

**PROJECT WORK CATEGORY 2B**

**Ignored, but Unforgotten**

Written Report

By:

Austin Foo 4A101

Goh Yu Heng 4A111

Benson Ooi 4A124

Sheng Junzhe 4A126

Mentor: Ms Susan Soh

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### *1.1 Background information*

In our day to day lives, there are many people ensuring that things go smoothly, be it our commute to work, the cleanliness of the environment we live or work in, and the infrastructure around us that enabled us to get to where we are today as a nation. These people are essential members of society who are often overlooked and ignored despite the very much vital contributions that they make to society. Without them and the essential services that they provide, society is sure to crumble.

### *1.2 Rationale*

Seeing as to how these workers are underappreciated, ignored, and sometimes even actively shunted by members of society due to a plethora of reasons ranging from xenophobia to elitist beliefs, we have embarked on this project in order to raise awareness of their contributions to society in an effort to get them the recognition and respect they deserve for all the hard work that they put into improving our lives.

### *1.3 Objectives*

We want to raise awareness and change the attitude towards people who have jobs that are quintessential in our daily lives but are often taken for granted or overlooked, allowing them to receive the gratitude and recognition they deserve.

The mediums that we will be using to satisfy our objectives:

**First Medium:** Portrait Photography

**The Plan:** Photograph people who have jobs that are quintessential in our daily lives but are often taken for granted or overlooked.

**Second Medium:** Poetry

**The Plan:** We want to write individual poems regarding the lives of our subjects, in order to accentuate their feelings, thoughts and hardships.

### *1.4 Research Methodology*

1. Find Interviews and articles online--secondary data
2. Pick out key words from these interviews and articles that relate to our research objective
3. Rearrange these key words to form found poetry
4. Find images online that showcase people who are often overlooked and pair them with our found poetry to form our final products

### *1.5 Scope*

1. Migrant Workers
  - Who shed their blood and sweat to bring us the impressive infrastructure that Singapore is known for
2. School Canteen Vendors
  - The promoters of health through each serving of food
3. Petrol Kiosk Attendants
  - Giving us the ability to get to our destinations

Reasoning behind the scope:

Some people have occupations that are essential in maintaining the convenience and the smoothness of our day to day lives. MRT workers and bus drivers, giving you hassle transport no matter the place; Migrant workers, who shed their blood and sweat to bring us the impressive infrastructure that Singapore is known for; School canteen vendors and petrol kiosk attendants, who help keep us healthy and enable us to get to where we need to be and many more. Why them and not other careers? We realised that most of such careers which have been seen as under-appreciated by the public such as teachers, nurses, and accountants have occasional events that allow the public to show appreciation to them in some way of form such as Teachers' Day. However, there are some careers that have been mostly invisible to society such as bus drivers, migrant workers and we'd like to start off this project with three of such careers.

### *1.6 Significance*

We chose people with these specific jobs as we wanted to properly convey our message, "Ignored, but not forgotten". These people are often overlooked, despite our dependence on them, and that is where our project comes in, to **shed light** on these unsung heroes and give them the **recognition they deserve**.

### *1.7 Limitations*

- We wanted to personally interview the people we chose while they work as well as take their photographs, however, due to the pandemic we are unable to do so. Instead, we can only rely on secondary data to extract similar reports done in the past for us to create our poems.
- Scope of the project was small given the timeframe so we were only able to talk about a few professions in detail.

## **Chapter 2: Survey of the Ground**

## *2.1 Literature Review*

Despite performing very much essential tasks, these workers are often unappreciated and ignored, and in the rare situation that they do get noticed, they usually get treated with disrespect. According to the article titled “The ‘invisible’ people in a class-conscious society”, Wong Pei Ting states that “people simply walk past them without greeting or talking to them, and they are not shown the respect they deserve or treated with dignity.” These people with overlooked jobs do a lot to both aid in Singapore’s development and allow society to live comfortably. In a class-conscious society, invisible workers are looked down upon even more. People often take them and the luxuries that they make possible for granted, while also looking down on these workers simply because of their social status. Ambassador-at-large Tommy Koh stated that the issue is not about these people doing their jobs with dignity, but about the way “the elite” treats them. A Straits Times article titled “What it is like being in the shoes of ‘invisible’ workers” shows that these ‘invisible’ workers feel very misunderstood, and are ignored or treated with disrespect so often that they adopt a pessimistic view of things, and start to think that no one will understand or care anymore. The article also highlights the fact that very few people have a positive view on taxi drivers despite the fact that most of them are just doing their job and providing a very much essential service.

