

**CORPUS CHRISTI COLLEGE**  
**EXPANDING**  
**HORIZONS 2023**



**SCHOLARSHIP**  
**REPORTS**

Thanks to the generosity of a number of US alumni the College was able to establish the Expanding Horizons Scholarship Fund. The fund is open to all current undergraduates and graduates. In its inaugural year (2017) it provided scholarships for nine students to spend between four and eight weeks in the United States or a similar period of time in a non-OECD country. In 2018 eight students received a scholarship and in 2019 a further six students were supported. The pandemic caused disruption in 2020 and 2021 with travel limited; the scholarship came back in full-force in 2022 and in 2023 we were able to support 5 more students. Each scholarship provides up to a maximum of £5,000 and offers the recipients an opportunity to experience the United States or a non-OECD country with the aim of building connections to form a basis for greater understanding and shared purpose, allowing them to expand their horizons and hopefully have a transformative experience.

The scholarships have a wide remit and aim to provide broad educational value beyond the scope of the applicant's academic course at Oxford. It is hoped that the trip will also involve significant exposure to the local people and culture of the area/country. The sorts of activities that the scholarship cover include taking an academic course not related to the applicant's current degree, working for an NGO, doing an internship in a business or laboratory, volunteering or taking part in local project.

A number of alumni have generously offered opportunities to our young people to work or study overseas during the summer for which we are extremely grateful.

It is anticipated that we will fund at least three students to spend time in the United States and a non-OECD country during the summer of 2024 and our intention is to continue to raise funds to enable us to offer this scholarship in the years to come.

This booklet contains the reports of the 2023 Scholars which we hope will inspire both donations towards continuing the scholarship for the years to come as well as to enable current students to find out what is possible and to encourage them to apply for a scholarship which will, as the evidence shows, expand their horizons.

**The recipients of the Expanding Horizons Scholarship 2023 were:**

Effie Armah-Tetteh – fourth year Literae Humaniores student

Maeve Ewing – second year PPE student

Zain Parvez – second year Law student

Thomas Shotton – third year Mathematics student

Ellie-May Vohra – third year Classics and Arabic Studies student

## Effie Armah-Tetteh

Thanks to the generosity of my alma mater, Corpus Christi College Oxford, I was able to expand how I practise solidarity by travelling to Miami, Florida, in June 2023. My plan was to volunteer with refugees as well as seek out the Black community in the city. Unfortunately, due to a debilitating illness, which nearly cost me my Greats, and unforeseen coordination issues, I was hindered from expanding my horizons as I had originally planned! Although the unpredictability of my situation was stressful at first, I found that my month in Miami ultimately provided me with the grounded perspective I was searching for, and then some.

My aspirations to volunteer with refugees at the International Rescue Committee (IRC) were obstructed by rogue strands of red tape. Firstly, my application received no response, despite having applied a month before my arrival. Bizarrely, when I ventured to their Miami office to follow up in-person, I was met with a plastic surgeon's office instead. The receptionist informed me that people often arrived at this office, assuming that the IRC office would be there, likely because it was the only address provided online. I was then surprised to learn that they left no forwarding address. Thankfully, collegiate connections managed to unstick me from this red tape; Sara (President Helen's PA) was able to connect me with an alumna who works for the IRC. After getting into contact, I was told that the lack of response was due to a restructuring of the Miami office and it would be unlikely that volunteering could be arranged for me before my departure. Further, she could not refer me to any other reputable organisations with which I could volunteer. I found this unusual since, in the UK, there are a plethora of organisations for the refugee crisis alone. Nonetheless, I knew, at this point, that I had to switch lanes.

My only remaining option was to put all my energy into broadening my perspective as a member of the Black diaspora. My mere existence on US soil was an easy way down this path; for starters, I witnessed Cubans using the n-word in my presence without a second thought. My discomfort and curiosity tussled with one another; at least British racism was insidious enough for non-black people to say the n-word when, they thought, nobody was watching. I found myself in a bolder, bigger America, wondering what relationships between the two communities had led to there being such an ease with casual racism. I wondered - what is it like to be *both* Black *and* Latinx? I ventured further to find answers to my questions, and hopefully have more questions, too.

At first, I found it difficult to immerse myself in Miami's Black community; all the guidance for tourists with this intention directed me to places which were ostensibly 'black', but, ultimately gentrified. The violence of gentrification is no new thing to me; I was born in Elephant and Castle. I had questions. A few short days into my search, I happened to have a Haitian Lyft driver, Idette, who had lived in Miami since 1992 and educated me about the realities of Little Haiti and Wynwood. As she drove me to Wynwood, hailed as the art and clubbing centre of Miami with political statements and pop culture graffitied on every block, she educated me on its history as a predominately Black area which was now unrecognisable, even in name. Little Haiti was a different story; her recommendation that I try the food there was gladly taken. I went the next day.

I sauntered down the streets in a sweltering heat, sweating off my edge control, hiding wherever shade was generous, comforted by the familiar fragrance of shop fronts reminiscent of Peckham. I noticed that Little Haiti did not have Wynwood's digital PR; I arrived to find the neighbourhood with plenty of neglected infrastructure, but I was so grateful to find what I had been searching for all these days - every day Black people who could talk to me about their community. There, I met a local mural artist, Serg, who was about to put on a festival in the area and had been inspired by keeping his community clean since the 80s. Since I was unavailable to attend his festival, he pointed me to a Haitian restaurant instead, at which I was elated to find familiar flavours with a higher seafood content. Despite the length and breadth of the Atlantic, participation in a Black diaspora, I found, has more similarities than differences when it comes to cuisine.

I felt this, too, with Latin cuisine. Their yuca was my cassava, their ceviche my yam and fish and hot pepper. I reflected at every new meal, feeling and knowing that, at some point in the distant, despairing past, we had shared a common ancestor. Despite the beautiful scenery in which I enjoyed these meals, I never neglected to remember the blood, sweat and tears that had gone into the taste of familiarity.

I continued to explore. I noticed class rings, class baseball caps, class t— shirts, children with their parents' alma matres (not a spelling mistake, I have graduated with my BA in Lit Hum!) on *their* t-shirts - does this sound at all familiar? Despite only a handful of people at the event being alumni of Miami Dade itself, it was clear that they embodied the space of their academic institutions - it was a brand for them. These brands were cemented with the flair and joy of uniform movement, as well as mouthwatering cuisine, as we know. I was delighted at this and, surely, on my flight home I took with me ideas and inspirations to share with the organisations of which I am a part in London. Yet, this felt all too polished, this felt like a high high in a stretch of peaks and valleys. I wanted and needed to explore the map of these valleys.

After the giggling at my accent and the requests that I repeat phrases like 'tea and crumpets' was over, I felt that I had bonded enough with my new friend to ask her simply - what is it like to exist in the space that you occupy? She shared a lot with me: '...the anti blackness down here is very nefarious. Miami presents itself as this multicultural place and is not like other places in the south, but it is. The only difference is the white people here speak Spanish. And on top of that, it constantly feels like Black people from here are erased from the history and culture' - to start. Puzzle pieces began to fall into place; no wonder the internet led me on a wild goose chase for a sense of Black community - it had been systemically erased. We spoke more, laughing here, crying there. She educated me about the process of erasure; Black history in America (and of Florida especially) was barely taught in schools, gentrification had been pricing people out for years, spaces are becoming less and less, the many Black neighbourhoods in Miami are neglected, Cubans have 'looked at [her] crazy' when she tells them not to call her n-...

