



# THE PERSPECTIVE

N° 01

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## **JOUHATSU**

The Evaporating People of Japan

## **TO THE FRONTLINE AND BEYOND**

Portraits of Swedish War Correspondents

## **INNOCENT UNTIL AI SAYS OTHERWISE**

How Predictive Policing in the Netherlands Raises  
Concerns for Human Rights

# WAR OVER REALITY

# EDITORS' NOTE

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Dear reader,

We hope you all had a lovely break, recharged the batteries and braced yourselves for the new year. With the first issue under our belts, we proudly present you our No. 2—WAR OVER REALITY.

Since we're still living in times with a great deal of uncertainty, we took the time to reflect. Not only on our respective circumstances, but furthermore on the different realities we as individuals and society experience—which in turn make and shape us, the world and all the intertwined relationships within.

We've certainly experienced that around the dinner table, sleeping in our old bedrooms at our families' houses, being thrown back into a reality we thought we had outgrown by now.

By the time this magazine lands on your doorstep, you're probably done with the end-of-the-year reflections, so we're warmly inviting you to read through ours. We promise, you won't be disappointed.

Ranging from an investigation into predictive policing in the Netherlands to trying to understand how a Nobel Peace Prize led to full-blown

war, our reporters delved deep into topics around Russian children's television, war correspondency and more. Oh, and investigating the Jouhatsu, the evaporating people of Japan!

Furthermore, we're delighted to bring you collaborations from our very own UPF Webzine Committee, guest articles courtesy of UF Malmö and UF Göteborg as well as Dr. Astrid Norén-Nilsson.

With that said, enjoy the read!

Yours truly,

Agnieszka & Victoria



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# UPF CRISIS GROUP

A socially distanced hello to you from us, the Crisis Group.

The Crisis Group is a working group composed of 2–3 board members, whereas one is either the President or Vice President. This year the group consists of Gabriella Gut—Head of PR, Thea Sandin—Head of Travel, and Soha Kadhim—President. Our job is to handle all crisis situations that affect you in conjunction with our events or operations.

Looking back on this past semester, it's safe to say that our board was hoping for better prerequisites to create a memorable year. Instead, we were faced with harsher restrictions. In the midst of all this uncertainty and being an association with old traditions, we look towards what the famous philosopher Aristotle talked a lot about: Let us not panic—organize instead! Because of these restrictions we have reshaped our association's way of operating and have entered an untouched territory—digitalization.

The Crisis Group's work this past semester has mostly been pre-emptive work. As our association is based in Sweden, we follow the Swedish Public Health Agency and Governmental recommendations, as well as restrictions. Our group's main function is first and foremost to ensure your safety during our operations. To do that, we have had biweekly meetings, and kept ourselves updated on a weekly basis with press conferences as well as further information regarding the situation in Sweden through various channels and official websites.

Moreover, we've updated the Crisis and Risk Mitigation Policy so that UPF can be better prepared in the future. Not to mention we have set guidelines and restrictions of what our committees and board can do that are in-line with the recommendations and restrictions set by the relevant authority. Due to the unfortunate circumstances and current restrictions that were presented in November, all of our operations are now digital.

## Current rules set by Crisis Group for UPF as of 24 November 2020:

- The decision of UPF operations being digital is prolonged until 17 January 2021. This means that all events and meetings such as committee meetings and board meetings must be held digitally.
- In-person committee gatherings that are non-essential are not allowed.
- Board members are not allowed to be in the office unless absolutely necessary. And a maximum of 8 people are allowed to be in the office at the same time.
- Board members must use the office calendar to book a time slot for when they will be in the office, whether it's for signing documents, picking up items or doing necessary work that can only be done in the office.
- Office is not allowed to be used for studying. Board members should go home instead.
- The office is only open for board members.

With that being said, we kindly want to remind you about your individual responsibility. Don't find loopholes—keep your social bubble small, stay home if you are sick, keep yourselves updated with the latest information and wash your hands properly and frequently!

If you have any questions or concerns, contact us at [crisis@upflund.se](mailto:crisis@upflund.se)

Stay strong and safe,

UPF Lund Crisis Group 20/21

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# UPCOMING UPF EVENTS

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## LECTURES

In line with current recommendations and the UPF regulations, the lectures will be held digitally until further notice. You can find the events on Facebook. See you there!

### FEBRUARY 3 TANYA LOKSHINA

"Tanya Lokshina, associate director for Human Rights Watch's Europe and Central Asia division, is based in Moscow. Having joined Human Rights Watch in January 2008, Lokshina authored several reports on egregious abuses in Russia's turbulent North Caucasus region.

Her recent publications include materials on Russia's vicious crackdown on critics of the government; use of excessive force against and torture of peaceful protestors in Belarus; and the armed conflict over Nagorno Karabakh. Lokshina is a recipient of the 2006 Andrei Sakharov Award, "Journalism as an Act of Conscience."

### FEBRUARY 17 BEFEKADU HAILU

Befekadu Hailu is an Ethiopian writer, activist, and blogger. He is a member of the Zone 9 bloggers group that were arrested in April 2014 due to their blogging activities. Hailu is now released on bail and is defending himself before court on a downgraded charge of 'inciting violence through writing'.

His novel, Children of their Parents, won third place in the 2012 Burt Award for African Literature. In 2015, along with the other Zone 9 bloggers, he was awarded the International Press Freedom Award from the Committee to Protect Journalists.

### MARCH 3 HARSHA WALIA

Harsha Walia is a South Asian activist and writer based in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. She is known for her organizing work with No One Is Illegal, the February 14th Women's Memorial March Committee, the Downtown Eastside Women's Centre, and several Downtown Eastside housing justice coalitions. Walia has been active in migrant justice, Indigenous solidarity, feminist, anti-racist, and anti-capitalist movements for over a decade.

In January 2020 she was announced as the new executive director of the British Columbia Civil Liberties Association.

## POD & RADIO

If you want to take in foreign affairs news via audio, please have a look at THE PERSPECTIVE Pod&Radio Committee!

We publish podcasts on a number of subjects related to foreign affairs such as climate policy, extremism, international diplomacy, war crimes and many more. You can find our podcasts on Spotify as well as [theperspective.se](https://theperspective.se)

## DO YOU WANT TO BECOME A MEMBER?

Memberships are FREE for the 2020/2021 operational year.

You will get:

- Access to all lectures
- 4x THE PERSPECTIVE
- Access to opportunities e.g. the Prep Course and Mentorship Programme
- Right to vote in meetings

You will also be able to join and participate in any of our committees.

Requirements:  
Studentlund membership

If you are not a member yet, you can register online or sign up at a nation or student union (Studentkår). The only exception are Swedish gymnasium students (Secondary School).

Joining UPF Lund means you will become a part of a student association that will help make your time at Lund University the time of your life!



## **South America Argentina**

### **DECRIMINALIZATION OF ABORTION?**

On December 12, a bill to legalize abortions passed a key “yes” vote by politicians in Argentina. This decision, seen as controversial by many, including the Roman Catholic Church, was made in the Parliament’s lower house. It may be trailblazing for the predominantly Catholic continent and further needs to be approved by the Senate. “I am a Catholic but I have to legislate for everyone,” President Fernández said. “It is a very serious public health issue.”

In the past, the South American country not only restricted access to contraceptives drastically, but outlawed abortions altogether, leaving women without a say in their reproductive decisions. Women and those aiding the abortion procedure face severe consequences in form of long prison sentences with the law only waiving punishment when the woman’s life is in danger or when the pregnancy is a result of rape of a mentally disabled woman.

Human Rights Watch stated that an estimated half million unsafe abortions were performed each year, deeming access to legal abortions “almost nonexistent in practice.” Both criminalization and inaccessibility lead to the infringement of women’s rights as well as creating public health issues. The Senate now has the chance to pave the way for safe and legal abortions and an improvement of women’s rights, setting an example for other countries still imposing bans.

© Ctker/Pixabay

## **Space**

### **GROUND CONTROL TO MAJOR MUSK Realities of Private Space Endeavours**

On December 9, SpaceX put their Starship rocket prototype to trial, starlaunched it from Boca Chica Beach in South Texas. It exploded, but the effort was deemed as a “huge leap towards Mars.” Only a few days later, they successfully launched a digital audio satellite into the orbit for a SiriusXM, a US-American radio channel, leaving the world in awe of what may be possible in the not-too-far-away future.

In summer 2020, Elon Musk’s company SpaceX made history by becoming the first-ever private company to transport people into space. The two



## Middle East & North Africa Morocco/Western Sahara

### MOROCCO, ISRAEL AND THE DISPUTED TERRITORY OF WESTERN SAHARA

In early December, the Kingdom of Morocco established diplomatic relations with Israel, making it the fourth Arab state to do so in as many months.

Donald Trump brokered the Israeli-Moroccan peace agreement—an extension of the Abraham Accords—which included the recognition of Moroccan sovereignty over the Western Sahara.

US-American NASA astronauts on board were transported to the International Space Station ISS. Since 2012, SpaceX has been shipping cargo to and from ISS and cut deals with NASA worth billions of dollars.

This reshaped the aerospace industry, leading to more competition, focus on developing new technologies, reduction of costs of space travel and a reignited spark of mainstream interest in space. The Tesla founder aims to bring humans to Mars by 2025, whereas NASA is more cautious—expecting a manned mission to the Red Planet earliest in the 2030s.

The desert is home to around 600,000 people and the area of which Morocco controls more than two-third is approximately as big as the United Kingdom. The territory has long been disputed between Morocco and the Polisario Front which fights for the region's independence. The conflict resumed fighting again in November after nearly three decades. Polisario Front stated that Morocco had breached the 1991 ceasefire agreement sending troops into a demilitarised buffer strip.

The agreement ended a 16-year war with a plan for an independence referendum that never came into place as both parties had disagreements on who would be eligible to vote. A Western diplomat in the Financial Times stated that it was a “low intensity conflict” but that “it could escalate.” Morocco has denied the fighting and claimed the strip had never been part of the agreement.

AGNIESZKA GRYZ | INTERVIEW

# TO THE FRONTLINE AND BEYOND

## PORTRAITS OF SWEDISH WAR CORRESPONDENTS



### PART 1 | Johan-Mathias Sommarström

Mosul, Iraq. Destroyed building at the cornice along the Tigris in Mosul, following war with the Islamic State.  
© Levi Clancy/Unsplash

IN A NEW INTERVIEW SERIES, THE PERSPECTIVE SAT DOWN WITH FOUR SWEDISH FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS TO DISCUSS THE CONTRASTING REALITIES OF PEACE AND CONFLICT AND THEIR OWN THOUGHTS ON THE CLASHES THEY COVER. PARTS 2 (TERESE CRISTIANSSON) AND 3 (NICLAS HAMMARSTRÖM & MAGNUS FALKEHED) WILL CONTINUE IN THE PERSPECTIVE WEBZINE.

**T**he day we (digitally) sit down to talk, the world remains mired in the pandemic. Johan-Mathias Sommarström is Sveriges Radio's Middle East correspondent currently stationed in Istanbul, Turkey. He first started working as a journalist in 1987 and has ever since covered a variety of topics ranging from sports to conflicts. He reported from the hotspots of the Arab Spring, Tunisian Revolution, Gaza conflict and beyond. Even though nowadays his journalistic objectives remain the same, his methods have been unavoidably changed.

"The problem now is that I don't get the new contacts. Not many at least," admits Sommarström. He remains in digital touch with his old contacts from Iran, Syria and Yemen—to name just a few locations. "But it's not the same thing. Of course not. The reporting is a little bit more pale. You miss a sense, you miss the smell of the country. It's not as good as it should be. I'm not proud of the reporting right now, but we do the best we can."

The realities of war reporting are gritty regardless of the global circumstances. The local conflict landscape is always tight—but not limited to the frontline, as Sommarström mentions in one of his answers. With coronavirus disease spreading over the horizon, we're reminiscent of the conflicts covered by Sommarström in the past, his self-identity, journalism on the ground and all things foreseen and unforeseen.

**TP:** Krzysztof Miller, a Polish press photographer said once that "You might happen to be a war correspondent, but you are not one at all times."

#### **How do you perceive yourself?**

**JMS:** I totally agree with the quote, because I really don't see myself as a war correspondent. I know, some people do, but I don't. I mean, I work in a lot of war areas on the front line, behind the front line, and sometimes far away from the front line. But in a way, I'm a little bit allergic to the label of a "war correspondent." It gives me a feeling more about, you know, reporting about bullets and bombs. And of course, we report about bullets and bombs. But the core in reporting from war is to me reporting about stories of the vulnerable people, about the people fleeing the area. It could be in the middle of the front line, but it could also be 10 kilometers from the front line—in a refugee camp or a refugee point. It's the most difficult work and the easiest work at the same time. It's easy to report because something is always happening. But at the same time, all the people you meet are so destroyed, they lost relatives, they lost their houses, they almost lost their lives for what they built up. And it's quite a challenge to cope with that. So I think you are not only a journalist. Of course, it's so important to report correctly and everything. But you also are like a psychologist—sometimes people want to talk and you lend them your ear. And even if you don't always broadcast their stories, it's so important that they have someone they can talk to.

#### **Was there a specific conflict—or a situation—that was especially difficult for you, or maybe most important?**

**Absolutely.** I would start by saying that every crisis is emotional. In so many ways. I mean, the Gaza



Johan-Mathias Sommarström in Mosul, during the war against the Islamic State. © Johan-Mathias Sommarström

War 2014, for example. Everyone in the Gaza Strip was affected by that war because the area is so small, the bombs were coming down all day long, all night long. And everybody was affected. Everybody knew someone who was killed or injured, so it was a tough war. But then we have the fight in Mosul, the coalition against ISIS. That was difficult because there were so many civilians trapped on the ISIS side—and they were used as human shields. And so many people were raped and killed—and they killed young children. And all the testimonies from there were really tough to bear, I have to say.