We decided to choose canteen vendors, petrol kiosk attendants and migrant workers for our project as they are fundamental in allowing us to live comfortably as well as in the development of the country but yet, they are usually not shown much appreciation. According to the article titled “Coronavirus: \$200 left with a family of 6 to get through 3 weeks”, canteen vendors are “no strangers to hardship”. As a result of COVID-19, canteen vendors are unable to cater meals to students in schools, which means that they lose their source of income, making it difficult for them to pull through this pandemic. From articles titled “Heartache and duty: At 77, the petrol pump attendant who must keep working” and “Caltex Singapore investigating incident involving Tampines petrol kiosk attendant and BMW driver”, we can see that petrol pump attendants often face a lot of complaints from patrons, even if the problem is of no fault of the petrol pump attendants. When it comes to migrant workers, Transient Workers Count Too states that they are “housed 12 to 20 men per room in double-decker beds” and are “transported to work on the back of lorries sitting shoulder to shoulder” which do not conform to social distancing measures. From an article titled “Virus Surge in Southeast Asia Migrant Workers Serves as Warning”, migrant workers are among “marginalised groups” that “tend to live in the sorts of spaces that make them vulnerable to disease”. This shows that migrant workers are overlooked with no concerns raised

about their living conditions, even during the COVID-19 pandemic. Eventually, the neglect of these migrant workers led to a spike in coronavirus cases in the dormitories.

## *2.2 Theoretical Frameworks*

Why did we choose to use photography as a second medium for our project? Frames can serve as the bridge between larger social and cultural realms and everyday understandings of social interaction (Friedland & Zhong, 1996). In framing, some aspects of a perceived reality are selected and made more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation (Entman, 1993). Individual frames are mentally stored clusters of ideas that guide individuals' processing of information (Entman, 1993). By using photography, we wanted to allow viewers to more easily understand the interactions between society and the people with jobs who are often overlooked and under-appreciated, hence influencing them to show more appreciation towards this group of people. We wanted to influence the individual frames through our conscious framing of these overlooked individuals.

### *2.2.1 Rule of Thirds*

In the rule of thirds, a photo is split into 9 equal parts with 4 imaginary lines and the subject of the photo should be at the intersection of 2 lines or lying on one of the imaginary lines. The rule of thirds causes the eye of the viewer to drift to the other two-thirds of the photo after they look at the subject, allowing for more interaction with the other parts of the photo. The viewer would first focus on the subject before looking at the location in which the subject is in. The direction the subject is facing can also allow for a sense of continuation. Furthermore, the rule of thirds can give a sense of motion to the subject.

### *2.2.2 Framing*

Framing is a technique in which certain parts of the photo are blocked by things in the scene, which thus frames the subject in the photo. Framing can be achieved using light, something in the foreground or background, and different colours. This would draw the viewer's attention to the subject as the subject would stand out more due to other things in the photograph being covered and out of focus. This can also intrigue the viewer and make them interested in the photograph, getting them guessing about the area of the photograph that is covered.

### *2.2.3 Lines*

Lines can also tell a story in a photo. Horizontal lines give the viewer a sense of stability, order and lack of change while vertical lines allow for a sense of elongation and disproportion. Vertical lines can also give the viewer a sense of peace and stability, like in power line poles and buildings. Diagonal lines give off a sense of chaos and tension. Diagonal lines can also serve as

leading lines. Leading lines, as they point towards the subject, can guide the eyes of the viewer to the subject.

#### 2.2.4 Angles

Camera angles can also play a role in effectively telling a story through photography. The 2 key angles in photography are the bird's-eye view (camera is placed above the subject's eyeline, pointing down towards the subject) and the worm's eye view (camera is placed below the subject's eyeline, pointing up towards the subject). The bird's-eye view can give the viewer a sense of superiority, showing that the subject is looked down upon by the viewer. On the contrary, the worm's-eye view can give the viewer a sense of being powerless and child-like while the subject is powerful and towering over the viewer.

#### 2.2.5 Found Poetry

Found poetry is a unique form of poetry. It is the literary form of a collage, and allows the poet to choose specific words and phrases from source materials (e.g article, book, interview) and combine them to form a found poem. This allows the poet to select the words that best highlight the message behind his poem, and allows for a more succinct text, leaving behind a stronger impression on the reader. Its first known use dates back to 1966, and was popularised by the comedian Dave Gorman, who used compilations of internet comments to form a found poem regarding a topical theme that was the main focus of every episode on his television show.