From her, I also learned about the Black community's defence from their systemic erasure in Miami. In addition to the festivals, like Serg's, which renew a physical sense of community, histories had of course been written as books, but also as instagram archive pages. After researching what I initially assumed to find readily available in the streets of Miami, black

and white (some edited to be so) pictures of Black Miami residents in the 20th century allowed me to comprehend the extent of erasure. I remain despondent at these findings.

So - were my horizons expanded? I applied for this grant, having been inspired by bell hooks' definition of solidarity - learning cultural codes and recognising differences so that there may be a shared sense of community. Nothing went according to my plans; both bureaucracy and living with a chronic illness had forced me to become creative with my time in Miami. It became an organic process, through which I surely learned and recognised and shared. So much so, in fact, that the individuals with whom I formed community in Miami are eager for my return, and I for their trips to London, with the hope that they can expand their horizons, too.

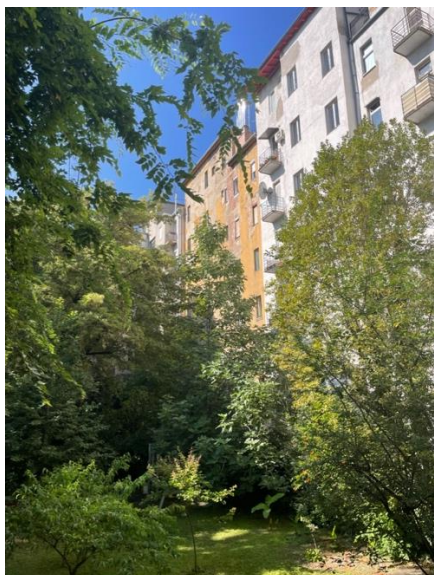
## Maeve Ewing

Over the summer of 2023 between the months of July and August, I had the pleasure of working as a summer intern at CEEweb for Biodiversity, based in Budapest, Hungary. CEEweb for Biodiversity is an environmental non-governmental organisation (NGO) that utilises EU funding to carry out projects focussed on ecological and biodiversity-specific protection and restoration across central and eastern Europe (CEE). I received the summer internship through the Oxford International Summer Internships programme after submitting a lengthy application form and attending an online interview in order to assess if I would be the best candidate for the job. The specific internship I applied for and received was working as an EU Budget Policy Intern, working with Aleksandra Khirv as my supervisor. Aleksandra was a Policy Expert in EU legislation and climate science, meaning she was an excellent supervisor to work with and under and I learnt many key skills that will be relevant in my future career prospects. Throughout the internship, I carried out extensive research into the funding mechanisms for environmental projects provided by the EU, wrote research reports on my findings that were distributed throughout the Due to the internship taking place in Budapest, this also meant that I had the unique opportunity to live and work in a bustling capital city and experience new cultures, funded by the Expanding Horizons Scholarship as the internship was classified as volunteer-work and so I received no direct pay for my work. I spent nine weeks living on Kazinczy Street in the heart of the bustling Jewish Quarter of Budapest. My accommodation allowed me to experience life living and working in Eastern Europe and allowed me to have the unique experiences of aligning current conditions of the Jewish Quarter to the historic events that took place there during the time of the Budapest Ghetto. Throughout my time in Budapest, I took every advantage to immerse myself in Hungarian culture, including historical sites of cultural significance, the cuisine, and the traditions. I visited St. Stephen's Basilica, the Tomb of Gul Baba, the Szechenyi Baths, and the many parks of the city. I also widened my cultural horizons by trying new and unusual foods, such as the fried bread of 'langos' and the hearty stew 'goulash'. I was also lucky enough to be in Budapest during the national holiday of Hungarian Independence on the 20<sup>th</sup> of August, where the religious, political and social traditions of Hungary were put on full display through traditional Hungarian music and dance and an impressive firework and drone show. I also used my time in Hungary to explore more of Eastern Europe and used Hungary as a gateway to the countries of Austria and Poland. Through a visit to Vienna, Austria, I was able to visit key cultural places and utilise and practice my German speaking skills. Similarly, my

visit to Krakow, Poland, allowed me to visit important political and historical sites, such as Auschwitz and the Krakow Jewish Quarter.

CEEweb for Biodiversity is an environmental NGO based in Budapest, Hungary, that acts as a membership organisation for other key environmental NGOs across the CEE region. The network consists of thirty-five different environmental organisations from fifteen different countries within the CEE region, including other NGOs from Hungary. It acts as an umbrella organisation to bring together the employees, projects, and goals of different organisations across the regions, and helps to facilitate transboundary projects, capacity building activities, and advocacy and lobbying campaigns. CEEweb has nine key areas of expertise: agriculture, biodiversity policies, climate action, health and biodiversity, NATURA 2000, resilience, sustainability governance, and water. As the EU Budget Policy intern, my main area of focus was on sustainability governance, specifically in relation with finance from the EU that is intended for sustainability projects. I worked on the 'Towards a Climate Neutral EU' project, which was financed by the European Climate Initiative (EUKI), under the supervision of Aleksandra Khirv. Aleksandra is a Sustainability Governance and Climate Science Expert and was the lead on the EUKI project. Through my work with her, I gained access to and was able to sit and participate in many key discussions and meetings throughout my internship. In one such meeting, I was able to participate and witness a meeting between the CEEweb member organisations and Zita Herman, a key Policy Advisor for the Green party within the Brussels European parliament. This was an incredible experience to talk to a member of the European Parliament who mirrored my specific interests in environmental legislation. Throughout the internship, I also carried out significant levels of research into different funding mechanisms for environmental and sustainability projects across the CEE region, including EU, state and private funding. Through my research, I became highly knowledgeable about the intricacies of EU state funding for sustainability projects, especially through funding mechanisms such as the RePowerEU scheme that focussed on replacing EU dependence on Russian oil with sustainability energy sources after the war in Ukraine, and the Restore and Resilience Facility (RRF) which focussed on rebuilding EU economies after the COVID-19 pandemic. Similarly, I became knowledgeable about the EU's Sustainability Taxonomy and the use of the 'Do No Significant Harm' principle applied to all sources of EU funding. I also researched extensively into sources of private funding in order to collate a list of possible sources that could be further utilised by environmental NGOs in the CEE region in order to alleviate their dependence on EU funding. Through this research, I identified key funds and charities that would fund ecological and biodiversity restoration and protection projects and published them in a report that was published within the CEEweb network. I also wrote an article on private funding sources, which was published on the CEEweb website and social medias. The final key aspect of my work at CEEweb was my research on attitudes towards private funding from within the NGO community. Through a survey which I sent out to key members of environmental NGOS, I analysed the results and created a report of key suggestions for NGOs on how to improve their attitudes towards private funding in order to attract and receive key funding.