The conflict that affects me most is still Yemen. Because for me, Yemen is both heaven on earth and hell on earth. I've never met people who were so kind and invited you to their homes—and they're really nice. And it's a beautiful country. But, at the same time, it's the world's biggest disaster. The kids are starving, they are dying because they don't have any food. Imagine 20 million people who don't know when they'll eat next time. And that's the situation in Yemen. You have so many landmines. Kids who play, they step on landmines and lose a leg—if they're lucky. And the psychological thing:

I often talk to children when I'm out. They always have these dreams. In Syria and Iraq, I ask: who do you want to be when you grow up? And they say, "Engineer. I want to help build my country," or "I want to be a doctor so I can treat the injured."

**But in Yemen—they don't have any dreams. All they want is food or safety.**

It's a big difference. The catastrophe in Yemen, its magnitude... it's enormous.

Do you have opinions on the conflicts you cover? I imagine it changes once you're boots on the ground. Is objective coverage even possible? Should it be strived for?

I must say, as long as we are thinking individuals, I think it's impossible not to have opinions, right? If anyone says that they are going to a war area

without any opinion, I would say they are lying. But the question is—can you handle that? I mean, can you go there, report objectively and without putting your feelings in the report? Take Mosul as an example. ISIS was really the bad part of that war. It was important to fight them. But it was also important to tell stories from Mosul. So we had to listen to the people who lost their relatives, we had to listen to people who were injured. And we had to listen to civilians. But we also had to listen to the military, to the politicians, and even to ISIS. Why did they do all this? And we had to report about the coalition's aggression in Mosul. The coalition killed as many people as ISIS, even though for a good cause. But still, it was them who bombed the city to ruins. ISIS did even worse things. But still, you have to be able to tell both sides of the story.

**You mentioned talking to ISIS. How did it happen? How do you reach sources like that?**

I interviewed members of ISIS several times in Mosul and Kirkuk in Iraq. One of the times, we had connections so we could interview a member. We sneaked out of Mosul, we met him, and did the interview. Another time we interviewed jailed ISIS members. They were in prison in Iraq, so we got access to them. And that's a little bit problematic because when they are in prison, the guards want to be in the same room. You don't know if the prisoners say what they want. But still, it was interesting to hear that.

**You said “we.” Who are the other people you usually work with?**

Alone as a journalist, but I always have a fixer—like a coordinator who helps me translate who has local knowledge—they know the ground where we are, and they know people. Sometimes we have a driver—so we are two or three.

**Today anyone can document anything with a flick of their smartphone. Will citizen journalism reduce the demand for sending designated correspondents to conflicted areas?**

It depends, I would say. Sometimes it's only covering—I mean, shooting pictures or videos and posting them online. But sometimes there's more journalism to it. But it is, in a way, problematic because many of the citizen journalists are a part of one side. So, the one using that material has to know which side this citizen journalist is doing his coverage for.

In Syria, for example, at the beginning of the Syrian crisis, citizen journalism kind of exploded. But many of the citizen journalists—I would say, like 99%—were on the rebel side, on the Free Syrian Army side, or—as people saw at the beginning of the war—on the good side. Some of the citizen journalists were really good and they got contracts with AFP [Agence France Presse] or Reuters, to film for them in areas where they couldn't come. But it is problematic because they are risking their lives. What if something happens to them? Who will take responsibility? No one. And I think that's a huge problem. And you have to be sure what kind of purpose they have. Are they reporting because they want to just show how things are, or are they reporting because they want a political change? My company would never use a citizen journalist. That is because of the safety; we don't use freelance material or anything from areas where we wouldn't send our own reporters or correspondents.

**Do you feel like your realities at work and at home are clashing with each other?**

They're clashing all the time. I can give an example. The summer of 2014. First, we had the Gaza War. That was a really tough war. And then ISIS came to Mosul, came to Iraq. The fight started for real there, and I met so many victims. When I came

back to Sweden, I felt almost aggressive. You know, I was at the grocery store. People were complaining over a long queue. And I was like—yeah, they're complaining over this... My kids wanted to have a new iPhone and I was like—fuck these standards. I was really—I was so angry all the time, because I felt that in Sweden life is so good. We complain over details, but it's so good compared to what I've been seeing and working with all summer. That was really, really difficult for me. And besides, if you heard booms from the construction site or a car door being shut... I was so afraid, you know, but only for a millisecond.

**I guess it was your subconsciousness acting?**

Yeah, it was. I went and talked to a psychologist who helped me a lot. And I think everyone who works in war areas should do that. Sometimes it's like a macho thing to say, "Oh, we are taking a beer afterwards and talking about it."

**But when  
journalists talk and  
have a beer together,  
they are competing in  
who was almost killed  
today.**

"Ah, I was almost killed today because the bullet was only like, 10 centimeters away for me." "It was only five centimeters for me!" It's stupid.

**There are so many conflicts that you've covered, so many places you have been to. How do you prepare for your missions?**

It's very difficult. And it's very complicated. I had a colleague who was killed in Kabul. So after that, they really want us to analyze this really deeply. So I analyze the situation of the place where I go, I imagine threats. I try to see where the checkpoints are, who manages your checkpoints. Which part of the army is where. Is the front line moving? I set everything. Where is the closest hospital? I arrange my fixer. Does he need first aid education? Or does he already know it? And things like that. I'm planning a journey soon to Yemen again. And I think I wrote like 10 A4 pages, just security. But, then, when I get to do that, I start to feel afraid, scared. I feel like: "No, I'm not going. I'm not going." I think that for weeks, or days at least. And when I'm on a plane or in a car, I always think: "No, I'm gonna turn around. I'm gonna turn around, I will go home. My boss will say it's okay." And [it's like that] all the way until I step over that line, when I'm actually in the conflict area. Then I can just focus on work.

**Are you the one contacting and finding the fixer or is your company doing that?**

No, I do that. And that is difficult also, because during the Syrian war, for example, some fixers were selling their journalists to ISIS and Al Qaeda, so they could kidnap them. It happened several times in Syria. So you really need to know that you can trust the fixer. And even if you trust them, even if you knew them before, you have to be so sure that they don't need money right now—or other things.

**So, how do you become "so sure"?**

Well, it's difficult to be 100% sure. My fixer in Yemen, for example, I know him very, very well. So I trust him with my life. In Syria, it was more problematic, I would say. And even in Iraq; some fixers in Iraq were pretty young guys. They wanted to be cool. They wanted to have something to brag about. They wanted to do more dangerous things than I

wanted to do. So I had to be their brake. And sometimes I was really angry, furious, and said, "Hey, I'm the boss." I don't like to use that language, but sometimes I had to. And they were like, "No, no, no, it's nothing dangerous yet." But how do you know? We haven't been there earlier today.

One time, I didn't trust my gut feeling. You know, sometimes I get that gut feeling that we shouldn't go any further here because it might be dangerous. I don't know what it is but I know that military expertise are studying the gut feeling. One time I had this feeling. But everybody said it was fine to go there. Everyone, even the military. So we went there. And they were shooting at us. ISIS snipers were. Now I sound like this bragging journalist I was talking about... I had it on tape when they were shooting at us. I felt the wind from the bullet. And we had to take cover behind the car. And they were shooting at the car. There were so many bullet holes in the car. And after a while, a helicopter came and rescued us.

**You said the helicopter rescued you. Do you have some kind of protocol for these kinds of situations, near-death experiences?**

We were only lucky because the Iraqi army was in the same place. And they had radio contact we have with the Air Force or what it was. So the Air Force came and shot the place where the sniper was. We don't really have a protocol. We are prepared so we know which hospital to take me to if I'm injured. And we are very well educated in first aid, trauma-informed care and things like that.

**Is it something that your company trains you to do before you go abroad?**

Yes. First of all, we spend a week in Munich, in the mountains outside of Munich, where we have scenarios—everything is for real. But it's a scenario. We

are reporting, and all of a sudden, we are kidnapped, we are forced to the ground, we get beaten. It's all kinds of scenarios—just so we experience it. And the big thing is first aid education.

**Thank you—I think this is it. I was wondering if there's anything you would like to say from yourself, any message you would like to convey.**

Yeah. For those who really are interested in going to a war area, I would say: think twice. It fucks your mind up if you want it or not. And you really have to be prepared. So really think twice. I met some guys, they were really young. I was on the Syrian border and they were coming with oversized flak jackets [a form of body armor]. Two, four sizes too big for them. They were looking ridiculous. They came and asked the Free Syrian Army: "Where is the bus to Mosul, to Aleppo?" And they were like: "Bus to Aleppo? This is a war area. Do you think we have bus traffic here? A timetable? No. Grow up." And those guys were kidnapped later on, of course.

**Do you think this kind of approach is a generational thing, or just lack of experience?**

I think maybe it's not a generational thing. I think it's just some people are more stupid than others. There are so many dangers—not only that you can be shot or bombed. You can get kidnapped, you can get really sick by the food you eat. There are so many UXOs [unexploded ordnance] so you can explode—also happened during the Mosul war. Several journalists were killed because they were unlucky.

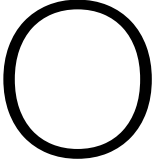
**So, is being successful—if I can even use that word—a mix of preparation and luck?**

No, I wouldn't say luck. It's a mix of preparation and daring to admit to yourself that you listen to your fear. Be a little bit scared. Don't be a cowboy.

# 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY BREAKDOWN

**HOW THE RACE FOR A COVID  
VACCINE HAS TURNED INTO AN  
ARMS RACE TOWARDS A NEW  
REALITY**

WITH THE SECOND WAVE RAMPAGING THE GLOBE, COUNTRIES IN ALL SHADES OF LOCKDOWN, AND A CATASTROPHIC AMOUNT OF LIVES LOST, IT IS APPARENT THAT THE RACE FOR A VACCINE—OR, MORE SO, A DEAL ON SECURING DOSAGES—HAS LONG BECOME A POLITICAL ISSUE. TOO EARLY TO PROCLAIM A POST-COVID STATE, THE DESIRE TO FINALLY HAVE SOMETHING TO FIGHT THE BACK-TO-NORMAL FIGHT IS UNFATHOMABLE.

 On December 8, 2020, the first risk patients in the United Kingdom received the long-awaited vaccination against the coronavirus, which has held sway over the world for over a year now. The UK had given emergency approval to the US-German Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine only days prior, marking it the first Western country to do so.

With 58 vaccines currently being tested in clinical trials on humans, 15 in the final stages and at least 85 preclinical vaccines under active investigation in animals (according to the New York Times on December 13) it seems like stepping into what will be post-COVID-normality may finally be within reach. But for whom?

From joining forces to develop a product at unprecedented speed to questions revolving around who can get the vaccinations and when paired with a great deal of uncertainty around vaccine approvals, the long-term safety of the jab and even vaccine mandates—the distribution of the vaccines within countries' demographics poses a huge set of issues. The fear that wealthy countries will make the deal, and yet again come out on top, ultimately leaving poorer countries out, mark another.

### **A Wealthy Few “corner 51% of the promised doses”**

Indeed, research from Duke University's Global Health Innovation Center found that a “vast majority” of the doses were sold to high-income countries, enabling them to vaccinate their

population “several times over”—in the unlikely case that all vaccines purchased get the seal of regulatory approval. Oxfam states that wealthy countries making up 13% of the world's population have “already cornered more than half (51 percent) of the promised doses of leading COVID-19 vaccine candidates.”

In a BBC interview, Clare Wenham, assistant professor of global health policy at the London School of Economics and Political Science, stated that “the process of advance purchasing is well established in the pharmaceutical industry” but that this also translates to “whoever can pay the most at the earliest stage of production gets to the front of the queue.”

### **Vaccine Nationalism vs. a People's Vaccine**

In order to fight pandemic effectively, it is necessary to distribute the vaccination among all, not only among the wealthy countries. “COVID-19 is an unprecedented global crisis that demands an unprecedented global response,” said WHO Director-General, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus. “Vaccine nationalism will only perpetuate the disease and prolong the global recovery.”

For the first time in 20 years, global extreme poverty is expected to rise. Due to COVID, the World Bank estimates that an additional 88–115 million people (150 million by 2021) are being pushed into extreme poverty, meaning they have to survive on less than \$1.90 a day. With a prognosed cumulative loss of \$12 trillion to the global economy in 2020 and 2021 (IMF, June 2020), the “new normal” looks dire.

# "Giving companies monopolies over vaccines in the middle of a pandemic is criminal."

James Love, director of the NGO Knowledge Ecology International

Organizations such as Oxfam and Human Rights Watch, among others, are calling for a "People's Vaccine," a freely accessible vaccine for all, distributed based on need, furthermore calling for transparency of governments cutting vaccine deals and knowledge-sharing so enough vaccine doses can be produced. James Love, director of the NGO Knowledge Ecology International, said: "Giving companies monopolies over vaccines in the middle of a pandemic is criminal." Furthermore, if vaccine nationalism will be kept up, "most people in low-income countries will be waiting until 2024 for COVID-19 vaccinations," according to the Duke research.

## **COVAX—a Pledge to Overcome COVID Together**

In spring 2020, the WHO, the European Commission and France launched COVAX—one of three pillars of the Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator—as a global tool to fight the pandemic. Co-led by GAVI (The Vaccination Alliance), the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) and WHO, COVAX aims at "providing innovative and equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines" to people around the globe, regardless of their (or their country's) wealth.

