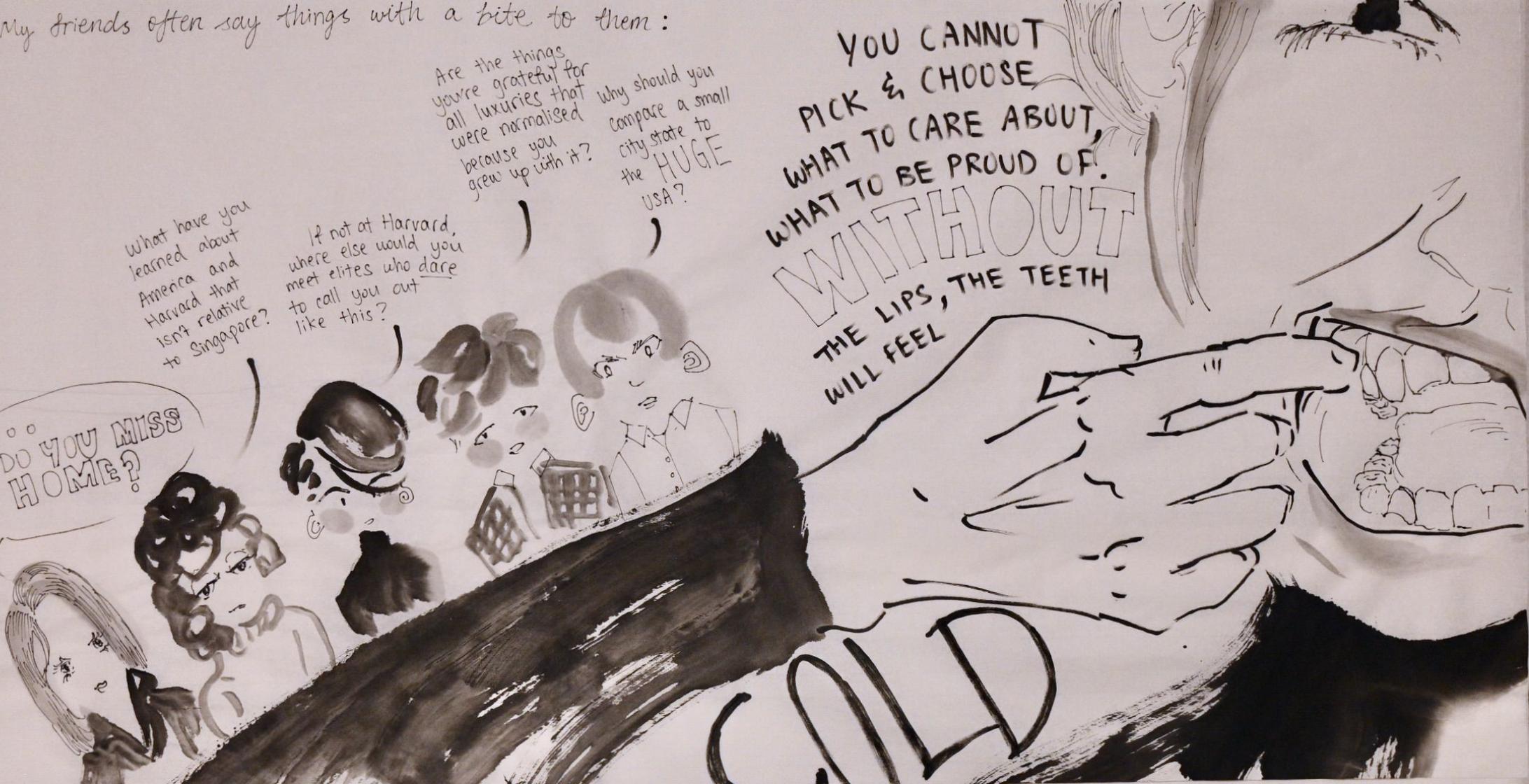
What have you
learned about
America and
Harvard that
isn't relative
to Singapore?

If not at Harvard,
where else would you
meet elites who dare
to call you out
like this?

DO YOU MISS
HOME?