*Figure 2: The garden in my office building*



*Figure 1: The tram I would get to work*

The work that I completed throughout my time at CEEweb for Biodiversity, as well as the key skills and knowledge that I gained from having the ability to work first-hand with an environmental NGO is key to what I hope to do with my future and my career prospects. Even though I am not currently looking to go into the NGO sector, the knowledge and skills gained from working with the EU Parliament and examining funding and policy mechanisms within the EU should help me greatly. In the future, I hope to work for the Civil Service, ideally using my skills and knowledge of environmental policy and funding to work in the environmental sector. I think the opportunity provided to me by CEEweb and the Oxford Summer Internship Program has been key in helping me decide to apply for the Civil Service, as I want to use the skills and knowledge I have gained throughout my degree and life to attempt to improve environmental legislation and policy.

As CEEweb for Biodiversity was located in Budapest, Hungary, the internship also gave me the unique experience of being able to live and work in an Eastern European capital city, which I would have never otherwise been able to experience. Whilst living in Budapest, I stayed in accommodation on Kazinczy Street, located within the Jewish Quarter, or District 7, of Budapest. The area of the Jewish Quarter was an incredibly exciting and bustling place to live, as it is a hub of restaurants, cafes, bars, and shops, as well as having very important cultural and historical significance. Whilst the Jewish Quarter is now a very lively yet safe place to live within the city, it was once a place of immense suffering and violence during the Second World War. Kazinczy Street, including my building, were located within the Budapest Ghetto, an area where Jewish people were kept in their thousands between 1944 and 1945. Within the walls of the Ghetto, there was extensive violence against the inhabitants and mass starvation caused by a lack of food allowed to enter the walls, causing mass deaths across the population. Whilst the Jewish Quarter has changed significantly since the 1940s, the impact of the Jewish population and Jewish cultural and historic significance could still be felt within the district. I stayed within the Triangle of Synagogues, between the Dohány Street Synagogue, the Kazinczy Street Synagogue, and the Rumbach Street Synagogue. The Dohány Street Synagogue is the biggest synagogue in Europe and the second biggest in the world and acted as a memorial for the many deaths that occurred within the Budapest Ghetto. The historic significance of the Jewish Quarter could be keenly felt, along with its continued cultural significance through its reconstruction as a hub of nightlife and alternative 'ruin bars' built out of the derelict remains of the buildings within the district.



Throughout my time in Budapest, I also had the ability to visit many culturally and historically significant sites. These included St. Stephen's Basilica, the Tomb of Gul Baba, Buda Castle, Szechenyi Baths, Rudas medieval baths, City Park, Margaret Island Park, the beautifully constructed Parliament Building. These sites were incredible, and I was inspired by the architecture and beauty of the city. I especially loved seeing the sites from the view of the Danube, as I was able to row with the DNHE rowing club, based on Margaret Island. I think the view from the waters of the Danube of the sun rising over the Parliament building will forever be etched into my memory. I also had the joy of visiting Lake Balaton in the Hungarian countryside, which is one of the most stunning areas of natural beauty I have ever seen. The lake is bigger than the entirety of Budapest and stretches out for further than the eye can see. The smattering of sailboats and the framing provided by surrounding hills makes the lake incredibly picturesque.



*Figure 4: Kazinczy Street, just outside of my building*



*Figure 3: Lake Balaton*

When my mother was my age or just older, she also had the opportunity to go and live in Budapest and worked at a language school teaching English to university students and staff. She was there for a month in the summer of 1991, and so saw a very different city to the one I experienced. Through old photographs and her memories, I was able to compare the city between different periods and see the development and growth in every aspect of the city. My mother had a keen interest in photography and snapped many photos of culturally significant landmarks and sites, which I then went on to try and recreate. I have inherited my mother's love for photography, and with her old digital camera, I was able to recreate some of her photos and experiences thirty years on, but in a vastly different city. In 1991, Budapest had just experienced the fall of the Iron Curtain and was entering a new age of market reforms, opening up to the West, and a wave of tourism. The city in 2023 can be seen as a hub of tourism from all over the world, as it is a key destination for many backpackers from Europe, Australia, and the US. This meant that the city had a much more international feel, yet it distinctly seemed to lack young Hungarian people. Unlike in the 90s when my mother experienced the optimism and hope of young university students for the future of their country, the Hungary I visited seemed much more politically pessimistic. There was a distinct lack of young Hungarians living in the city, and the few that I did meet spoke of many young people leaving due to the political problems that have arisen in recent years. Faced by the political challenges created by Viktor Orbán and his government, many young people have left Hungary for more prosperous European nations due to the freedom of movement within the EU. This pessimism for the future of Hungary could also be felt

within my colleagues at CEEweb, many of which were Hungarian nationals but were thinking of relocating or moving the entire organisation to a more politically stable country. Whilst I was able to view these political problems from a privileged position of a longer-term tourist who had little direct invested interest in the future of Hungary, these political concerns were still thought-provoking and difficult to come to terms with.



Figure 6: The Elizabeth Bridge in 2023



Figure 5: The Elizabeth Bridge in 1991, taken by my mother.

I was lucky to be in Budapest during Hungarian Independence Day on the 20<sup>th</sup> of August and therefore was able to enjoy and take part in the many traditions that are entailed by this weekend-long festival. Hungarian Independence Day marks the day when St Stephen brought Christianity to Hungary, and so is largely celebrated by the parade of the holy relic of St Stephen's hand in a procession around the city, followed by a large church service at St Stephen's Basilica. However, the religious festival has also become a political opportunity for the state to show off its military and technological prowess, as well as opportunity for the celebration of traditional Hungarian culture and cuisine. Events that took place over the 20<sup>th</sup> of August weekend included a military parade, an honour-giving session outside of the Parliament Building, an air show highlighting Hungary's air force's resources, and an official visit from Erdogan, the President of Turkey, as an official guest of Orbán. Whilst the festival was partially used to prove political and military power and importance, the festival also showcased Hungarian culture through traditional music, dance, theatre, and cuisine. Throughout the weekend, I visited multiple stages set up across the city, attending free events with subsidised food and drink, allowing for the events to be accessible to all Hungarians. I also had the joy of trying the Cake of the Year, a tradition where a certain type of cake wins the cake vote and is then sold at key bakeries throughout Budapest. The 2023 Cake of the Year was *Spicces Füge Respektus* (Respect for Drunken Fig) and was delicious. The 20<sup>th</sup> of August celebrations were concluded by a large firework show, attended my thousands of Budapest's residents, which was one of the most impressive fireworks shows I have ever attended (and I have lived in the US where they take fireworks very seriously!).