The mechanism, in which nearly 190 countries are participating as of December 11, shall ensure that vaccines are distributed to all corners of the world equally, with a goal of delivering two billion doses by the end of 2021. The ACT brings together governments, global health organisations,

manufacturers, scientists, private sector, civil society and philanthropy.

According to the WHO, a total of \$5.1 billion are committed so far, but furthermore stated that "an immediate funding gap of \$4.3 billion" exists. A further \$23.9 billion is needed in 2021 to "deploy tools across the world as they become available." GAVI states that COVAX offers "doses for at least 20% of countries' populations" and a "diverse and actively managed portfolio of vaccines,." They also aim to get "vaccines delivered as soon as they are available," "end the acute phase of the pandemic," and "rebuild economies."

As this groundbreaking joining of forces aims at ending the pandemic together, it is worth pointing out that countries are still able to make deals with manufacturers on top of their pledge to COVAX. Which, according to the Duke research, may leave "low-income countries entirely reliant on the 20% population coverage from COVAX." Elina Hodges of the Duke Global Health Innovation Center critiques that high-income countries are undermining the vaccine equity effort as they "secure as many doses as they possibly can" in bilateral agreements even though they've "made a commitment to equality." This would inevitably lead to the "big pie" being significantly smaller for the rest of the world.

With everybody wanting to go back to normal, the harsh reality is that a fair share of the world's population won't see this happening in the near future, furthering the existing divides even more.

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# DON'T READ THE NEWS

January 2021

WHAT IS THE STATE OF THE WORLD TODAY? WHERE HAVE WE BEEN, WHERE ARE WE, AND WHERE ARE WE GOING?

WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION, FAMINE, CLIMATE CRISIS, ASTEROIDS HITTING THE EARTH, FUTURE PANDEMICS, ARMS RACES, OVERCROWDED REFUGEE CAMPS, SUPERVOLCANOES, FASCISM AND ALTERNATIVE FACTS ARE ONLY A FEW OF THE NUMEROUS PROBLEMS THAT HUMANITY FACES.

IT CAN GET OVERWHELMING WHEN TRYING TO PROCESS ALL OF THIS. HOWEVER, THE NEWS TENDS TO PRIORITIZE WAR OVER REALITY—WHEN, IN FACT, HUMANS ARE DOING PRETTY WELL.

## OPINION BY Eje Brundin

As a student of Peace and Conflict Studies at Lund University, I see patterns of polarization, violence, and the breakdown of states everywhere I look. Democracy is in global decline, rape is used as a weapon of war, nuclear arms deals are failing and social media is polarizing us into frightening bubbles of self-righteous, aggravating rhetoric. The problems are huge and complex, and affect people and families all over the world. Being hopeful is difficult, but let me help.

When we see war and cruelty, there are deep patterns of cooperation that we tend to overlook. We read about war, murders, environmental degradation, and then think that

human nature is greedy, selfish and cruel.

However, when we say that the winners write the history books, we forget what made the writer a winner: human cooperation. You have a war? That is two or more sides, each one cooperating to win over the other. You have a nuclear bomb? It was created by scientists that cooperated through sharing knowledge. You have THE PERSPECTIVE in your hand? I am happy to say that we cooperated to get this delivered to you. Human cooperation is everywhere and we take it for granted. War and nuclear bombs are horrific things, but where cooperation has created death and destruction it is also the solution.

Cooperation is what makes humans unique. In the widely read novel *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding, the stranded boys slowly descend into chaos and

are described to hold a beast-like quality in their human core. Rutger Bregman, a Dutch historian, found the real-life example of *Lord of the Flies*. It turns out six boys stranded on an island in Tonga constructively cooperated to survive for more than a year. One even broke a leg, and the others compensated to let their friend heal. *Lord of the Flies* is a good novel, but that's all it is. In reality, we usually do better. We are the only species on the planet that can cooperate in large numbers with other unknown humans. This is an incredible advantage we have over other animals. Animals like wolves or monkeys can only cooperate in small numbers and not outside their circle or kin. Put ten million chimpanzees in Paris and you get chaos, but in the same space ten million humans manage to cooperate and co-exist. Human reality tends to lean toward cooperation and

we see it in international politics, too.

Last year the United Nations celebrated 75 years of existence. It can be considered the pinnacle of human cooperation. It has served an instrumental role in creating peaceful international relations. States across the globe come together to discuss issues, to reach agreements and to ensure international peace.

This inter-state organization has been an incredible success. Since its creation, there have been no superpower-wars. Let me say that again: there have been zero wars between superpowers while the United Nations has existed. This point might sound trivial, but oh, so important to make!

The existence of the United Nations is taken for granted today. According to *Our World in Data*, out of the world's population in 2019, less than 8% is 65 years or older. This means that almost nobody alive today was of an age to witness and understand the creation of the United Nations. The pinnacle of human cooperation, to us, has always been there. Our standards of international relations and peace are very different than those who lived through the first and second World Wars. To put it into perspective, imagine instead what might have happened if there had been no United Nations at all during the Cold War. The UN has given the world the Laws of War and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and much more. Without it, wars today would be much

worse than what they currently are.

This positive development is a slow and long-term one, but it is an important one. There is much data to support this worldview. Since 1945, global life expectancy has gone up, child mortality has gone down, hunger has decreased, access to electricity has gone up, democracies have *increased*, war deaths are *decreasing*, homicides are decreas-

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**“Humans are not problem-oriented; we are solution-oriented.”**

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ing—I could go on and on. This has only been 75 years. If we instead look back 300 years, it is fair to say that humanity has progressed just fine. If you want to know more, look at all this data by yourself through *Our World in Data*.

Now, compare these hard facts to the news. Have you ever heard reporters say “Today 137,000 people escaped extreme poverty” every day for the last 25 years? The answer is no, despite this being a truth of global human development. Our human reality is a reality of positives and negatives merged into one world. You almost give up on humanity when you read the news, but that is because these slow, positive developments are not covered in popular media.

In exclusive correspondence with THE PERSPECTIVE, Dr. Steven Pinker, a cognitive psychologist, writes that “peace

consists of nothing happening, which by definition is not news.” News media tend to follow the motto of “when it bleeds, it leads,” but reality is not a big pile of blood. To understand the world, you cannot only look at the news. When you look at countries at war, look at the countries at peace at the same time to get the whole picture. To be fair, the fact that the news media mainly covers problems and human suffering is a very constructive and cooperative act in and of itself as well. While being aware of the positive progress humans are making, you are also getting information about problems humans have to solve to improve human life even further.

Humans are not problem-oriented; we are solution-oriented. Dr. Pinker emphasized that by looking at data and seeing trends in the long-term, we can “muster the energy to reduce [war] further.” We learn from looking at what we did wrong in the past. We also learn by looking at what we are doing right, and it seems we have more to learn about what we’re doing right. It is difficult to process all the problems we face today, but it is because we are more aware and know more about all of our problems today. We are facing immense inequality, traumatizing wars and environmental crises. Alone, it can feel impossible to deal with it, understand it, and try to change it. Luckily, we are by nature experts at cooperating and in the last centuries we have (statistically) passed the challenge of progress with flying colors.

**PLOTS, PRIDE AND PREJUDICE**  
**UNDERSTANDING CONSPIRACY THEORIES**

THE UGLY-FACED HYDRA OF CONSPIRACY THEORIES IS JUGGERNAUTING THROUGH OUR SOCIETIES NORMALIZED BY THE LIKES OF DONALD TRUMP. BUT ARE CONSPIRACY THEORIES REALLY PREVAILING OVER COMMON SENSE AND SCIENCE? THE PERSPECTIVE SPOKE TO PROFESSOR OF AMERICAN LITERARY AND CULTURAL HISTORY MICHAEL BUTTER ABOUT THE NATURE OF CONSPIRACY THEORIES, WHICH IS ALSO THE TITLE OF HIS NEW BOOK.

## **S**hit Happens

When I told my partner of four months that I was writing a piece on conspiracy theories, I was not prepared to enter into a four-hour long argument refuting that the Twin Towers were brought down by controlled demolition. After having locked myself inside the bathroom for five well-deserved minutes—all the while grappling with some tough thoughts along the lines of “Am I dating a total whacko?” And googling “How do I freeze my eggs?”—I swallowed my pride and engaged in debate with my partner. “It doesn’t look right. A plane flies into the top and then the whole building disintegrates. That just seems unlikely,” he, in no way professionally qualified to make that kind of judgment call, told my dropped jaw. To my horror, his arguments—detailing how engineers have proved the towers fell due to controlled explosions—made sense in some perverted way. Yet, something didn’t feel right. As the hours passed, I realized we were going in circles. While I was blaming him for uncritically

adopting the conspiracy theory and ignoring the facts, he blamed me for the same shortcomings by simply replacing “conspiracy theory” with “the official version of things.” At the end of the evening, still reeling from the shock of my discovery, I realized that something deeply disconcerting, yet profoundly human, had happened—a dramatic event I couldn’t plan or foresee; something inexplicable and unexpected. And that something, it turns out, is at the heart of understanding conspiracy theories.

### **Understanding Conspiracy Theorists**

In my interview the next morning, I immediately started to secretly conspire with Michael Butter on how to bring my boyfriend down—that is, how to make him see sense. It turned out Michael Butter, who is one of the founders of COMPACT—an EU-funded project that brings together research on conspiracy theories from all over the continent—was facing a related but much graver problem. “I just finished a letter to a police officer who is investigating someone

threatening me,” he said. As almost all contemporary conspiracy theories are anti-establishment and anti-elitist, many conspiracy theorists perceive politicians, the media and even academics as part of a conspiracy. “I am ideologically misguided, paid by the CIA or too stupid to understand the scientific facts,” Michael Butter says in one of his lectures. “This guy has been writing to me for years. He is actually not a bad guy, or he didn’t use to be. It is pointless to engage with such a die-hard conspiracy theorist.” Michael Butter points to empirical studies showing that staunch conspiracy theorists are only fortified in their convictions when presented with conclusive evidence that they are wrong. This is because their identity is tied to their belief in conspiracy theories. If you challenge the conspiracy theory, you are also threatening their identity. In that sense, conspiracy theories are more about feelings than about facts. On a psychological level, conspiracy theories appeal to our sense of security and to people who feel powerless and unheard—which is also where they coincide with contemporary right wing politics.



The World Trade Center and St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church, which began services at 155 Cedar Street in 1922. All three buildings were among those destroyed in the 9/11 terrorist attacks on New York City in 2001.

© Steve Harvey/Unsplash

For those who are not already convinced conspiracy theorists, there is still hope. The key is to focus on the personal relationship you have with the conspiracy theorist, express a willingness to understand how they think and insist on the facts. "Depending on the conspiracy theory you might not want to do that. 9/11 is fairly harmless, but what about a very anti-Semitic conspiracy theory? Do you want to ask 'Why do you think the Jews are behind that?' or do you want to say 'I think this is anti-Semitic bullshit and I don't want to hear it in my house'" says Michael Butter.

I am probably not alone in harboring prejudices about conspiracy theorists as uneducated, weird, tinfoil clothed others—which is why I was so surprised to find one of them at my doorstep with a degree in journalism and no shiny

hat in sight. Although a number of studies show that a higher degree of education makes one less likely to believe in conspiracy theories, significant minorities from all over the social spectra believe in them. Writing these believers off as paranoid lunatics does not provide us with a good explanation of what conspiracy theories are and why people believe in them—especially not in an era characterized by polarization.

### **The Founding Myth of the Republican Party**

When Donald Trump was elected president in 2016, media in the US and Europe mourned that the Republican party—the party that abolished slavery—had been taken over by a conspiracy theorist. "From a historical point of view, that is quite ironic because

the party was founded on a conspiracy theory: the resistance to the so-called Slave Power," says Michael Butter.

The opening lines of Lincoln's famous 1858 speech from the closing of the Republican State Convention in Illinois—"A house divided against itself cannot stand"—have been invoked by both Democrats and Republicans throughout Trump's presidency to warn the public about how division undermines democracy. Those quoting Lincoln often fail to note that in the remainder of the speech he accuses several powerful figures—including the president, the former president, and the chief justice of the Supreme Court—of having orchestrated the crises of the 1850s in order to extend slavery to all of the US. Some believers of the Slave Power conspiracy

theory assumed that the ultimate aim was to also enslave the white working class.

According to Michael Butter, the Slave Power conspiracy theory is what really galvanized the opposition and secured the party's victory, making Lincoln the first Republican president. "Opposition to slavery on moral grounds was always a minority position," he says.

### **The Bastard Child of the Enlightenment**

Historically, conspiracy theories as legitimate political discourse were common practice, not unique to the Republican Party.

"Today you can investigate the reasons why people believe that the Earth is flat despite all the scientific evidence. But this didn't make sense 700 years ago," Butter says. Conspiracy theories were accepted as a rational form of knowledge from at least the 17th century. During the Enlightenment, when people in Europe gradually became less superstitious, conspiracy theories increased in popularity and became more complex—in large part because they provided an ordered explanation of a world which could no longer rely on god to pull the strings. Enlightenment thinkers supported a worldview in which cause and effect could

be explained mechanically as products of human intentions—leaving little space for accidents and ambiguity. According to this view, bad things —like the COVID-pandemic— are the result of sinister human design and not due to events we cannot control. Ironically, the language of cause and effect is also the rational language of modern science—another by-product of the Enlightenment. Contrary to what some scholars claim, conspiracy theories function like scientific theories in that they are falsifiable and provide explanations of past events while permitting predictions of the future. Kind of like in *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, scientific theories and conspiracy theories seem to cohabit the same logically defined body, although with very different assumptions about the world.