**Found poems** can be seen in the work of **Charles Reznikoff**. In his book *Testimony*, Reznikoff created poetry **from law reports**, such as the following excerpt:

*“Amelia was just fourteen and out of the orphan asylum;*

*at her first job—in the bindery, and yes sir, yes*

*ma'am, oh, so anxious to please.*

*She stood at the table, her blond hair hanging about*

*her shoulders, ‘knocking up’ for Mary and Sadie,*

*the stitchers”*

This is a particularly good example of found poetry because it clearly presents its ability to highlight the author's underlying message. In this excerpt, Reznikoff is trying to underline the eagerness and enthusiasm that Amelia is feeling in regards to her new job. Reznikoff is seen

remixing certain parts of the text, such as transplanting some speech, as seen by “Yes sir, yes ma’am” to emphasise her subservience towards her higher ups. Furthermore, Reznikoff also uses the phrase knocking up, which refers to counting books and stacking them in piles to be taken away, to quickly show an example of Amelia diligently working on her assigned task to further accentuate her eagerness and overall enthusiasm towards her new job.

### **The Makings of a Found Poem**

To make a found poem, there are 3 essential steps.

Firstly, you must decide on your general theme and main message for the poem. This allows you to narrow down the words and phrases that you will use.

Secondly, you have to read through the source material multiple times, and highlight the key words and phrases that you think will best fit your theme. These are the materials that you will be working with.

Lastly, you can play around with the order of the words and phrases, until they form cohesive sentences and match the general theme of your poem.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### *3.1 General Process*

Initially, we had planned to conduct real life interviews with our target group in order to acquire source material for our poems. However, due to complications from COVID, we decided to find existing source material online. Once completed, we picked phrases and words from the source material in order to remix them into found poems.

### *3.2 Sourcing for Data*

We went to many different sources to find suitable source material that we would be able to craft poems that would accentuate our message. We used articles and interviews from various sources such as news organisations like Straits Times and Bloomberg. Also, we read up books from famous poets that contained found poems in order to emulate their style.

### *3.3 Analysis of Data*

For the source material, we filtered out the key phrases that could give the reader an impression of the hard lives that these people experienced, and also to highlight their willingness to serve the society despite being overlooked on a daily basis. For the found poetry examples, we analysed the technique that the poet used in order to best capture the essence of the source material, and we emulated it to produce the best results.

## **Chapter 4: Final Product**

#### 4.1 Articles Used for Found Poetry

##### **School Canteen Vendors**

- "Canteen prices **continue to** remain affordable to students
- "The prices of food in school canteens have gone up and some prefer if their children are **not limited** to buying full meal sets, when all **they** want is a small snack."
- "There may **be** a nominal increase in the price **but** the prices remain **significantly lower** than at public eating places."
- "I want to **encourage** students to have healthier and more balanced meals"

*("More schools renting canteen stalls to individuals" The Straits Times, 2014)*

- "More than half of the schools here are now **servicing** healthier meals with less fat, sugar and salt, and each with a serving of fruit."
- "**Care is** taken to **maintain** affordable food prices and that students will get **value for** money."

*("More school canteens serving healthy food but rising prices a concern" The Straits Times, 2016)*

- "Stall vendor Gary Ho who has **more than** 10 years of culinary experience, including cooking at hotels, said some students would **return** to his stall during almost every recess and order the same dishes."
- "The hours are more stable, and he **gets to spend more time** with his **family**, especially his three-month-old son."
- "Their **top priority** should be to offer healthy, affordable and tasty food to the students"
- "Students are also **spending more time** in school, due to commitments such as co-curricular activities"

*("Italian pasta, Tunisian kebab: More school canteens offering wider variety of food" The Straits Times, 2017)*

##### **Analysis**

Despite the low profits, the canteen vendors of schools in Singapore continue to work hard in order to provide food for the students. They are required to comply with strict health regulations given by the Ministry of Education, so the effort they have to put in is twice the amount of a normal public food vendor and they have a higher tendency to receive less profits. With the pandemic situation, their situation is even worse. They need to provide for their family and therefore have no choice but to push on as canteen vendors. Spending most of their time on the job, which meant lesser family time. Most students order from these vendors but remain ignorant to their stories and hence take them and the painstakingly-prepared food they provide for granted.

### **Petrol Kiosk Attendants**

- “I have to **take care** of **my child, my wife** for as long as I am **alive**”
- “The cars **kept coming**”
- “There are only 3 of us **managing** the cars so it’s **hard** (to take a **break**)”
- “We can **survive** on my pay of **\$1000 plus**, not that it’s not enough”

(“*Heartache & Duty: The 77-Year-Old Petrol Pump Attendant*”, Channel News Asia, 2018)

- “The person also must be **strong** because you need to **stand for 8 hours**”
- “At night, the customers are very **friendly** and **kind**”
- “Over time, these customers became my **friends**”
- “When I work from 11am to 7pm, I have **less time for my family**”
- “**Uncomfortable** because I **don’t get to spend a lot of time** with them”

(“*The Neighbourhood Pump Attendant*”, Channel News Asia, 2016)

### **Analysis**

The hardships these people have to face, from being unable to spend time with their family to having to endure tiring working conditions can be clearly seen from the articles. It goes to show the gruelling nature of this job.