*Figure 8: Fireworks on 20th of August*

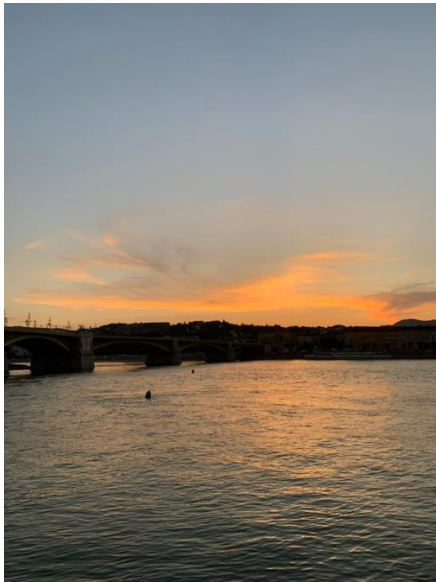


*Figure 7: The Parliament Building on 20th of August*

I also used my Expanding Horizons Scholarship to explore more of Eastern Europe as it allowed me to visit Vienna and Krakow. I used my time in Budapest as a gateway into Eastern Europe, and area of the world I had barely visited and knew little about the culture. Through my visit to Vienna in Austria, I had the ability to visit the stunning Schönbrunn Palace and witness the extensive palace buildings and stunning gardens that were a product of the Austro-Hungarian empire. I also visited the Belvedere Palace in order to view my favourite painting, *The Kiss* by Gustav Klimt. Ever since I was a child and saw a print of *The Kiss* in an art book, I have loved the painting and seeing it in real life was surreal. Klimt's simultaneous use of hyper-realism in the faces of the lovers and abstract form in the silhouettes and background of the painting were even more impressive in real life. Similarly, the use of gold in the painting, which cannot be reproduced to the same extent within online or printed copies of the painting, made seeing the painting in real life all the more special. I also had the ability to practice my German when in Austria. I studied German for A Level and I've always had a keen interest in the language, especially how it is actually spoken in German-speaking countries. Through my time in Austria, I was able to practice my German by speaking with people in restaurants and bars, as well as asking for directions. I also visited Krakow in Poland during the summer, which similarly allowed me to visit culturally and historically significant sites. During my time in Krakow, I visited Auschwitz and the Jewish Quarter within the city. Through these sites, I was able to find out more about the historic treatment of Jews and other minorities within the population and see first-hand the horrific reality of the Holocaust. This aspect of the trip was especially moving as a member of the LGBTQ+ community and I found the exhibit of the thousands of shoes that were taken from the inhabitants of the concentration camps incredibly upsetting. The Jewish Quarter in Krakow also told the story of the Krakow Ghetto, and the thousands of people that faced oppression and violence at the hands of a fascist state. Through an amazing tour guide, Bart, I learnt about how important it is to learn from the teachings of history and take what we have learnt and apply it to contemporary politics today.

Overall, I had an amazing time exploring Budapest and taking part in the summer internship with CEEweb for biodiversity. Not only was I able to learn key knowledge and skills about working within the NGO industry and about sustainability governance, but I was also able to

live in a European capital city for two months, exploring and participating in new and unique cultures and traditions. I will always remember the many memories that I made over the last summer, from the friends that I made with other interns and my colleagues at CEEweb to the incredible feeling of playing cards and watching the sun set over the Danube, the entire experience is more valuable than I can put into words. All in all, my horizons, both in terms of my career and my life experiences, have been expanded significantly.



*Figure 9: Sun setting over the Danube*



*Figure 10: The Parliament Building at night*

## Zain Parvez

I was fortunate to spend just over four weeks in New York City, studying electronic music production. Ever since I was young, music has always been a constant in my life. My interest in electronic music began when I was thirteen and ever since then I have wanted to create my own music. However, I have always struggled to get the ideas stuck in my head onto paper, mostly due to a lack of formal music education.

I wanted to learn about music. Both the technical side and the creative side of production, and the course I took helped me to explore both. It provided the foundations I needed in music theory as well as technical ability, to finally express the ideas that play over in my mind. But I have also learnt so much more from this trip – about music and about myself.

It has been an opportunity that has truly expanded my horizons beyond what I thought was imaginable. It has been one of the most profound experiences of my life, and I am so grateful to the donors and college, who have provided this opportunity for personal growth and development. I hope to be back in New York soon.



## Part One

### New York City

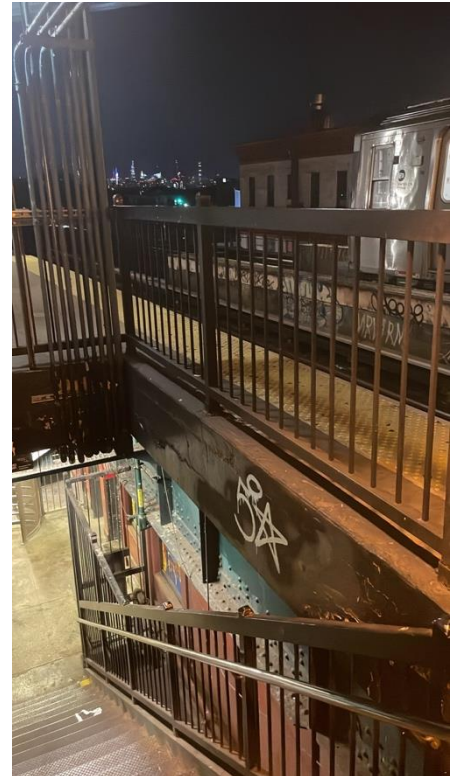
Music is an embodiment of its environment, and therefore it is no surprise that New York itself is a place I have always hoped to visit. The art and beauty for which New York is renowned for, contrasts the hustle and harshness that surrounds such a city. The diverse community and environment has created the perfect canvas for electronic music to thrive.

Upon arrival in JFK, my first interaction with a New Yorker was unsurprisingly in an interrogation room questioning me on the details of my trip. Both the immigration officer and I were in a state of disbelief that my bucket list trip was about to begin.

I was staying in a brick railroad apartment building in Ocean Hill, Brooklyn, on the border of Bushwick, Bedford Stuyvesant and Queens. I knew that I wanted to stay in Brooklyn, as it would mean I was constantly immersed in culture, art and music. I also wanted to stay outside of Manhattan, as the course I was taking was based in Midtown, and it would mean I wouldn't have the same chance to explore Brooklyn. I am so glad that I did. Brooklyn is what the New York that is mentioned in pop culture, films and movies actually feels like. It felt like I experienced the real parts of the city, rather than having the perspective of a tourist. For me, it was the most creative, interesting and authentic parts of the city - it is why New York has the reputation for being the "coolest" city.

Living near Bushwick, an emerging neighbourhood home to many creatives and undergoing rapid gentrification, meant there was a diverse and youthful community nearby, with all sorts of music venues, restaurants, and cultural institutions.

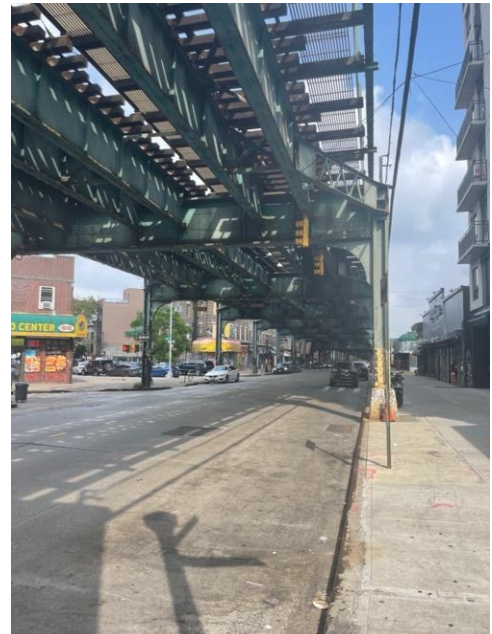
Within the first week, I acclimatised to my new surroundings, I felt welcome to the community. This was despite being warned countless times about this neighbourhood and the surrounding areas, which have the reputation of being dangerous, economically deprived and unwelcoming to outsiders - this couldn't be further from the truth. The other residents in my building were very friendly, and took time out of their days to talk to me and give me recommendations. I was taken aback by how friendly everyone was, especially to an outsider like me. I felt safer in Ocean Hill than I did in Manhattan. I also was not expecting that most strangers would approach me and speak to me in Spanish, assuming I was Latino, which has never happened before. They were even more confused when they heard my accent and wondered what I was doing in this part of New York.