### **Conspiracy Theories vs. Conspiracies**

History is full of real conspiracies, like the murder of Julius Caesar, the CIA's involvement in the Iranian coup of 1953, the Sykes-Picot agreement to partition the Middle East and the documented Russian effort to influence the 2016 US elections. So what separates advocating for a healthy scepticism of "the official version of things" from turning into a fully-fledged believer

of conspiracy theories?

One problem with conspiracy theories is that the chain of cause and effect is distorted and prolonged indefinitely: everything is connected, usually over vast periods of time. Whereas real conspiracies are limited in scope, focusing around one event—a coup, a military action, or an assassination—conspiracy theories might begin with single events but are then integrated into a much larger scenario, creating a perfect narrative. For example, in 1920 Winston Churchill gave a speech in which he asserted that the Illuminati, the Freemasons and "international Jews" are part of a "worldwide conspiracy for the overthrow of civilization" that has been going on since 1776 and was the cause of such disparate events as the French Revolution and the rise of communism in Russia.

Another trademark of conspiracy theories is that there is usually no room for coincidence. "Al-Qaeda probably couldn't believe their luck when those towers collapsed," says Michael Butter. "By contrast, if you assume that the towers have been brought down by controlled demolition, you assume that somebody somehow managed to plant these explosives in the towers without anybody noticing. Then you manage to fly planes in there

without setting off the explosives. And then at some point, when it seems appropriate, you set off the explosives and everything collapses.”

Contrary to what many conspiracy theorists claim about the term “conspiracy theory,” that the notion was invented by the CIA to discredit alternative explanations of the Kennedy assassination—it was first employed in its modern usage by German science philosopher Karl Popper. He noted that in real conspiracies, the conspirators hardly ever get to enjoy the successes of their plotting, since something usually goes wrong. On 9/11, the fourth plane never hit its target and came crashing down in Pennsylvania. When the CIA assisted the overthrow of Iranian Prime minister Mohammed Mosaddegh in 1953, the US government did not anticipate the coup eventually leading to the Islamic revolution, turning the regime into one of its worst enemies. These examples point to another trait of conspiracies: they are usually brought to the surface in one way or another. Watergate is frequently used by conspiracy theorists to “prove” different theories by providing a historical example of a conspiracy that turned out to be true. They leave out that there were, in fact, no theories about an existing conspiracy before the scandal

was revealed. Conversely, no one has come forward to reveal that the moon landing was fake or that they were forced to take part in orchestrating 9/11 from the inside—projects that would have required the participation and continuing silence of hundreds of people.

## "Al-Qaeda probably could not believe their luck when those towers collapsed."

Michael Butter to THE  
PERSPECTIVE

### Stigmatization and Comeback

It was not until the 1950s that conspiracy theories underwent a process of stigmatization, pushing them to the margins of the public sphere. “The Holocaust is one major reason for this,” says Michael Butter. “The members of the Frankfurt School who were sitting in exile in the US saw the horrible consequences of the belief in one conspiracy theory—that of the Jewish world

domination.”

The other main reason is the breakthrough of social science as the accepted norm of how to explain human behavior. Karl Popper contended that conspiracy theories are “bad explanations of reality” because they underestimate unintended effects and structural factors while putting a huge emphasis on intention and ability to plan. As Michael Butter puts it, social scientists generally agree that “people very often don’t really know what they want and political decision making is extremely complicated. For example, sociological habitus theories can explain why people act as if they were secretly collaborating even though they aren’t. It’s just that they have been socialized in the same way, so they have the same values and pursue the same goals.”

Contrary to popular belief, the internet and social media have only led to a modest increase of conspiracy theorists according to Michael Butter. What has actually happened is a fragmentation of the public sphere, which has made conspiracy theories more visible both to people actively looking for alternative explanations, and to those who don’t believe in the theories. “Today we have this clash between a public that worries about the dangers of conspiracy theories

and a counter-public that worries about the dangers of conspiracies. They are both observing each other and it's kind of like this spiral of escalation."

Despite the prominence and visibility of figures such as Donald Trump and the Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orbán, conspiracy theorists are still operating on the margins of society. Media tend to take an alarmist approach toward conspiracy theories, stressing how they lead to radicalization and violence—as was the case with Anders Breivik in Norway and the Christchurch mosque shooting in New Zealand. Michael Butter agrees that many conspiracy theories can be dangerous



Michael Butter spoke to THE PERSPECTIVE. © Michael Butter

when they lead to distrust of the political system, endanger public health or lead to harm for those who have lost loved ones in tragedies. Yet, he recognizes that some are harmless and can even be entertaining, bringing up the moon landing as his personal favorite. "We have to say: not all conspiracy theories are dangerous, and not all conspiracy theorists are dangerous in any way," he concludes.

### Love Conquers All

In the final chapter of his book, Michael Butter notes that although not all conspiracy theories are dangerous, they stand in the way of a proper understanding of the world. In the end, conspiracy theories are—just like theories of social science—concerned with power. But because conspiracy theorists ultimately think that history can be planned, they undermine their own critique of power. While listening to my boyfriend talking about the mysterious chemicals found in the Twin Towers, I remember thinking at one point that I don't care how the towers fell. I care about the people who lost their lives that day, and the

terrible effects of the US involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq. Claiming that 9/11 is an inside job obscures legitimate critique of how the Bush administration capitalized on a crisis that changed the world.

I did not freeze my eggs. My boyfriend is definitely harmless and, more importantly, really hot. Following Michael Butter's advice in my own style, I've been preaching about the inherent weaknesses of conspiracy theories for weeks. Last I checked, he was still sceptical about some of the facts surrounding 9/11 but no longer buys into the version of controlled demolition. That he is still a believer in some sense does not affect our daily lives. As far as secret plots go, trying to convince my partner that it's possible to discern the difference between "truth" and "truthiness" is the best I could do.

# CHEBURASHKA

## KREMLIN'S FAVORITE DISSIDENT

CHEBURASHKA, PERHAPS THE BEST-KNOWN CHARACTER FROM SOVIET CINEMA, MANAGES TO BOTH BE A SYMBOL FOR SOVIET NOSTALGIA AND MODERN-DAY DISSIDENTS. HOW CAN ONE CHARACTER OCCUPY SUCH CONTRADICTORY ROLES? AND WHAT CAN WE LEARN ABOUT MODERN-DAY ISSUES FROM THE CASE OF CHEBURASHKA?

In times when the news is flooded with articles warning about the destructive force of misinformation campaigns, is it easy to forget that misinformation is probably as old as information itself. Donald Trump might have made the terms “Fake News,” “Alternative Facts” and “Covfefe” household phrases, but

he is far from the first to play on the fragility of factual information and the power of people's imagination. We are always to a certain extent viewing reality through the lens of our own knowledge and experiences—which brings us to the topic of Soviet children's television. Cheburashka, often seen as the Mickey Mouse of the

USSR, is a widely beloved character in the post-Soviet world. One of the main reasons behind Cheburashka's enduring appeal might be the extensive list of roles Cheburashka inhabits. The ungendered creature of unspecified species has been used as a symbol for Russia, as seen in Cheburashka's numerous appearances as an Olympic mascot or even as a rocket launcher near

Donetsk. At the same time,

Cheburashka and its associated television shows

are also seen by some as a thinly veiled

criticism of life under the Soviet government. THE

PERSPECTIVE reached out to

Eleonora

Narvselius,

a lecturer of

European

Studies,

and

Michael

Bossetta, a lecturer

of Media and Communication

Studies, to better understand

why Cheburashka is embraced

by such a wide range of different

audiences and what we can

learn about cultural soft power

through our furry Soviet

friend. One of

the

keys to understanding Cheburashka's appeal for the audience

critical of the Soviet regime lies

in the juxtaposition of Cheburashka's personality and identity.

Eleonora Narvselius explains

that the main moral of the

Cheburashka stories is friendship,

but what makes them stand

out are the characters. The writers

behind Cheburashka were Jewish,

and it is quite clear that

Cheburashka embodies the

Jewish community in the USSR—

even though some of the references

are hard to catch today. Cheburashka

arrives in “the city” (hinted at being Moscow)

in a box of oranges—a clue that

would have been obvious in the

60's, as almost all oranges in the

Soviet Union were imported

from Israel at that time. It is,

however, still easy to understand

that Cheburashka is an outsider.

Cheburashka is described as

reminiscent of a bear—coincidentally

one of the more well-known

symbols of Russia—while most

certainly not being a bear. The

orange-grocer who found

Cheburashka tries to drop them

off at the zoo, but the zoo rejects

Cheburashka since none of the

cages are designated for

this unorthodox

“almost-bear.”

While Cheburashka is undoubtedly the star of the show, there

are the two other important characters—Gena the Crocodile and

Shapoklyak. Gena and Shapoklyak

are, just as Cheburashka, clearly

representing the outcasts of the

Soviet society. Narvselius describes

Gena as being highly reminiscent

of the old intelligentsia, and

Shapoklyak—a play on the

Russian word for top-hat—as

a clear nod to the old aristocracy.

The fact that these three

groups—Jews, the intelligentsia

and the aristocrats—were

sidelined in the Soviet society is

rather explicitly implied, but the

story also expands and highlights

other reasons for their exclusion

in the Soviet Union. Cheburashka

and Gena were rejected by the

Soviet Youth Association, the

Pioneers, due to not possessing

the necessary skills, such as

marching and building bird-

houses. There are also a lot of

instances where the Soviet

governance appears to be the

butt of the joke—a personal

favorite being when Gena

confronts the director of a

river-polluting factory. The

director's solution to Gena's

complaints is to simply hide the

pipe-sewage industrial waste

underground, which does not

amuse the Crocodile who

decides to take matters into his

own hands by sabotaging the

factory.

So, what we have are three outcasts who find company amongst each other, which might not sound that critical. What makes the identity of our three protagonists relevant is the contrast between the kind and good-hearted nature of Cheburashka, Gena and Shapoklyak, and how their real-world counterparts were perceived. The foreigners, intelligentsia and aristocracy were not exactly seen as friendly folks; instead, they were regarded as the enemies of the people and the state. Yet, their method of choice was to be kind and not conspiring with foreign powers—even though the group was constantly rejected in their search for a place in the society.

Due to the widespread use of the Cheburashka character in

such functions, it would be easy to think of Cheburashka as an inherently Russian character steeped in the Soviet nostalgia. Narvselius explains that the duality of Cheburashka is largely due to “the Cheburashkas” that exist on the outside of the show. While the Cheburashka we know from the books and movies symbolizes society's outcasts, there are many other ways in which Cheburashka can be perceived. Narvselius exemplifies it with one of the most common and important Cheburashka features of innocence. It is, for instance, common to find a lot of Cheburashka teddy bears left at memorial sites after fatal accidents and other injustices. The multitude of Cheburashkas also explains why it is not too difficult for modern-day Kremlin allies,

such as the Russian Olympic Committee and the separatists in Donetsk, to co-opt a character that originally represented those shunned by the people of Moscow and the Soviet Union. So, with Cheburashka's various interpretations in mind, is there anything we can learn from it that might be applicable to more pressing issues? The case of Cheburashka shows that a single source can be seen in a lot of different ways—and those interpretations are not necessarily more correct than others. Cheburashka is only a symbol “for Russia” if the viewers, to a certain extent, already believe it to be the case. If they, instead hold preconceptions about Cheburashka meant as a criticism of contemporary Russia or the USSR, then its appearance as



Cheburashka as the Russian Olympic Team mascot during the 2010 Winter Olympics © Megan Westerby/Flickr



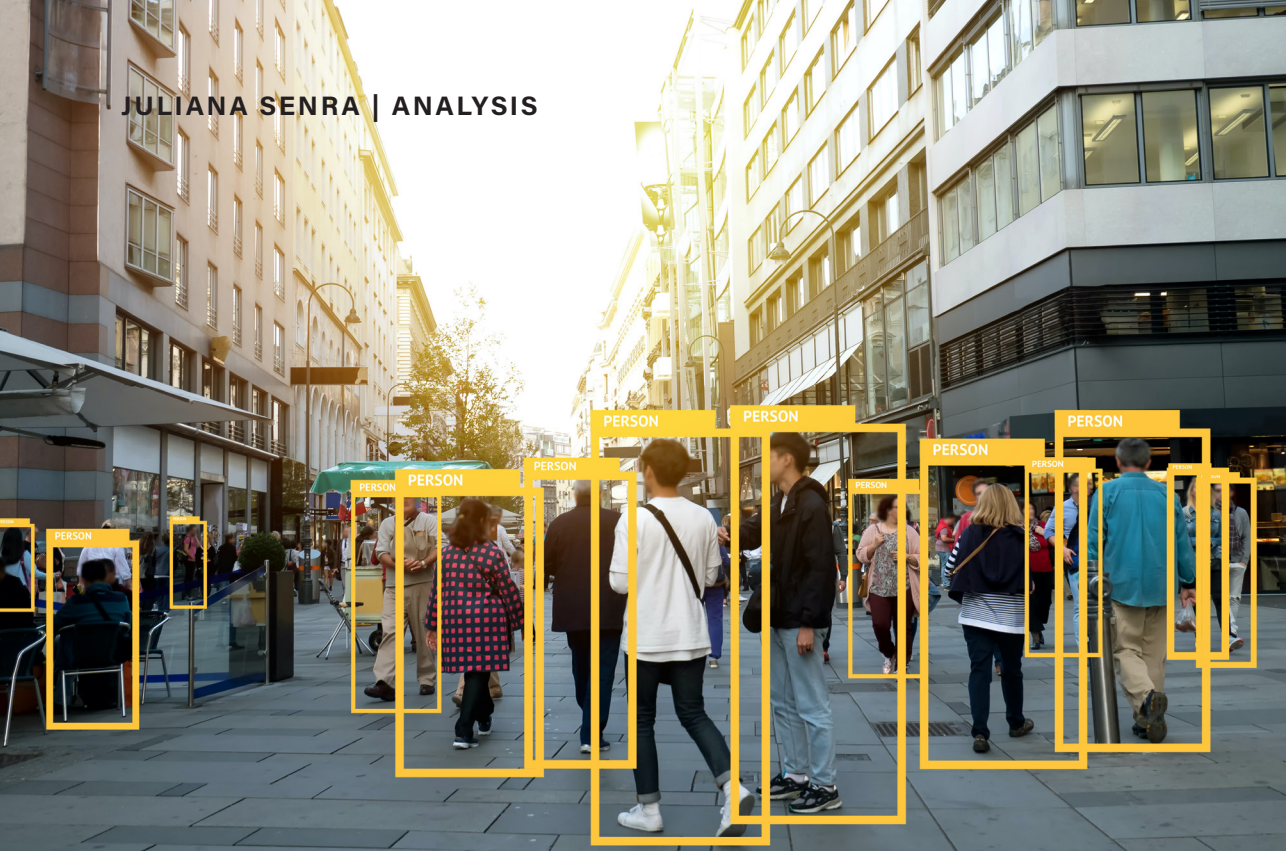
Rocket launcher nicknamed "Cheburashka" near Donetsk, Ukraine, May 22, 201