YOU CANNOT
PICK & CHOOSE
WHAT TO CARE ABOUT,
WHAT TO BE PROUD OF,
WITHOUT
THE LIPS, THE TEETH
WILL FEEL

COLD



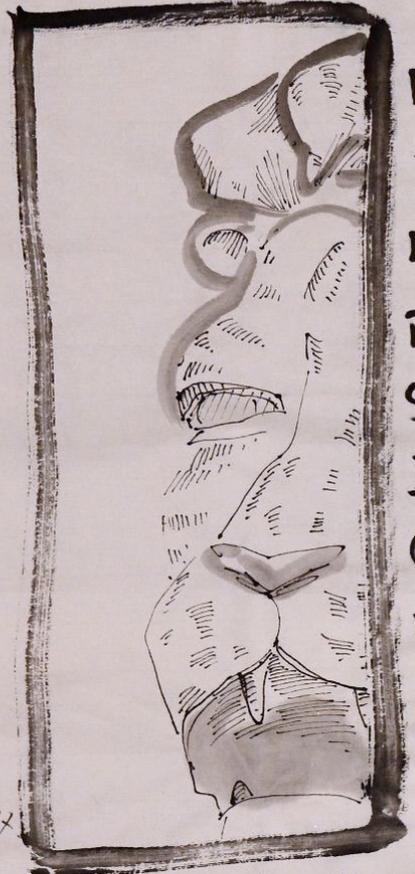
Must I only appreciate what I have

I might only be grateful now, with the

I miss home now, because without the

only offer flitting around in places I don't belong to?

Can I only appreciate how much I travel as a college student after comparing public service to my peers? our robust American scholarship?



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That leaves the views of home unobstructed. But I wonder sometimes, what I would have seen if I didn't have the privilege to get away and find these perspectives.

It's hard to see what you miss. I'm sure America's vastness and anarchy would also look beautiful the more I re-immense myself back into Singapore's claustrophobic society.

Sometimes, I fear I'm over-thinking something ^{"NOT THAT DEEP"} So I talk to my friends about these thoughts, a lot.

Can you criticise America when you're not even from here?



Can we really make a point about studying abroad, when we're benefitting from it?



I don't like what's going on in America either....



When you tell me about Singapore, I learn a lot



I'm different from you, but no more than the differences between you and other Singaporeans.



Well, why not? Education and identity are complicated and there is no moral high-ground here.



..... but we all came because we see the ways America can be irrefutably good too.



..... and maybe you learn from what you're telling me too.



I don't have many friends who are very different from me. I think that's what happens when we start streaming ourselves as early as PSLE. I wonder if someone who grew up under these PSLE reforms, 15 years later, would be in my same position. Would they come to Harvard with the same iron-clad self-reassurance that their merits got them to where they are, or would they start wondering if it was a stroke of luck that they ended up the winners of a punishing system? Would they miss home and question their Singaporean identity?

Or would their Singapore identity wane like our hawket culture crawling towards its slow death?



And that identity, it has to still be diverse and harmonious, right?

Diversity, in its most obvious ways — race, class, gender — are the most boring ways we can differ from one another.

SINGAPOREANS ARE SO DIFFERENT:

Whether we grew up playing at the HDB playground, whether we go to Malaysia for the weekends, whether we like Prata with sugar or curry, whether we had a great US experience, whether we BTO, whether we watch Channel 8... We all bring something different to the table. I want to believe that our diversity is different from the visible type that Harvard values, but no less valuable. Maybe, by this metric, all my Singaporean friends are very different from me.

The same way, my time at Harvard and in America had also shaped my reflections. I must have changed, somewhere between the ironic singing of

A star-spangled banner ☆, faking an American accent in class, driving for 6 hours only to get into a different state, asking my classmates to "lets grab coffee sometime", small-talking at a party, fearing for my life walking in the subway at night.....

THE THINGS
THAT
SHAPE US
ARE ALWAYS
THINGS THAT
YOU CAN'T REALLY
Pin-Point.



Some of these differences have become

more
Or they can eat Mala Medium Spicy without crying like the weakling I have become.