The area I was living in was largely untouched by gentrification, in contrast to Bushwick. It was home to a large population of working-class Dominican, Puerto Rican and African American residents, centred around the Ocean Hill public housing projects. Much of the “gentrification” in this area was actually led by locals and was more of re-development than the gentrification experienced in other parts of Brooklyn and New York. This meant the tension I experienced in Bushwick between the gentrifiers, and long-time residents wasn’t as palpable in Ocean Hill.

There were many differences compared to my experiences living in East London, which would be the closest equivalent to Brooklyn in London. I wasn’t used to getting approached on the street or greeting most strangers that passed by. Both the elderly and youth would congregate on the street at all hours of the day, blasting music in good spirits, it truly felt like they were as happy as me to be there, and the city was being lived in and enjoyed. It is a city that is shaped by people, and this is unique.

For me, Brooklyn reminded me a lot of my experiences in Mumbai, India. There was a city that was alive, lived in, constantly bustling and with similar scenes, noises, and smells. In fact, New York felt like the perfect mix of London and Mumbai, two cities which I love and have left an enormous impact on me but are polar opposites. I felt this enormous sense of freedom, creativity, and happiness, which was absorbed from the streets into me.



### **The music scene and Arts**

Some of the best experiences I had in New York were through exploring the music scene. It was the diversity and range of events that I enjoyed the most. I was sharing my accommodation with a Venezuelan couple who worked in the music industry and were attending the Latin Grammys Conference in New York, who kindly invited me along to a Latin rap concert. Despite not knowing any of the acts or music, and communicating with my hosts only through sign language, it was incredible. The diversity of genres from reggaeton, electronic infused merengue rap and Latin drill melted together to create a flavour of music that was so unique but also very familiar to western pop/rap.

### **Jazz**

Another highlight was listening to jazz, which surrounded me everywhere in the City. The local coffee shop hosted a weekly jazz night which was fantastic, but the real joy came from listening to talented buskers in central park or on the subway. I was also lucky to visit the Ornithology Jazz Club in Brooklyn, a reference to Charlie ‘Bird’ Parker, where they would feature new experimental jazz musicians free of charge. One distinctive performance was a contemporary fusion by an Israeli-Latin jazz trio. By the end of the trip, my music taste



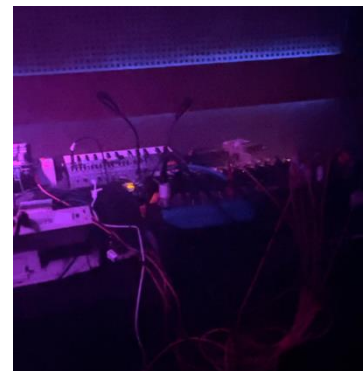
expanded and grew beyond what I considered possible, in which every performance I heard felt like an education.

The blending of culture, history and art manifesting in live music was all over New York. As well as this, the intersection of culture and a deep immigrant history which built New York is still visible, from artworks in the MoMa to the plethora of street food outside.

### Public Records

Another highlight of the trip was a live performance at Public Records, home to the best Sound System in New York designed by Devon Ojas. The venue itself was mind blowing. It was previously disused warehouses in Gowanus, which had been transformed into an oasis of all things music and culture. In the day it was a co-working space for creatives, with a coffee shop and pastry chef. At night, it would transform into a vinyl listening bar. At the back there was the sound room; an immersive visual and auditory experience.

The night was hosted by the New York label, Minimal Wave, who specialise in finding forgotten electronic music of the 70s/80s and 90s and expose it to the masses. It was a live experimental electronic night, with musicians making use of multiple complex synthesisers, drum machines, sequencers and their own voice with layers of effects, all improvised. It felt like more of an education in music than just a concert. The lineup featured Veronica Vasicka, Beau Wazner and *An-I*. It was truly fascinating seeing them work together to tell a story, with build ups, peaks and then dissipations of the energy.



### Producer Mondays

Finally, a highlight was attending an iconic Open Jam session called “Producer Mondays” with some of the most talented musicians in the city. The New York grassroots music scene is like no other, and I was lucky to be invited into this world by another student on my course. The event was open to anyone with one rule, live improvisations only. It had featured surprise celebrity appearances in the past, and the night I went to blew me away. The undiscovered talent of the city and once again, the range of styles and influences felt like an education in music.

### Exploring New York

The majority of my time outside of the course was spent exploring new areas in New York, mainly in Manhattan and Brooklyn. I started with a checklist of all the places in New York I had wished to visit – from the main tourist attractions to beautiful neighbourhoods and some of the lesser-known parts of Brooklyn. I also relied on my newly formed friends to show me their favourite parts of the city. I was lucky to meet a friendly bunch of students on my course and was introduced to friends that I had made through the visiting Stanford students on exchange at Corpus. I was introduced to many New York institutions – delis, food carts and \$1 pizza (which actually turned out to be \$5). I was also lucky to benefit from many recommendations from friends – visiting a Salvadorian family run restaurant, a frontless Chinatown restaurant, authentic Mexican taquerias and speakeasy bars. Brooklyn



also has some of the best coffee shops in the world, with SEY coffee being located in a disused warehouse and Devocion being placed in front of the stunning Manhattan skyline. I spent a lot of time making music, writing and planning my travels there.

By the end of the trip I had visited nearly all parts of New York I had wished to. Highlights were the music and cultural trips to the MoMa, Met and Guggenheim. But also, some of the breath-taking and brain melting landmarks like Times Sq, Grand Central, many of the Skyscrapers and exploring the west side of Manhattan – the high line, waterfront park and ‘little’ artificial island. I was fortunate to be living in an area that was well connected to Manhattan despite living in ‘deep’ Brooklyn. I commuted to the music school on the subway, which was located in the Flatiron district of Chelsea, right next to Madison Square Gardens. It gave me time to explore before class and work in a new coffee shop to finish work, and then after exploring a new area with friends and get dinner in a new part of town. I used the subway every day of my time there, and I found it a lot easier to use than the tube! It was also air conditioned which made the journey bearable amongst the heatwave I experienced there with over 35 degrees Celsius. It is true, the rats are huge, and I certainly witness some interesting interactions on the subway.



## Part Two

### The outline of the music production course

The course was an introduction into Ableton, a music making software known as a DAW (digital audio workstation). It is a professional software used by the majority of electronic music producers, due to its limitless potential for making new sounds paired with a fast workflow based on creating loops. But the complexity of the software is in the fine details, which is part of its steep learning curve. That is why this course was so useful, it was taught by a professional music producer with his perspective of what he wished he knew at the start of his production journey. It also provided a comprehensive introduction rather than my own piecemeal self-teaching. In addition, the intensive nature of the course, four days a week for four weeks, kept us focused and constantly creating music, we had no choice to feel demotivated or give up. It also allowed us to meet other musicians, a class of seven people of different ages, musical influences and from so many different backgrounds – including a KPop singer, Harvard graduate, professional actress, an art student and a management consultant.