© YouTube/WarDoc

an Olympic mascot will probably not change their mind. The question of how we interpret information and source material is highly relevant as disinformation campaigns condense more attention. Disinformation campaigns are often described as a pressing threat to democracy, but a growing number of academics are in fact disputing their alleged hazard. Micheal Bossetta generally shares the sentiment that disinformation campaigns might not be as effective as they are made out to be. One key aspect of Bossetta's criticism is that disinformation probably is not the source, but rather a symptom of other issues. If disinformation campaigns were so effective, then people would change their opinions all the time—but that is not the case. Bossetta instead claims that disinformation usually works only when it acts in tandem

with an underlying issue, such as distrust towards the government. In other words, if you are not reciprocatory towards a certain conspiracy, then you will most likely discard it. This does, to a certain degree, render disinformation ineffective, as it would only cater to an audience that already believes given disinformation to be true. Bossetta's critique towards disinformation campaigns vs. actual disinformation aligns well with Narvslus' explanation of the multitude of interpretations of Cheburashka. The core of the issue is not the disinformation itself, but rather its interpretation. If a person is highly skeptical towards the government, then they are most likely more susceptible to false information claiming the government is run by evil lizard-men. The same logic applies to Cheburashka, as people who

do not perceive themselves as the outsiders will most likely see other things than those that do. The importance of the interpreter is of course nothing groundbreaking—the interpretation of a single source is what theologians have been examining for millennia after all. But it does bring forth questions of handling disinformation. Disinformation campaigns are often portrayed as attacks of hostile actors—which, while true for the disinformation itself, might not be the core of the issue. If we instead focused on why people are willing to believe disinformation campaigns we could both learn more about underlying attitudes in society—as well as work towards a more robust defence against the process itself.



Machine Learning & Artificial Intelligence identification analytics concept.

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# INNOCENT UNTIL AI SAYS OTHERWISE

## HOW PREDICTIVE POLICING IN THE NETHERLANDS RAISES CONCERNS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

WHAT IF CRIME COULD BE PREDICTED EVEN BEFORE IT HAPPENED? THIS POSSIBILITY HAS OFTEN BEEN EXPLORED IN SCIENCE FICTION AND, AS THE SELF-FULFILLING PROPHECY IT SOMETIMES IS (NOT IN THE CASE OF FLYING CARS YET, UNFORTUNATELY), IT HAS SOMEWHAT COME TRUE. THERE IS NO WITCHCRAFT OR ALIEN POWER CLAIMING TO BE ABLE TO PREDICT CRIME—THE MASTERMIND IS ALGORITHMS.

Recent technological developments in the field of policing have incorporated algorithms and big data analysis into the work of law enforcement agencies. This is done through predictive policing, a set of technologies that allege to be able to somehow predict crime. However tempting it is to wish for a system able to help law enforcement stop crime before it takes place, the use of these systems in pilot studies has already showcased many ethical concerns with these technologies—and that human rights violations can be ingrained into their very design. The Netherlands is one of the first countries in the world to have implemented a predictive policing system nationwide: the Crime Anticipation System (CAS). Citizens, activist associations and politicians have been increasingly voicing their concerns about it, attempting to spread awareness on the dangers of a technology that the general public often does not even know is being applied.

THE PERSPECTIVE spoke exclusively with Controle Alt Delete, an independent organization striving for equality in the treatment of all people by law enforcement, about predictive policing's connection to racial profiling and discrimination. The Dutch section of Amnesty International (Amnesty NL) has also voiced their position regarding the Dutch policing panorama. In a recent report they shared how whole communities are being experimented on through the implementation of novel predictive policing projects, such as the Roermond Sensing Project in which Eastern Europeans and the Romani are targeted on questionable grounds.

### Unveiling the Magic Trick—What Predictive Policing Is and How It Works

Predictive policing is the umbrella term for a set of technologies that claim to be able to predict when, where, by whom or to whom a crime will occur. They do so by amassing large quantities of data on the temporal and spatial occurrence of crimes,

collecting data on victims and perpetrators, and analyzing patterns in these datasets through algorithms. It has the potential to help law enforcement prevent crime and harm, rather than just react to crime when it has already happened—an important target for any law enforcement agency. If it seems whimsical and complicated, that's because it is. According to Vera Prins, Policy Officer of Human Rights at Amnesty NL,

"talking about data sounds very abstract—it is hard for people to pinpoint what exactly may be the consequences in their day to day life if their data is being collected."

The criteria guiding these algorithms can be person-based or location-based, depending on whether the data analyzed is relative to the people committing the crimes or to the place or time at which the crimes may allegedly take place. Amnesty NL has drafted recommendations for both types of predictive policing systems in their September 2020 report. However, they are particularly concerned with person-based algorithms, since "if you are making a profile to assess people and giving them a risk score [...] someone who hasn't done anything wrong can be seen as dangerous by the authorities, and they may be subjected to interventions without being suspected of any crime." These systems often focus on crimes against property, such as shoplifting, pickpocketing, home burglaries and bike thefts, as in order to generate meaningful data, the crimes in question must have a significant

occurrence—something that murders or intimate partner violence crimes, for example, do not.

### **Big Data—Big Discrimination?**

Predictive policing arose in the wider field of predictive analysis using Big Data—a field that is growing as rapidly as the concerns about it. Predictive analysis can be used to foresee perpetrators, victims or crime events—the when and the where of crimes. The prediction of perpetrators has been highly controversial in the past, as in the case of COMPAS, the Correctional Offender Management Profiling for Alternative Sanctions. This system, used by several US states, intends to evaluate the risk of recidivism—the tendency of a convicted criminal to reoffend—among those undergoing criminal trials, using this assessment to determine the length of their sentence. However, according to a 2016 UCLA Law Review article, a study conducted by the nonprofit news organization ProPublic showed COMPAS was biased against black defendants.

The UCLA Law Review explains that while race is not a factor in the algorithm design, other factors are “proxies for race,” meaning “seemingly innocuous data points can exert prejudice against marginalized demographics.” One’s place of residence, for instance, can inadvertently bear racial connotations, creating a feedback loop. If you live in a racialized community with socioeconomic problems and heavier police supervision, more of your fellow residents will get convicted of crimes. This, in turn, means that, if this algorithm is used, it will identify your community as one where residents are more prone to commit a crime, translating into a longer sentence. This type of system can potentially deepen the structural inequalities that create racial divides between communities in the first place. Consequently, it risks putting democratic principles such as the presumption of innocence at stake by deeming some perpetrators inherently guiltier than others.

### **Technology’s Power to Discriminate**

No matter how enticing these technologies are, Amnesty International—among others—identifies several aspects of predictive policing that jeopardize human rights and democratic principles—such as the risk of ethnic profiling and consequent violation of the non-discrimination principle. Ethnic profiling is defined as “the use by the police, with no objective and reasonable justification, of grounds such as race, color, languages, religion, nationality or national or ethnic origin in control, surveillance or investigation activities” by the European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance. It is already a concern in the Netherlands, with Controle Alt Delete’s 2019 independent study claiming that 41% of men with a non-Western background were approached by the Amsterdam police in 2018, double the frequency of Dutch men without any migration background.

Many civil society organizations are also concerned with infringements on people’s rights to privacy and data protection, as the police can collect immense amounts of data on citizens through these systems. The principle of legality is also put into question by their lack in regulation and transparency. Especially in person-based predictive models the presumption of innocence is at stake, as one is likely to be considered a perpetrator and thus investigated without proof of connection between the person and the crime—as would be required in a standard legal investigation.

### **Pioneering Predictive Policing—The Netherlands’ Living Laboratories**

The Netherlands is one of the first countries in the world to apply a system of predictive policing countrywide: the Crime Anticipation System (CAS). This location-based system was first piloted in Amsterdam, dividing the city into small

squares and determining which squares are “crime hubs” or “hotspots,” thus allowing for the policing of places where certain crimes, such as pickpocketing or bike thefts, are more frequent. After being evaluated, a decision was made to extend CAS across the whole country despite the system not exhibiting any signs of effectiveness, according to Anthonie Drenth and Ronald Van Steden, researchers from the Universities of Utrecht and Amsterdam, respectively.

Control Alt Delete has actively criticized CAS, their main concern being that the input entered into CAS is based on previous decisions of police officers, which they claim to have already been biased. It is, yet again, a vicious cycle: their research shows that people with a non-Western migration background are stopped more often than people with a Dutch background. Consequently, they feel more criminalized and have less trust in the police, according to the association.” This, in turn, leads to algorithms focusing on these populations in an excessive and unjustified manner, just as with traditional policing techniques, Control Alt Delete claims.

Another program that has been piloted in Amsterdam is Top400, which calculates children and youths’ risk of becoming crime suspects, assigning them a “risk score.” The 400 young people with the highest risk scores will then be monitored closely by the police in an attempt to prevent their potential crimes. Amnesty NL claims that there are several of these “experiments with predictive policing” across the country, but they do not know how many and on what terms they are implemented, due to the lack of transparency from law enforcement agencies and the lack of legislation on the issue. One of Amnesty’s main recommendations is the enforcement of better supervision on these programs. A campaign in which Amnesty NL members could send a request to the National Data Supervisory Authority for more oversight on these programs was

set up as an attempt to advance this goal.

### **The Sensing Project—Predictive Policing in Action**

Amnesty NL’s report illustrates their concerns through an in-depth look into the Sensing Project after requesting official documents and speaking with police officers in order to explore its human rights compliance. Held in the municipality of Roermond, this is a person-based predictive policing system that was introduced in January 2019 with the intent to predict “likely perpetrators of pickpocketing and shoplifting in [Roermond] shopping centre.” For this purpose, they are targeting the nationality of suspects, associating petty crimes with “mobile banditry,” a series of crimes they believe are committed mostly by Eastern European incomers. Amnesty NL highlights how, in reality, 60% of the suspects of these crimes are of Dutch nationality and only 22% are indeed from Eastern Europe. According to Amnesty NL, mobile banditry is an ethnically charged concept, as police statements have often referred to Romani people being potential perpetrators in this type of crime, despite having no empirical basis for this claim, as data on ethnicity cannot be collected in the Netherlands.

For Amnesty NL, “The Sensing Project illustrates how in each of these phases there is a decision being made that ultimately results in discrimination.” They want people to be aware that human intervention happens at every stage of a predictive policing project, and thus, discrimination can be built into the technology. These decisions go from choosing to focus on mobile banditry, a form of criminality they claim is ethnically charged, to adding a profile rule which focuses on certain nationalities. Furthermore, Amnesty NL stresses how the police have large discretion in the intervention phase—they can choose which people they want to stop or not, the questions they ask them, whether they report the stop or not. This makes the project

difficult to evaluate, as officers do not register the number of car search cases and the grounds for them, leaving no way to determine whether these checks are effective and justified. The police do intend to evaluate the project and share the results with the public, but again, their ways of registering and processing the data remain undisclosed.

### **Technology is Made of Those Who Make It**

Amnesty NL is adamant about one thing: technology is not neutral, as predictive policing technologies depend on a series of human decisions in which disregard for human rights can easily take place. According to Amnesty NL,

**"as long as there are these inequalities and injustices in society, technology is bound to reflect them."**

The human rights association believes systems to assess and review the human rights compliance of these technologies are necessary, as much as

other more traditional types of policing. Similarly, Controle Alt Delete sees predictive policing as dangerous, since "the input isn't neutral because it is, amongst others, the result of racial profiling." Both Amnesty NL and Controle Alt Delete agree that the technology reestablishes biases in new ways.