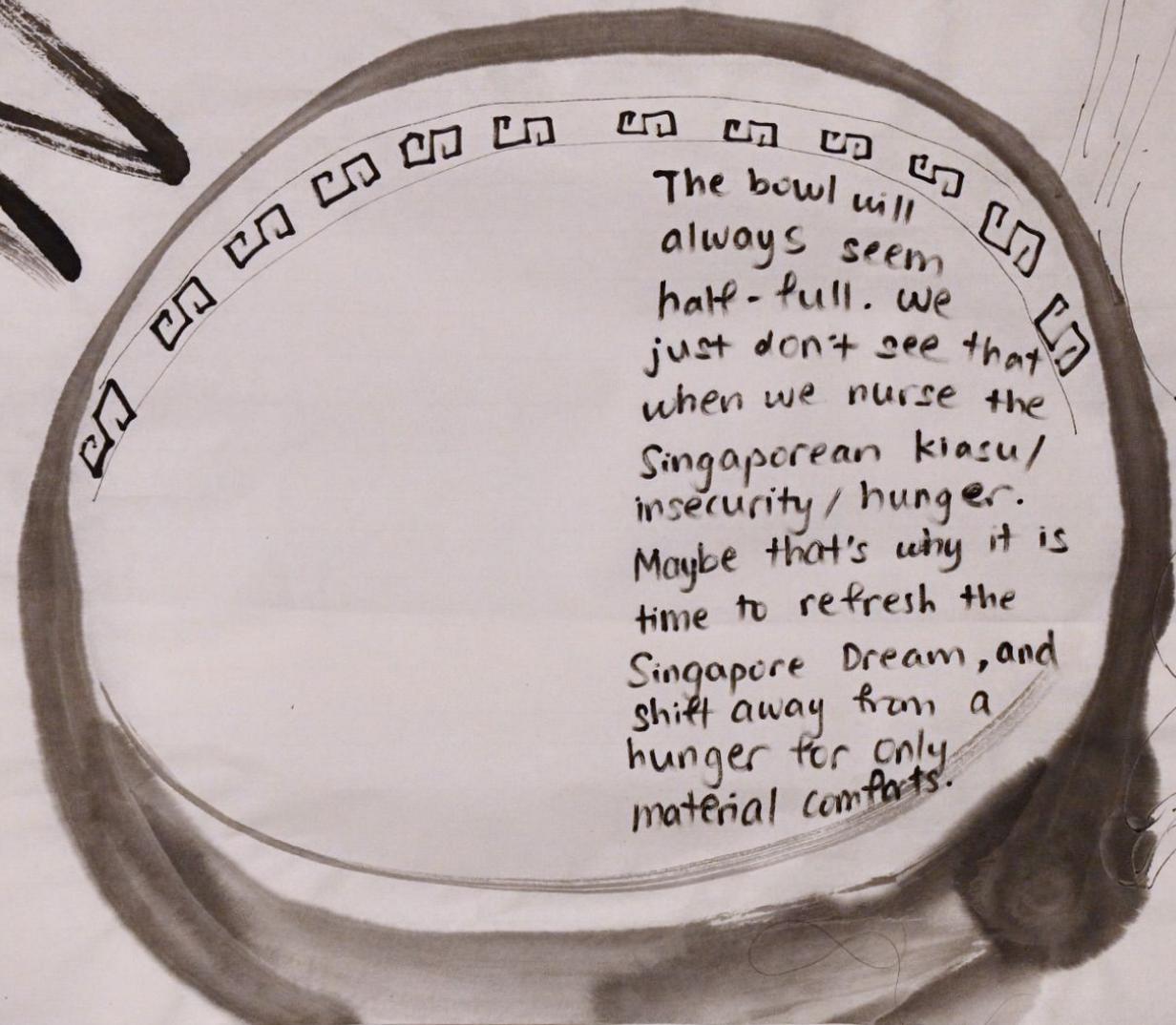
obvious due to the 4 years I spent at Harvard.

BUT I think that I still (and probably will always) think about Singapore whenever I am far away from home. Some aspects of identity and upbringing have become muscle memory. That muscle memory may be developed over the morning assemblies and national anthems and pledges I unwilling mouthed through, conversations with friends over recess, my social media feeds etc....

they might have gotten better at using chopsticks than me now.

Singapore, and
the puzzle piece of
studying abroad, will probably
never fit.
But whatever,
for now, that's enough talking.
Let us just

MAKANAN



The bowl will
always seem
half-full. We
just don't see that
when we nurse the
Singaporean kiasu/
insecurity / hunger.
Maybe that's why it is
time to refresh the
Singapore Dream, and
shift away from a
hunger for only
material comforts.