## Patterns and arrangements

Ableton works through a unique workflow, comprised of making short repetitive clips of drum patterns or melodies for example. It then works on a modular basis to swap in and out of these clips/loops to build a complex arrangement and hopefully, an interesting track.

The first step was making these patterns, and to start by making a drumbeat. Most of these would be one bar, in the common 4/4-time signature, which means there is four beats (normally four kick drums) in one bar, with each one of these kick drums being a  $\frac{1}{4}$  note. This is how a lot of electronic genres (house, techno) works with this simple kick drum pattern.

Then the snare or a clap sound would play on the second and fourth beat of each bar, this makes a simple beat. The last two elements for a very simple house pattern would be a closed hi-hat, which often is played in 1/16th notes, so there are 16 hi-hat hits in one bar, which provides the groove and a percussive rhythm through syncopation. Finally, a signature of house and techno sound is an open hi-hat sound or a ride cymbal which often is on a 16th note arrangement but on every third beat of that 1/16th.

These sounds were what defined the traditional house sound that emerged in the 80s in Detroit, composed on famous drum machines such as the Roland TR-808 or 909 which are still used to today.

After making our first patterns, part of making a song is how these patterns are arranged, with slight variations in each clip (such as an extra snare or an extra kick on the off beat) which provides interesting elements which add to the groove of a song. It is in this arrangement that interest is built, with tension building up to a drop which is then released. This is done through phrasing, for example most house music uses 4 or 8 bars of an element (say the drumbeat described above) which repeats or changes in this sequence. This is how most modern music works, and it was enlivening to experience creating this first hand.

## Music theory

In the second week of the course, the focus was music theory – creating and building melodies. Basic introduction to formal music elements such as chords, scales and keys was very useful to me as someone who had been self-taught up to this point, it all finally made sense – why certain arrangements sound good and some don't. An interesting part was learning about intervals and being taught how to recognise an interval. This was something I had wished to understand and found so useful, as I had always felt I couldn't create good music until I understood how theory, scales and melodies worked.

## Mixing, EQs, effects and mastering

An important part of production which is often overlooked by beginners and is what separates a professional producer is technical ability on mixing a track. Once a piece has been written, arranged, and composed, it then is time to mix the elements of a song. This may be to achieve a certain sound character, ie. making the track darker and deeper with lower (bass) frequencies. Mixing can also be thought of as 'cleaning' up the track, removing unwanted frequencies and giving elements of the track breathing space when all of these frequencies crowd the same space or are in the wrong place. Software is often used to make these elements separate, quieter or stand out (ie. multiband processing), separated into the

low frequencies of a track, middle and highs. By perfecting and cleaning up each sound, from the snares to synths, the song begins to sound clearer. This is some of the more technical parts of production which relies on knowledge of sound design.

### Sound design

In the third week of the course, we were able to explore areas that interested us the most. For me this was sound design and synthesis, the process of making your own unique sounds and individual synthesisers. This field emerged out of programming analogue modular synths, but now is mostly digital. This part of the course was the most technical and scientific, relying on creating sounds from simple waves as a building block to creating complex sounds. An area I focused on was Wavetable synthesis and FM synthesis. Speaking to techno and sound design legend, John Selway, who teaches at the music school was certainly a highlight of that week.

This was so fascinating to me, and after a lot of practise, I was able to recreate some sounds I would hear in songs, using the simple principles of waves, frequency, harmonics and filters. As well as this, learning the complexity and the physics behind the electronic and pop music we hear today was fascinating, especially when tracing the sounds back to old emergent genres, such as dub reggae musicians, who had no clue that the sounds they created would evolve into the music we hear today.

## **Part Three**

### Volunteering

Outside of the course, I chose to Volunteer at the Holy Apostles Foundation, an organisation based in a Chelsea church and is one of the largest food banks in New York. Post-COVID, in which New York was devastated, the rate of homelessness skyrocketed. This organisation has thus had to grow rapidly, stretched at its limits and providing daily food and an alternate pantry (food bank) service.

On my first two shifts I was working in the pantry service, assembling food bags for families. Eventually, a team of volunteers and I had filled the altar with bags ready for the pantry service. We were treated to lunch afterwards which was an opportunity to meet and talk with the other volunteers.



I would often rotate between packing food servings for distribution to the local community and working in the stockroom. Despite working behind the scenes in a tiring role, everyone was still dedicated to the cause and was still grateful and happy to be there, which isn't the case at most jobs. The power of volunteering was moving, and I was able to talk and interact with so many different New Yorkers who shared their life experiences, gave me recommendations and imparted wisdom on me. They loved hearing about how my own experiences compare in London and Oxford. It also meant a lot to me to give back to people in the city as I have been so fortunate as to experience life here.

## Part Four

### Reflections

Looking back to my trip, I have grown so much since leaving to New York. I enjoy spending more time alone and I have become more internally confident. Initially eating in restaurants, going to galleries and music events by myself was slightly strange and I felt out of place next to groups of friends and couples. But by the end of the trip and since coming back to the UK, I found myself wanting to spend more time alone. I have found a real passion for solo travelling, and this will be this first solo trip of many.

I have also become more creative. Waking up every day and being forced to create and learn something new that I am passionate about was fantastic. I spent a lot of my time thinking of track ideas and how to introduce and create new sounds. It has shown me that I am passionate about being creative – and this has led me to deep introspection in what I should do as a career in the future – it must be creative.

It was in musical and technical ability that I saw the most growth. On return to the UK I have somewhat mastered the complex software of Ableton, but still have an infinite number of things to learn! I have also been creating a lot of my own music. The type of music I have been making since has been very different to what it was before New York. Influenced by a lot of the events I saw there, as well as the diverse people I met, my productions have been more experimental and percussive. This has also influenced the music I have been playing whilst performing as a DJ, since returning to the UK I have played at a number of events in which my music style has transformed from what it once was. Whilst not as conventionally ‘crowd pleasing’ I have found that the audience has been challenged and tested by some of the newer material I have discovered, and perhaps whilst not as danceable, I have received comments telling me how it was more of an education or performance than just a DJ set. This is what I experienced in many of the best performances in New York, and it makes me so happy that this has channelled into my own style. I hope to release my debut EP very soon, featuring songs I made in New York.

It was the frustration I felt being unable to express what was in my mind and hear it playing back, that led me to New York. It has been a true experience of growth, education, and self-reflection. It has taught me many things about myself. It has truly expanded my horizons.

## Thomas Shotton

Firstly, I would like to thank the very generous donations of the alumni which made my travel and experiences possible, and I would like to thank the Vildoso-Ocampo family who very kindly hosted and welcomed me into a very unfamiliar environment for the summer.