The nature of predictive policing remains inherently human, as technology is ultimately what its creators make of it. The defense of human rights is essential for the supervision of new technologies so they do not enforce existing inequalities. By investigating the Sensing Project in Roermond, Amnesty NL's report hints at the concrete consequences of predictive policing, helping to unveil how big data affects people's lives. Many other programs exist in the Netherlands, unscrutinised by civil society, and many other countries have shown interest in implementing similar systems. It is therefore crucial that people understand the ways in which predictive policing technologies can reinvent inequalities embedded in our society, and evaluate algorithms by what they are: humans in disguise.

Dutch police jackets. © Maxim Hopman/Unsplash



# THE GREEN NEW DEAL FOR EUROPE

## PAVING THE WAY FOR THE CLIMATE OF THE FUTURE?



THE CLIMATE CRISIS IS A FAST-APPROACHING REALITY AROUND THE WORLD. AS RISING TEMPERATURES ENDANGER EUROPEAN SHORES AND POLLUTED AIR POSES A HEALTH RISK IN EUROPEAN CITIES, THE GREEN NEW DEAL IS A PRIORITY IN THE POLITICAL DISCOURSE IN BRUSSELS. THE PERSPECTIVE TALKED TO ROMAN ERIC SIELER, A CLIMATE ACTIVIST AND ENERGY POLICY ANALYST, ABOUT THE INTRICACIES THAT THE DEAL ENTAILS.

**T**he Green New Deal (GND) has recently become a focal point of interest and concern within the national and transnational political narratives across Europe. In response to the increasingly numerous voices that have conspicuously expressed their worry on the Climate Crisis, in November 2019, the European Parliament declared a state of climate emergency and called for the Commission to fully cooperate in their collective endeavour to limit global warming to 1.5°C and significantly reduce Green House Gasses (GHGs). Subsequently, the European Commission developed what is known as the European Green Deal, aka the Green New Deal for Europe.

In May 2020, the European Parliament called for an ambitious recovery plan to be the core of European activity during transitioning out of the COVID-19 crisis. As a result, the European Commission came up with a €750 billion revival strategy that aims to create a “greener, more inclusive, digital and sustainable Europe” with the GND at its heart, according to the official website of the European Parliament. “We are determined to tackle climate change and turn it into an opportunity for the European Union,” Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said referring to the GND on 12 December in Brussels.

However, the holistic and intricate nature of the project have made both the legislative package

and the environmental movement a hot topic of discussion amid the European political dialogue.

THE PERSPECTIVE has had the opportunity to discuss these issues with Roman Eric Sieler, who gave us his personal opinion. He is a research analyst on sustainable economic development, energy and climate change, and with a great enthusiasm for climate activism. He has been involved in various volunteering organizations for nearly a decade. He currently collaborates with Generation Climate Europe, which brings together different European youth groups to form synergies that focus on climate change issues.

He previously assumed a role as the Head Organizer of an event on the European Green Deal, a member of YOUNGO—the official youth constituency at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and an accredited observer during the 2019 UN

Climate Change Conference COP25. He is also involved in the UPF podcast where he discusses environmental issues together with other global affairs.

“The crucial issue is that we fight for every single part of the European Green Deal to be good,” Sieler says. Already, various self-interested organizations have tried to water down certain aspects of the Deal, which is being fought back by activist groups. “[We] must understand the European Green Deal as something that has to be a uniform approach, and has to be strong in every aspect to really achieve the change we need.” In order to obtain this cohesion, we must include all of the stakeholders, he

continues to explain. “Every European country [must be] on board.”

What is particularly innovative about the GND is the scope of policy areas that are being targeted. As Sieler explains, the coordination and cooperation between the manifold strategies that are being proposed are innate to the success of the overall project. Such a vast ambition will need the support of the majority of citizens, and perhaps, a social and cultural paradigm shift to accompany the policy changes that will be implemented.

When confronted with the idea that climate agreements are rather susceptible to change—for instance,

the removal of the US from the Paris Agreement during the Trump administration—Sieler remains optimistic about the GND. “The US has been somewhat of an issue for climate initiation in the last couple of years, but I am quite hopeful that, with the election of President Biden, there is going to be a fundamental

**"It is the responsibility of national politicians to fight misinformation in their own countries and to explain to their citizens that they do not have to be afraid of the GND,"**

Roman Eric Sieler to THE PERSPECTIVE

paradigm shift.” Nonetheless, the US is still lagging behind. It can be argued that the EU is performing comparatively better on the climate front, but according to Sieler, “we also have a long way ahead of us.” There are still significant challenges that we need to overcome.

Yet, if we take a look at the different climate initiatives that are being discussed, such as the recently announced carbon neutrality goals for 2050 in Korea and Japan or the US election result, which might also lead to a similar goal, we can be hopeful. “[The world] is not as divided as sometimes seems in the media,” Sieler explains. We are beginning to experience a uniform consensus between the large

industrialized countries to take action to solve the climate crisis. "As soon as we have all these commitments in place, political solutions will have to follow."

"In Europe, the main issue becomes a just transition." Interest groups and populist parties have been trying to create a narrative against the employment of green policies, arguing these will come at a great cost to our economies. We must therefore overcome this line of reasoning. Simply, by looking at the facts, "we appreciate how many jobs are being created already by the green energy industry." What is extremely important is that we "allow the regions that may be dependent on fossil fuels to transition away from the old industries [and] give them opportunities in the new economy that we want to create," Sieler remarks.

Potentially, 18 million jobs can be created by 2030 worldwide in the process of limiting global temperatures to 2°C, according to the International Labour Organization. Moreover, European Commission data shows that based on the task content of occupations, 87.6 million jobs were greenable in the EU-28 by 2016, amounting to 40% of employment that year. "The fundamental problem that Europe has is that it is very vulnerable to nationalistic attacks."

Whenever we experience national issues, "it is very easy to point the blame towards the EU. We must therefore overcome the misguided discourses that attempt against the legitimacy of the climate shift and need to communicate [these figures] clearly", the climate activist adds. "It is the responsibility of national politicians to fight misinformation in their own countries and to explain to their citizens that they do not have to be afraid of the GND."

When asked about what we can do as citizens to collaborate with the project, Sieler argues that the Deal itself "is based on a citizen movement; on the young people that were on the streets all these years; on political movements such as 'Fridays For Future.'" According to Sieler, "all this activism has enabled the political climate to really come up with something, like the GND. Therefore, the first thing that we can all do is get active both online and, as soon as COVID-19 is over, on the streets." There is a great importance to build that political momentum from the streets first, which will in turn influence the decisions being made in parliaments at the national and European level. "We have to step out of the bubble and really communicate how important this issue is," thus creating a political environment on the

climate change conundrum. Finally, Sieler is optimistic for a green transformation at the global level. However, he is, as he describes himself, "cautiously optimistic" about the GND. "I believe it is the necessary step to take at this point, but we still have to overcome many challenges." He concludes that we still have to push every single aspect of the European Green Deal to get it in the right direction.

The fact that the Green New Deal is advancing positively does show that we could feel optimistic about the project. Although, as Sieler recommends, we must remain slightly cautious around this newly found optimism.

Projects like the Green New Deal can set us on a strategy towards accomplishing the climate goals that were laid during the Paris Agreement in 2015. It is on this path only that we may still influence the climate change reality on our terms. Unfortunately, if we fail to embrace, or we begin to undermine, these projects we will most certainly find ourselves in a much less attractive reality, in which nature will influence us on its own terms. It is not too late to react.

# THE PANDORA'S BOX OF ETHIOPIA

## HOW DEMOCRATIC REFORMS LED TO A DEVASTATING WAR

CONCERNS OVER THE FUTURE OF ETHIOPIA ARE BEING RAISED ALL OVER THE WORLD AS THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT FINDS ITSELF FIGHTING THE WAR AGAINST THE REBELLIOUS TIGRAY PEOPLE'S LIBERATION FRONT PARTY (TPLF). THE PERSPECTIVE DISCUSSED THE SITUATION WITH THE FREELANCE JOURNALIST, DOCUMENTARY FILMMAKER AND FORMER AFRICA CORRESPONDENT MARIKA GRIEHSSEL.

The Tigrayan representatives—once a part of the ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) coalition—lost power when the repressive regime became unsustainable. As a result of several years of protests and ethnic unrest, the former prime minister, Hailemariam Desalegn, had to give ground to Abiy Ahmed. This happened in April 2018. Since then, much has changed and a hope that Ethiopia is on the way to democracy has been ignited: Abiy released political prisoners, appointed more women in governmental positions, asked Ethiopians in exile to return and ended a long-lasting war with Eritrea, which earned him a Nobel Peace Prize in 2019.

But has the political situation really improved?

Just a year after receiving the prestigious award, the Ethiopian prime minister launched a military operation against the TPLF residing in the northern Tigray region, claiming that they had attacked a federal military base in Tigray. The federal government cut off the internet and phone lines in the Tigray region, limiting access to the region for journalists and humanitarian workers. On top of that, the government has also refused peace negotiations.

These steps can be hardly described as democratic, and with propaganda thriving on both sides of the conflict, we are witnessing a true war over reality.

Marika Griehsel worked as the Africa Correspondent for Sveriges Television (SVT) for 15 years. She also helped to strengthen independent journalism in Ethiopia as a manager at Fojo Media Institute. Now she works as a freelance journalist and documentary filmmaker. With her long-standing experience in Africa, Marika (MG) puts the complicated events in Ethiopia into perspective.

**TP: What is happening in Ethiopia right now?**

**MG:** What is happening now is that former colleagues, Abiy and the Tigrayan leadership—who were in the same government until 2018—are not agreeing upon how to lead Ethiopia. People in 2018 demanded democratic change and the ruling party had to transform. Abiy took over the power, even though he was not democratically elected. Some of those who had been the most oppressive within the government were jailed; some of them fled to Tigray. They have been sheltering up there and demanding further federalism, which is part of the constitution, but no government in Ethiopia has ever allowed actual federalism to happen. And I don't think that prime minister Abiy is prepared to allow that to happen either, for several reasons: one of them is that if the Tigray region were given further autonomy, other groups in Ethiopia would want that also and that is not in the interest of the federal government. There are more than 80 different ethnic groups in Ethiopia.

**What is the historical background of the conflict?**

The power has been concentrated around Tigrayan and Amhara people for centuries. There is a conflict of interest that has been going on among these different groups for a long time. The Tigrayan leadership used to be in power from 1993. Being a minority, they were ruling over the rest of Ethiopia together with representatives from other ethnical groups as well, but they had the main control. Their government was becoming almost as oppressive as the government of Mengistu [Ethiopian dictator from 1977 to 1991, responsible for a crackdown on the opposition and for the death of a minimum of 500.000 people]. Until 2018, when the party in power was transformed within.

**What preceded the start of the conflict?**

There were plans for democratic elections this autumn, but then COVID came. The elections were postponed by Abiy, but the Tigrayan leadership

decided to hold them anyway.

I think they pushed it a bit too far in the eyes of the federal government.

**You said that Abiy was not democratically elected, but did the world see him as such? Considering that he also received a Nobel Peace Prize.**

He got the prize because he ended a long-standing war with Eritrea, and because he said, and to some extent did, all the right things. He included more women and people from opposition in the government. But there has never been a democratic election in Ethiopia; Abiy was elected by the ruling party and the government. After 2018, there was much more freedom and people were hoping that things would go in the right direction, but those who knew the settings of the ground were sceptical.

**Did PM Abiy Ahmed lose some of his popularity? After he was elected, there was a term 'abiy-mania' describing how popular he was among some Ethiopians.**

Not everybody was overwhelmed by him. The world was hoping he would do the right things. Among some quarters, he is still popular because he is saying what they think is right, yet not everybody bought the fact that Abiy will change life for them. And some people are not surprised by what is happening right now. But from Abiy's point of view, he probably does not know any other language. Because of the TPLF, he was brought up in an environment where the mentality was 'if you are not with me, you are against me, and I will crush you'. So I would say there is a backlash in his popularity, but how big, I don't know.

**How big of a role does social media play in this conflict?**

At the moment, social media can be used more for propaganda than for the good. The Ethiopian

government claimed that they have to take control over social media, because it is misused. The question is, who is going to make the judgment of what the truth is. It is difficult to say in this case, because there is no information coming out from Tigray. With journalists not being allowed to come in to do independent reporting, there is a lot of rumours and misinformation spreading and that is, of course, a problem.

**You have worked for the Fojo Media Institute that promotes media freedom in Ethiopia. Their latest study talks about the ethnification of the Ethiopian media. How ethnically divided is the media in Ethiopia?**

There is little generalization when it comes to Ethiopia. People are aware of the ethnicity, as it has always been used by those in power. You know what region you come from and what your home language is, and either you think that this is your only attribute as a human or that it is only a part of you, you are a human because of other values. There are journalists with that kind of thinking as well. There are media that were based outside Ethiopia and came back in the last two years, and some of them are very nationalistic and biased towards their ethnicity and they go drum that into readers and viewers. Other media is just broadcasting what the government says. At the moment, the media who would like to work independently are very careful, because journalists are being arrested and followed again. People are trying to self-censor to a higher degree than last year.

**During summer 2020, a popular singer and political activist Hachalu Hundessa was killed. After this, protests followed. Is this somehow connected to what is happening now?**

I don't think so. The singer was from the Oromo group, and that is another group that wants to have



Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed at the 11th Extraordinary Session of the Assembly of the African Union.  
© Office of the Prime Minister of Ethiopia/Flickr

independence. Many Oromo people think that it is time for them to have a much more influential position. Abiy is partly Oromo and partly Amhara. That is why many people thought that Abiy could create a more peaceful situation. The killing of the singer and other killings have been taking place all over Ethiopia throughout this period. At some point, there were more than 3.000.000 internal refugees because of unrest within the country between different groups. It is an unstable situation not just in Tigray, but also other parts of the country.