### **Migrant Workers**

- “**This city is infused with the smell of my sweat and tears...think of my appa (Father’s) sorrowed face, my wife crying at the airport... when I just started, my salary was \$18 per day...**”

(“*Migrant diaries- Life as a migrant worker in Singapore*”, CNA, 2020)

- “Sometimes I **watch locals with their families** and **think about home...**”

(“*Watch the heartbreaking experience of migrant workers in Singapore*”, Grid Synergy, 2020)

## Analysis

Singapore is a land of dreams, and a land of sorrow for many migrant workers. They come here with the hopes of earning money for their families back home. In exchange, they leave behind their families, their friends and everything they have been fond of back in their home countries. They do so as they do not have a choice: many of these migrant workers are very qualified but the job market in their countries simply did not favour them, or did not pay well enough for them to provide their families with a good life.

### *4.2.1 The Poems*

#### **School Canteen Vendors**



A canteen vendor who runs a yong tau foo stall which was beside his aunt's stall, which sold ban mian.

**The Straits Times**

#### **The Promoters of Health**

Encouraging students to maintain their health;

The care for students is their top priority in school;

but not to spend more time with family.

Their value should not be limited to each serving of food.

## Petrol Kiosk Attendants



A 77-year-old petrol kiosk attendant is forced to continue working in order to financially support his wife and son with a disability.  
**Channel News Asia**

### Unattended Life

“Work for my child and wife to survive;

But it’s hard to survive when I don’t have time for my family.

Uncomfortable to stand for 8 hours;

Less time to take a break.

Customers be kind to me.”

## Migrant Workers



A group of migrant workers carrying out road works.  
**Channel News Asia**

### The City's Genesis

Layers of this city, infused with the smell of my sweat  
Brick by brick, floor by floor  
I would watch the locals with their families  
And I'd recall  
My father's sorrowed face, my wife's tears, my family back home  
All for \$18 per day.

#### *4.2.2 Rationale for Each Poem*

##### **The Promoters of Health (School Canteen Vendors)**

The poem focuses on the challenges the school canteen vendors face. They are under-appreciated and taken for granted, with people seeing them as merely food vendors even though they are so much more than that. They are the guardians of students as they are responsible for the students' health. We also focused on the result of choosing this occupation, where they are forced to choose between their duties and family. The photograph we chose shows a canteen vendor serving yong tau foo, which is a healthier choice option, to a group of students. He has a big grin on his face, just like we described in our poem. The photograph made use of the rule of thirds, which causes viewers' eyes to be first drawn to the canteen vendor before travelling to the other two-thirds of the image, revealing the interaction between the canteen vendor and the student. The canteen vendor is also facing the right, allowing for a sense of continuation.

### **Unattended Life (Petrol Kiosk Attendant)**

The poem is written from the perspective of a petrol kiosk attendant. It includes the hardships they have to face, from being unable to spend time with their family to having to endure tiring working conditions. We want people to understand the gruelling nature of this job and hence be more kind and understanding when interacting with them. We hope that people will become more appreciative of petrol kiosk attendants as they are usually overlooked. The photograph we chose shows a 77-year-old petrol kiosk attendant who still has to continue working to financially support his family. He has to stand for long periods of time despite being quite old. The photograph uses the framing technique, which draws the viewers' attention to the subject, which is the petrol kiosk attendant. The lines in the photo also lead to him, drawing the viewers' attention to him.

### **The City's Genesis (Migrant Workers)**

The poem is written from the perspective of a migrant worker and details his struggles here in Singapore. Singapore is a land of dreams, and a land of sorrow for many migrant workers. They come here with the hopes of earning money for their families back home. In exchange, they leave behind their families, their friends and everything they have been fond of back in their home countries. They do so as they do not have a choice: many of these migrant workers are very qualified but the job market in their countries simply did not favour them, or did not pay well enough for them to provide their families with a good life. They borrow money to come to Singapore to build a better life for their families. In doing so, they lock themselves in debts that they must repay. They end up trapped by circumstance due to debt, or because returning home means that they lose much needed money for their families. Through this poem, we hope to highlight the hardships migrant workers face, as well as the contributions they make to our society, in order to make them more appreciated in our society which tends to shun them due to a combination of xenophobia and elitism. The photograph we chose shows migrant workers carrying out road works and working hard to build our nation. The photograph uses the rule of thirds, drawing the viewers' attention to the migrant worker in an orange safety jacket. It also allows for more interaction with the other two thirds of the photograph, which includes the other migrant workers.

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