After furiously revising for finals until just days before my flight to Peru, as well as my English state school not being able to provide any Spanish lessons, I realised quite suddenly on my flight that I had quite literally zero Spanish when a flight attendant asked “*Huevos o la tostada?*”. Although I was to be travelling to Peru to teach maths and outdoor education, I was most excited to learn as much Spanish as possible through immersion in so many different cultures. I am particularly fond of this initial embarrassing interaction, as to me it



represents the development I had over the summer; returning on the flight home, chatting and helping the Peruvian couple sat next to me with the English-speaking flight attendants was a memorable full-circle moment.

## Ecuador

Although not officially funded by the scholarship fund, my flight dates allowed me a spare fortnight before my funding started, so I immediately took a bus north to Ecuador to spend as much of my time possible hiking with my 120L backpack through dense vegetation and national rainforests well above 3000m in altitude. A highlight of my trip, The Quilotoa Loop, was a three-day trek to an inactive volcano crater (over 3900m!) with a serene lake filling the centre. The views were simply stunning, and something I will never forget. After a seemingly endless two weeks of exploring and getting lost in national parks, I spent a few days putting my newly acquired Spanish from long nights on buses to the test wandering about the museums and streets of Quito, the capital. Cuisine and cooking is a great interest of mine, so I took pleasure in trying some of the cheaper, local restaurants and chatting to locals about the culture and dishes of Ecuador (some of which, such as a plate of white corn, scrambled egg and potatoes so similar in colour it was hard to tell which it was until you bit down to try the texture, failed to capture my enthusiasm as much as the local's).



## Peru

And before I knew it, I was on a flight back to Lima again (this time well-prepared for the question “*Huevos o tostada?*”). Greeted by Matías, my close friend and fellow Corpus Christi student, we returned to his home where I would be staying to rest and plan out how we shall spend our time outside of my teaching hours. The days leading up to my first teaching induction were jam-packed with the best of what Lima has to offer. We first visited the bustling tourist destinations such as *Parque de Les Leyendas*, the national zoo, and *El Circuito Mágico del Agua del Parque de la Reserva*, a stunning interactive fountain waterpark, the highlight of which was a huge fan of water which had a film of the history and culture of Peru projected onto it. Matías knew his city like the back of his hand, and soon after tackling the classic tourist spots I found us travelling to lesser known sights, the best bars and restaurants around, driving up to private spots where we can see the whole city lit up at night before us, or visiting some of the many nestled-in *Huacas*; protected Incan ruins humbly embedded within random neighbourhoods around Lima, all of which accompanied by Matías’ seemingly boundless knowledge of the region and history of Peru.

Between these excursions, I was of course teaching. Working as a teaching assistant at Markham College, Lima, for classes of students between the ages of 15-18, explaining mathematics to a wide range of abilities. As my confidence grew, I was given different break-off classes to teach more focused study with some of my lower-level S4 classes (ages 15-16), which was very popular with both the teachers and students alike. I looked forward to these lessons as it allowed me to explain maths to students in the way that I see it, and I hope inspired the students to enjoy mathematics, not just suffer it. From these classes, I felt I really developed my skills in communication in many ways from forcing myself to explain maths in a way that is easily understood, but additionally my Spanish leapt ahead in strides as I furiously tried to translate the quick Spanish slang batted about the classroom by the students (on numerous occasions I caught a student admitting to cheating a test or talking about me in Spanish as they thought I couldn’t understand).

Without any homework to mark, my empty teaching slots were - well - empty, and so if not learning Spanish in the library I would often drop into the very cramped Outdoor Education office, where I had made close friends with the 3 full-time staff who had an endless list of tasks to do, none of which ever seemed to have anything to do with Outdoor Education.

(“Hello Tom, do you have a spare 3 hours to wash and fill these jars with 2 gallons of honey?”) (I did). One of these tasks I stumbled upon was another highlight of my trip, and stretched me in a way I had never expected when I left for the airport in London. I was asked to travel across the city to the younger years’ campus, where they were one staff member short for the activities period in the timetable. Once accepting and being sent over, I entered to a school full of screaming children running around. The staff told me I was to be taking a day’s schedule of children ages 3-6 and teaching them orienteering and map skills. This proved to be hugely demanding, challenging my Spanish (some groups refused to talk to me unless it was in Spanish), my ability to manage groups of 10 very young children, my teaching skills to explain



things at the most basic level. I left the day more exhausted than after my 3-day hike, but buzzing. Some of the children ran to hug me before leaving with their parents, and their gratitude and happiness was infectious. I talked to the head of Early Years and went back, to the surprise of Outdoor Ed, to ask for a weekly day with the Early Years which was happily given to me.

At around this time, I still had not gotten a message back from the Bridges NGO, who were amid a management change, and despite several emails to new and old management I suspect I was lost in the flurry of changes. Not wishing to go bad on my promise of volunteering to build infrastructure, I turned to my new friends, the Outdoor Ed department. Amongst their dizzying array of random acts, they were soon to be travelling to some of the worst affected slums, to build a house for a man named Juan, who had recently lost his old shelter in a landslide. On the journey there, John, the staff member in charge of these bizarrely diverse acts of kindness, explained to me he was in contact with a lady who lived up in the favela and ran a community food service. John had asked her to identify some people who would benefit most from the housebuilding project, and although reluctant for help, Juan eventually accepted the offer to build a home for him and his children. The land these homes are built on is not owned, and as a result there are no pipes bringing drinking water to or away from the houses (Lima is situated in a desert, so drinking water is a very real struggle). As a result, the water is brought in trucks which charge higher and higher rates the further they must travel up the increasingly precarious and steep mountain to deliver water - I was told just as we reached the top of the hill where the worst off in the community felt the full force of this charge. We immediately hopped out of the van and started unloading walls, wood, power tools that would be used to build the new home. I had spent my spare time the week before cutting walls and doors to size so that the volunteering students could efficiently build the house, and the home was soon up with teamwork and care. We were then kindly given some soup by the community (which was delicious, although basic, and I would have loved to know what sort of ingredients were in it). We gathered round to give Juan the keys to his new home, wished him luck and left him to move in.





Another project I jumped into headfirst was an art restoration project, assisting local Baroque art collector and restorer Aldo Barbosa. I wasn't sure what to expect when waiting to be collected at Markham to be taken to his home and workshop, having never engaged with art or its preservers. I was greeted by a very friendly Peruvian (as they all seem to be) who, always enthusiastically and animated, explained a great many things to me about art and its preservation, how to identify a restored piece, the difference between Spanish and Peruvian art based on the pigment's source and colour as well as his family's history in art, his own bizarre backstories and about his sons, which he was clearly very proud of (we often listened to his son's band when working, which was fantastically catchy and something I listen to at home very regularly now – Flower Hour – check it out!). The art restoration process was very slow and particular, and I am a very fast-paced person, so the skills I learnt in slowing down when brushing off dirt from the canvas and very closely inspecting the pigments is something I really value now and has seriously made a difference in how I appraise the world, especially when wandering about Chilean art museums later in my travels, which I had not expected to be the takeaway from my time in the workshop.