**Besides Tigray, are there other regions where there is fighting?**

There is fighting in many places, but not on the same level as in Tigray.

**The federal government announced at the end of November that they had taken over the Tigray capital, Mekele and that this essentially means that the war is over. Do you think this is true?**

No. There is already information saying that fighting

continues in and around the capital. Tigrayan leadership announced that they had shot down a government military plane and taken prisoners. I do not think that it is fully true, but it is impossible to know. But even if they had taken over the capital, the TPLF said they will continue to fight. That is of course the biggest risk, that there will be a prolonged guerilla war in the north of the country.

**The TPLF has also been attacking neighbouring Eritrea. What is the reason for that?**

There was a war that has been going for more than over 20 years between Ethiopia and Eritrea when the TPLF was in the government. This was the war that ended just over a year ago, when Abiy made a peace deal. The question is whether Eritrea is sending troops to support Abiy's government troops or not. TPLF claims that the government is getting support from Eritrea. They would send out a message that they are being attacked also from the north, that Eritrea is infringing on their territory and that they have the right to defend themselves—and that Abiy is not strong enough to fight this war against TPLF on his own.

**If the war continues, is there a possibility of other countries joining?**

There is always a possibility. Ethiopia is a very strong player on Horn of Africa: it is populated by 100 million people and it has an advanced economy and strong military capacities. Ethiopia is in alliance with the US, they have good relations with Saudi Arabia and China, the latter being a big investor. I do not know who TPLF would go to to get support, but I am sure they would get some as people are always happy to sell weapons. Egypt and Sudan could have interest in supporting the forces that are trying to weaken the central government, as they are not happy about the big dam that Ethiopia has built on the Blue Nile bordering towards Sudan. It will most likely affect the water flow both into Sudan, Ethiopia and Egypt. It could potentially be a very long and rather sad development, considering the humanitarian catastrophe.

**The European Union (EU), the African Union (AU) and humanitarian organizations are asking for negotiations. Are they possible?**

Abiy has been saying up until now that this conflict is an internal security problem and they do

not want anybody meddling. Thank you very much, but we are not interested in any kind of negotiation with the Tigrayan leadership, who are criminals and have no right to do what they are doing. Whether that will change I do not know, but there were some of the most influential African leaders who approached Abiy in this matter, and he told them he is not interested.

**What do you see as the most probable outcome? Is it possible to say?**

It seems that it can drag out for a long time. And the result will be a very grave humanitarian disaster, because there will be refugees, and also economic consequences. The Tigrayan region and other parts of Ethiopia can suffer. The hope they have been feeling over the past year and in 2018 will disappear.

THE PERSPECTIVE: While we cannot be sure about what is actually happening on the battlefield in Ethiopia due to lack of information, there is one substantial evidence of the disastrous results of the war: the thousands of refugees fleeing from Tigray to neighbouring Sudan.

Ethiopian flag. © Chuck Moravec/Flickr



# Centre for Advanced Middle Eastern Studies

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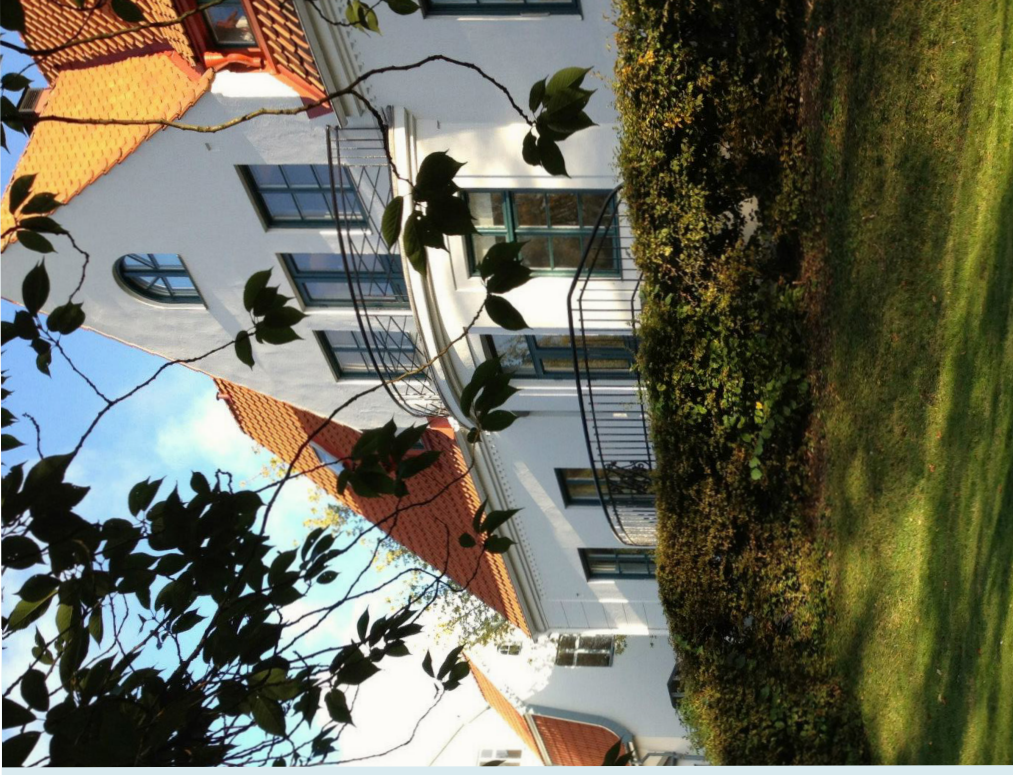
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# S(P)INISTER POLITICS

## THE BUSINESS OF SPIN DOCTORS IN US-AMERICAN POLITICS

POLITICS IS NOT WHAT IT USED TO BE: NATIONAL POLITICAL IDEAS ARE UP FOR GLOBAL SCRUTINY. ELECTION CAMPAIGNS ARE NO LONGER LIMITED TO A SEASON, BUT CAN STRETCH OVER YEARS. POLITICIANS ARE UNDER CONSTANT INSPECTION BY NEWS OUTLETS AND SOCIAL MEDIA. POLITICS HAVE BECOME INTENSELY PROFESSIONALIZED.

IN THE MIDST OF THIS PROFESSIONALIZATION OF THE POLITICAL FIELDS A NEW INDUSTRY HAS EMERGED: THE INDUSTRY OF POLITICAL SPIN. THE PERSPECTIVE TAKES A DEEP DIVE INTO THE PROFESSION TO UNCOVER WHAT THESE DOCTORS PRESCRIBE.

If the name Olivia Pope does not ring a bell, allow me to give you a quick rundown of the seven-season long HBO mega-hit "Scandal." The series takes place in Washington DC, the epicenter of US-American politics, where former White House employee Olivia Pope opens her own crisis agency aimed at "fixing" whatever scandals her clients, ranging from politicians to sportsmen, might have gotten themselves involved in. By hiding dirty information, controlling the perception of

events and strategically constructing heartfelt public statements, Olivia Pope manages to spin the public perception of any blunder of her well-paying clients.

Olivia Pope is actually based on a very much alive woman named Judy Smith. Smith is a renowned crisis and PR manager who served in the White House under George Bush, later moving on to open her own crisis-management firm. She advised clients such as young Monica Lewinsky whose reputation came under constant

attack throughout the infamous Clinton sex scandal. Smith is only one out of many working in what has come to be called "spin."

The spin industry has a robust place in the political business of the US and UK, with superstar spin doctors such as Peter Mandelson who was the alleged mastermind behind Tony Blair's political career. The US has seen the rise of several well-known spin doctors such as the aforementioned Judy Smith or Mike McCurry, who



Washington DC, United States, Kellyanne Conway argued to be “the greatest spin doctor in modern American history” gives a press brief in the James S. Brady Press Briefing Room of the White House. © Official White House/ Flickr

continuously cleaned up Bill Clinton’s stained reputation.

Let’s talk about the terms “spin” and “spin doctor.” Spin doctors rarely call themselves spin doctors. No spin doctor will hand out a business card with their names followed by “spin doctor” or “spinmeister.” Rather, they often call themselves “special advisors,” “communication strategists” or similar.

The term “spin doctor” is derived from American journalist lingo and emerged with rather dire connotations. It was allegedly first stated in a New York Times editorial, published after a debate between Ronald Reagan and Walter Mondale during the 1984 presidential election. It was then picked up by other political

journalists, and thus made its way into the journalistic and political vocabulary.

## "Spin is to public relations what pornography is to art."

Robert L. Dilenschneider

A spin doctor has been thought of as being a manipulator—a PR mastermind evilly lurking in the shadows prepared to trick and persuade public perceptions. Robert L. Dilenschneider called out spin in a opinion piece in the Wall Street Journal in 1998, writing: “Spin is to public relations what pornography is to

art.” Over two decades after Dilenschneider’s remarks, spin has found itself as an integral part of American politics and has become thought of less contemptuously.

### So, What is it Really That a Spin Doctor Does?

The Cambridge Dictionary defines a spin doctor to be “someone whose job is to make ideas, events, etc. seem better than they really are, especially in politics.” Michelle Grattan, a renowned Australian journalist explained the profession as “the highly professional selling of the political message that involves maximum management and manipulation of the media” in her article “The Politics of Spin.”

One can then think of spin

doctors as advertisers, but the product up for sale, in this case, is politics and public opinion. Spin doctors sell politicians and political messages. To do this, they must know their markets, their potential “customers” and how to reach them most effectively.

Controlling the public perception of the politician or the politics they are hired to sell is an everyday task of spin doctors. Caroline Fisher is a former spin doctor and now works as a professor in journalism at Canberra University. She has listed some of the tactics spin doctors rely on when they ought to “manage information.” This involves:

**“playing a dead bat:** this refers to not responding to a media inquiry or giving a minimal response in an effort to kill the story”

**“throwing out the bodies/taking out the garbage:** these tactics are used to disclose damaging information under the cover of a major distraction. The classic example often used is that of Jo Moore, a media adviser in the Blair government in the UK. On the day of the 9/11 attacks she sent out an email saying: ‘It is now a very good day to get out anything we want to bury.’”

**“dog-whistling:** using specific subtle language and messages to target a particular section of the audience”

Let’s have a look at one spin doctor who has had her hands full the last couple of years:

Kellyanne Conway, former Counselor to the President in Trump’s White House—and inventor of the word “alternative facts”—was argued to be the “greatest spin doctor in modern American history” in an opinion piece in *The Week*. In the piece, Lili Loofbourow shows the many ways in which Conway being strategically deflection and rhetorically persuasive turns any interview into a pitching ceremony of Trump politics.

Conway’s statements did not always align with Trump’s, but political alignment is not the job of a spin doctor. The job of a spin doctor is to sell, and this is what Conway did so arguably well.

No matter what controversy the former president caused, Conway swept in, smoothed over, deflected and made the conversation into something it wasn’t from the start.

### **Spin: A Threat to Democracy?**

Now, the growing industry of spin in American politics has attracted some serious disliking, as it has been deemed by critics as harmful to democracy. One major criticism is that citizens are no longer thought of as actors demanding political representation but as consumers of political thought.

The democratic model is not about finding someone able to represent the political needs of the majority, but more to sell a political idea to as many as possible. Andreas Whittam Smith, co-founder of *The Independent*, argued in his opinion piece “How spin doctors destroyed our democracy—and what we can do to repair it” that the professionalization of politics, of which spin is an integral part, has changed the political field such that “political parties became brands to be managed.”

David Greenberg has a lighter outlook on spin and its possible effects on democracy. In his *New York Times* opinion piece, he states that citizens can see through the propagandist elements of spin and that spin can even spark political interest and add some liveliness to the political debate.

Whether or not spin harms democracy or makes politics more engaging, it has become an inevitable part of modern politics. The intensification and professionalization of the political field has created a need for these persuasive, rhetorically skilled professionals. As long as these trends continue, the business of spin is here to stay.

Scandal is an American political thriller television series starring Kerry Washington as spin doctor Olivia Pope. Pope opens her own crisis agency aimed at “fixing” whatever scandals her clients, ranging from politicians to sportsmen, might have gotten themselves involved in.  
© Walt Disney Television/ABC/Craig Sjodin/Flickr



Olivia Pope's character is based on a woman named Judy Smith—a renowned crisis and PR manager who served in the White House under George Bush, later moving on to open her own crisis-management firm.  
© Judy Smith Press Kit



# **DOCTORS, NOT BOMBS**

## **CUBA'S STRATEGIC MEDICAL MISSIONS**

April 27, 2020. Cuban Health Specialists arrive in South Africa to support efforts to curb the spread of COVID-19. The arrival of the 217 Cuban Health Specialists follows a request made by HE President Cyril Ramaphosa to HE President Díaz Canel Bermúdez of Cuba. © South African Government/GCIS/Flickr

**D**uring the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the island state of Cuba is sending hundreds of doctors around the world to combat the virus. According to the Cuban government this is an act of solidarity in line with the ideology of the Cuban revolution. The Cuban medical missions have been praised widely and civil society organizations have started petitions calling for the Nobel Peace Prize to go to the doctors. However, opponents of Cuba's medical missions claim that the doctors are victims of exploitation by their government, a view that is held by the United States and its allies. Ever since the Cuban Revolution in 1959, the US maintained a hostile policy and an economic blockade against the island. Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro also recently expelled several Cuban doctors working in the country, and the same thing happened in Bolivia. Despite this pressure, Cuba keeps sending doctors abroad. It could be argued that these medical missions are a strategic political tool, which may help to push for a relaxation of the US sanctions. So what exactly is the purpose of Cuba's medical missions, and what is the history behind the country's very well-trained medical professionals?