Another example of an experience I certainly had not expected to have when I set off on this trip, was on the 1-week trip to Huaraz – 8 hours away from Lima – with the entire year of S3 mostly 14 year olds. Matías was to join me on this trip, and so we were given joint responsibility of one of the four groups of Guise house, about 10 students, two of which were 17 year old 'leaders' tasked with helping and guiding the younger years. Matías, clearly, had better Spanish than I and the students chose to communicate with each other in Spanish, so Matías took the lead in instructing students, whilst I earned the title "*El Gringo*". The 4 houses would be split into different locations, and would swap locations and activities to make management easy (situated at 'basecamp' at Huaraz). The trip fantastically planned, with whitewater rafting, climbing, and the highlight I was looking forward to the most – a particularly remote spot, where we would eat with locals in a mudhut and hike around the mountains. The first few days went by without many hitches and I got another chance to practice my building skills I promised, involving myself in a project building a new school playground in the Andean community, repurposing wood to build a climbing wall. A few days in, the teachers' group chat were told that students were becoming ill and we had instances of students throwing up. Nothing to worry about, with over 160 students some of them were bound to get ill. Part of the adventure, John (who had organised and was managing this trip too) cheerfully told the kids in an emergency meeting. I, myself, was still not too worried, being famed back in the UK for having a seemingly impenetrable immune system from any disease not originating from my hometown, Hartlepool (my kryptonite). A day later, I learnt the other teachers did not share this immunity and of the original 5 teachers of Guise house we ended the day with 3. No worries, quick shuffle of students and I was reassigned to cover one then both of the groups of the teachers that were too unwell to continue and Matías now had full control of our original group. The next morning, I woke up and loaded my double-group into some battered-up minivans along with groups of

Matías and the remaining teacher, Davis. After a rather precarious, far-too-fast drive up the mountain, zig-zagging on dirt roads that fell off far too steeply to be comfortable, we reached the top of the mountain and greeted Heather, the site-manager at this most remote, rather cold altitude. We set off on the day's activity; a hike down off the mountain before we drive back up to camp for the night. The walk went smoothly, and I highly enjoyed the day despite shepherding my reluctant students along, who were starting to get used to me and would chat to me along the way. However, after tackling the rather scary route back up the mountain once again, I discovered Davis had twisted his ankle on the walk and was sent on the bus back down to rest after a quick review from the paramedic (Kiko, an incredible man who was very bravely fighting a losing battle with the students' illness with a unbreakably cheery attitude on a campsite which didn't even have flushing toilet). I was still on the lookout for Matías, who undoubtedly now also had a double-group of his own, and I was looking forward to share in our bittersweet triumph of being 'the last ones standing'. Upon arrival, I discovered he too had been sick, and I found him cleaning the side of his van- valiantly claiming he could continue and wasn't leaving me, somehow perfectly clean in a white shirt despite his bumpy hour-long ride and pale complexion. His admirable effort to stay was unfortunately in vain when he was caught being sick again over the nearest hill away from camp (somehow still, inexplicably, perfectly clean) and was sent back along with Davis in the buses returning home. Once the buses left I, very suddenly, realised I was the only remaining teacher and was now staring at about 40 students – the entire house - all of which were my responsibility. The night, thankfully, went smoothly – consisting of a newfound respect for staying from the students, a bonfire with horror stories and another delicious meal cooked by the local farmers in their hut (Heather was quite happily telling me about the two cute chickens that seemed best buds the night before, and how odd there was only one today whilst we ate our chicken soup...), and the morning after was the last day we would be volunteering at another school, so we sat (and joined!) the traditional dance, and waited for the day to start. We were scheduled to cross paths with Miller house, accompanied by Matías who, despite having an awful night of sleeplessness and sickness, was capable of movement and therefore nothing was stopping him returning up the mountain to help me out. As the time got later and later, and I was having to increasingly reassure bored students we would be leaving as soon as Matías arrived with Miller house, I was approached by a sheet-white Heather. As we walked away from the students, I was told Matías had rung her and the first of the convoy of 4 minivans carrying Miller house up the precarious mountainside had rolled from one zig to one zag on the journey up, and although there were no casualties, all the students and the teacher involved had been immediately rushed to hospital. Matías had been on the second bus and, incredibly despite his illness, was the first responder to pull out students from the bus and had informed the school and other houses of what had happened. The next few hours were a blur, waiting with very little phone signal for a plan of action, and although the school has asked teachers to keep the privacy of the students, all of them made a full recovery, some after a few weeks in hospital. The experience of informing my students of the disaster their friends were involved in, managing the downwards trip in the buses off the mountain past the crash, and subsequent comforting of everyone involved was something I will never forget, and I never expected to happen on my trip. Although the experience was incredibly taxing and challenging, I feel it has changed me immensely and brought me new outlooks on the world.



Finally, I would like to end my essay the way I started it – thanking the people that made it possible, in particular the generous Corpus Christi Donors. The people I met on this trip were inspiring in so many diverse ways and the trip was wholly unforgettable, and the combination of experiences, both planned and unexpected, pleasant and unpleasant, have shaped me into an entirely new person. I can only hope to be successful enough to be able to donate to the fund later to be able to give others the chance to have an experience similar to mine, and encourage any current students of Corpus Christi reading to apply to the Fund – explore the world!

## Ellie-May Vohra

Thanks to the generosity of Corpus Alumni, I was able to spend two months this summer pursuing my interests in the dialect, culture, and humanitarian projects of Amman, Jordan. It was a hugely enriching trip which allowed me to build connections and gain experiences which I will carry forward with me into the next chapter of my life.

I converted my knowledge of Modern Standard Arabic into a more applicable skill by getting to grips with the Levantine dialect (‘āmmiyya) through classes at the Deewan institute. Whilst I knew of the gulf between MSA and spoken Arabic before my trip, I was hoping that I would at least be able to get through greetings with my al-Kitaab knowledge, but I was quickly humbled on meeting my driver at the airport. My first lessons at Deewan with Huda and Hiba were spent drumming in these set phrases and responses which were absolutely

key to every interaction. Whilst it was a fairly steep learning curve, I am happy to say that we did move beyond everyday expressions and by the last few weeks explored lots of topics integral to local culture; my favourite discussion was on the concept of 'aīb. The term is often translated as 'shame'/'embarrassment' but it corresponds more to an idea of unwritten cultural rules. Through a long discussion of examples, we decided a better (though lengthier) translation for Brits was 'that feeling you get when someone you're with complains about their food at a restaurant or when someone jumps a queue by joining you'.

Not only did I gain a greater understanding of Jordanian culture through my visit, but it also made me reflect on my own culture in ways I doubt I would have otherwise. I credit this to my incredible teachers, who I can now call friends, at Deewan who were as passionate about sharing their own culture as they were about learning of others'. I had many opportunities outside of the classroom to engage with the local culture, from daily interactions in cafes, markets and restaurants to cooking, calligraphy and Palestinian embroidery workshops. I also glimpsed into the history and nature of the country outside of Amman through trips to Petra, Jerash, Wadi Rum and Wadi Mujib.

Having volunteered with refugee charities in Oxford and in Greece previously, I was keen to learn more about NGOs working with refugees in Jordan as it hosts the second highest share of refugees per capita in the world. Deewan was a fantastic place to meet people working in these areas and discuss their roles ranging from community centre project leader to registration officer at UNHCR. My two months in Jordan were unforgettable and have inspired a desire for further travel in the Arab world as well as opening my eyes to a variety of professions which could make this possible.