### **The History of Cuban Medical Internationalism**

Even though Cuban doctors have only recently received global attention because of the pandemic, it is not the first time they are sent abroad to places in need. Cuba has a long history of medical internationalism. One of the biggest accomplishments of the Cuban Revolution was the implementation of a wide, public, and free healthcare system spanning the entire island. The first time Cuba sent doctors to another country was to Chile after the earthquake in 1960. Shortly after, Cuban doctors also went to Algeria, which at the time was a newly independent country. In the 1980's, Cuba decided to start training doctors for the purpose

of exporting healthcare as Fidel Castro was committed to make the country a medical superpower.

With the fall of the Soviet Union in the early 1990's, Cuba lost its most important trade partner. This led to the so-called Special Period in Cuba, an economic crisis that lasted almost a decade. The Special Period was characterized by shortages in everything, and even though the healthcare system never lost its place on the list of priorities for the government, the crisis also affected the availability of medicine and medical equipment. The situation led to a search for new sources of hard currency to access much needed imports and to reduce the isolating effects of the US economic blockade. A dual-currency system was implemented, and tourism became the main source of income, which also led to the emergence of inequalities based on access to hard currency.

### **Regional Integration and Expansion of International Cooperation**

In 1999, close relations were established with newly elected Hugo Chávez in Venezuela, whose country received Cuban doctors in exchange for oil. This helped Cuba to relieve the fuel shortages the island had suffered since the fall of the Soviet Union. Cuban doctors were key in Chávez's social programmes, the so called *misiones*. A well-known example of such a mission or programme is Barrio Adentro, which provided healthcare for Venezuelans living in slums where doctors did not usually go. Another programme is Operación Milagro, in which Cuban doctors perform free eye surgeries and have restored the sight on three million people in poverty all over Latin America. Ironically, the soldier who shot Che Guevara in Bolivia received eye surgery through this programme.

The Cuban state has also financed the education of many international students to study medicine on



April 27, 2020. Cuban Health Specialists arriving in South Africa to curb the spread of COVID-19  
© South African Government/GCIS/Flickr

the island. Fidel Castro inaugurated ELAM, the Latin American Medical School, in Havana in 1999, despite the critical situation during the Special Period. Ever since its founding, the school has received thousands of students from Third World countries. It has also welcomed students from low-income areas in the US, whose enrolment is coordinated by the organization Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization and its program Pastors for Peace. The only obligation for US students is to practice medicine in their neighbourhoods after returning home. Both the ELAM and the international medical missions are characterized by a form of “revolutionary medicine,” traced back to the Cuban revolution and its vision of healthcare as a fundamental human right.

In 2003, Fidel Castro held a famous speech at the University of Buenos Aires, in which he spoke of the missions. “Doctors, not bombs!” he shouted, criticizing the US who had just invaded Iraq at the time. Since 2003, the amount of Cuban medical missions abroad increased drastically. The Henry Reeve Brigade, a team of doctors specialized in disaster medicine and infectious disease containment, was established in 2005. Cuba had this brigade ready to go to the US during Hurricane Katrina in 2006. However, instead of accepting this offer for help, George W. Bush created the program CMPP (Cuban Medical Professional Parole), which encouraged Cuban doctors to defect from medical missions by offering quick asylum in the US.

### **Why do Cuban Doctors Want to Go Abroad?**

By 2020, Cuban doctors have worked in over 60 countries. It is voluntary for doctors to sign up for

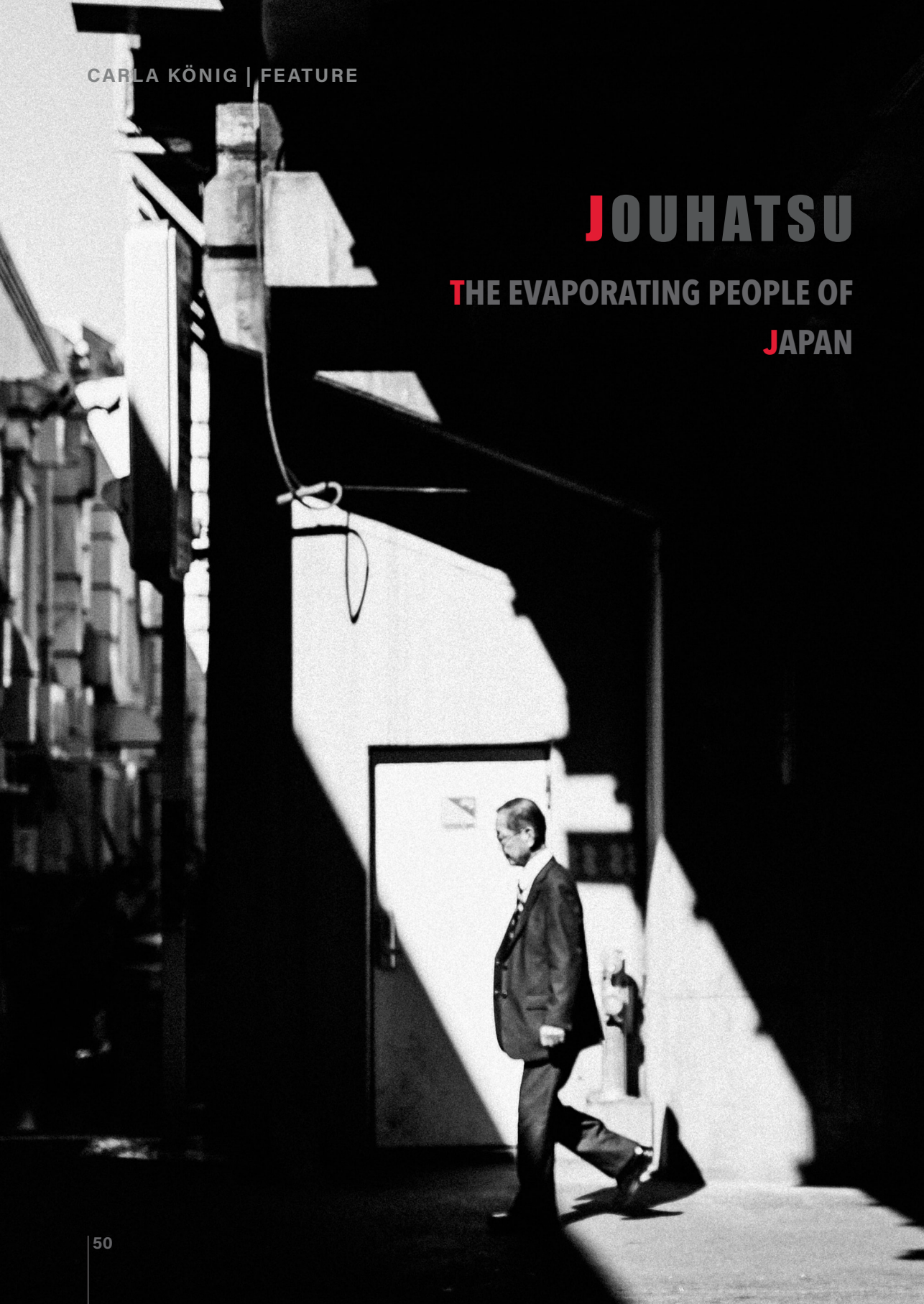
an international medical mission, and there are different reasons why many do it. Many cite the plain morality and the obligation to help people as the strongest reason to go and there are also significant economic advantages. While doctors work abroad, they receive several times as much as their salary in Cuba. The government also sends money to the doctors’ families every month and places hard currency in a savings account for when the doctor returns home. Cuba only charges host countries with the financial ability to pay, such as South Africa or Qatar. Cuba is paid per doctor and most of it goes back into the country’s national healthcare system. Further, many doctors who get to work abroad are Afro-Cubans and women, social groups who generally take less part in the tourist industry and therefore have less access to hard currency. US academic Sarah A. Blue has written about this in more detail put into a wider context within Cuban society.

In sum, the Cuban medical missions can be seen to serve several purposes. Providing help in times of need out of ideological commitment is one, but these missions also help Cuba to gain political legitimacy internationally, as well as providing hard currency for its public healthcare system and its citizens. During the COVID-19 pandemic, countries around the world have expressed gratitude for the Cuban doctors, including European countries like Italy and Spain. Cuba has called for global cooperation to combat the pandemic, and regardless of critical debates concerning underlying intentions, Cuba is showing that they are turning these words into action.

CARLA KÖNIG | FEATURE

# JOUHATSU

THE EVAPORATING PEOPLE OF  
JAPAN



IN JAPAN, TENS OF THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE VANISH EVERY YEAR. SOME OF THEM DISAPPEAR VOLUNTARILY AND DO NOT WANT TO BE FOUND—THE “JOUHATSU.” THE REASONS FOR THEM TO CUT TIES WITH THEIR OLD LIFE AND DISAPPEAR FROM SOCIETY VARY, BUT MANY CASES RELATE TO CULTURAL NORMS, GENDER ROLES AND SOCIETAL EXPECTATIONS WHICH HARDLY ALLOW FOR FAILURE. THE PERSPECTIVE TRIED TO RESEARCH A PHENOMENON THAT STILL SEEMS TO REMAIN SOMEWHAT HIDDEN IN SOCIETY.

Every family has its secret stories—but only some of them sound like they are taken from the screenplay of a thrilling movie. The story of Kazuko Yamamoto’s family (name change for privacy purposes) took place almost 40 years ago. “It was the morning of 17th January 1982, when I was in the last year of university,” she tells THE PERSPECTIVE. “We put quite a lot of stuff in a truck and my car, told neighbors I was going to move to an apartment room near my university, and left the house.” But it wasn’t just Kazuko who did not return to her house that day.

About 87,000 people vanished in Japan in 2019, just a slight decline after a record high the year before. While the leading cause for disappearances is reportedly health-related—those with dementia accounting for nearly 20%—people are also disappearing on purpose. The Japanese word for that is “jouhatsu,” which literally translates to “evaporation”—disappearing without leaving any trace. It describes people cutting ties with their old lives, often vanishing from one day to another without letting a single person know. In Kazuko’s case, there is another description for a variation of the same phenomenon: “Disappearing into the night” is a literal translation of a word in Japanese: yonige, which means “a family disappearing overnight from their house,” she explains. Kazuko’s stepfather had quietly sold his car and the house they were about to leave beforehand, and together with him and her mother, she secretly moved into an apartment in another part of the city that day.

The reasons for the sudden disappearance of people in Japan differ a lot—and can range from failing

an exam to losing a job and its subsequent compromised financial security. This relates to Japanese work culture that expects people to work long hours and be constantly productive, sometimes even up until the point of death from overwork: a phenomenon called karoshi. The claims for compensation for karoshi had reportedly risen to a record high of nearly 1,500 cases in 2015. In reality they may be even higher, as many cases are not even recognized by the government, according to the National Defense Counsel for Victims of Karoshi. The organization consults relatives of victims who died from overwork and helps them to file complaints to receive compensation by employers. The first white paper about the phenomenon, issued by the Japanese Labor Ministry in 2016, revealed that compensation payments for deaths linked to mental illnesses have risen over the years. Even though this suggests that the phenomenon as such is increasingly recognized by the government, the organization argues that it still is not doing enough to actively promote a reduction in working hours and a change in the working culture.

“There are plenty of reasons for ‘evaporation,’” Tsubasa Yuki tells THE PERSPECTIVE. He consults the homeless and people in economic despair for Moyai, an independent living support center in Tokyo that aims to socially solve Japan’s poverty problem. “While some people escape from the Japanese mafia or debt collectors, others cut ties with their abusive families,” Yuki says.

“Other people fade out from society rather than disappear at once,” he continues. Those people get into a vicious cycle of not having secure housing, which in turn excludes them from the labor market,

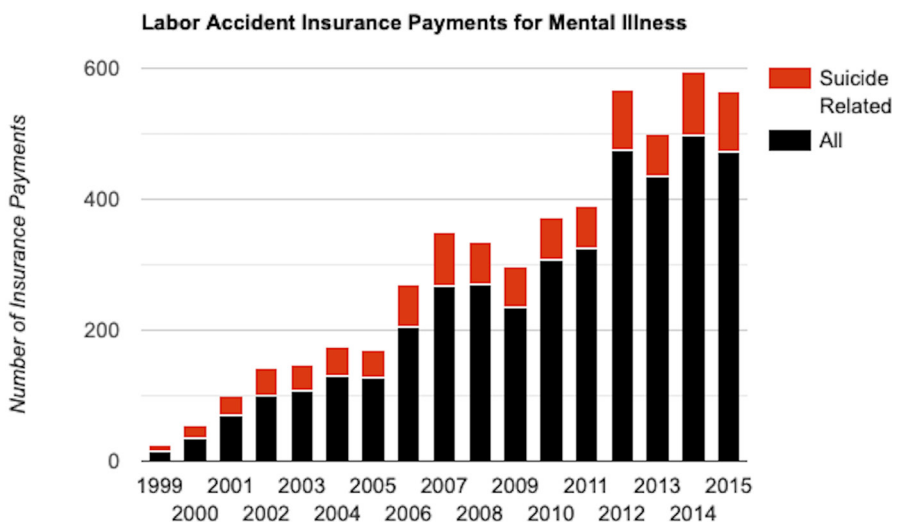
so they are forced to take insecure and informal or even illegal jobs. Once, Yuki was consulting an old laborer living in San'ya, a neighborhood in Tokyo known for its day laborers and poverty—and as one of the places where evaporating people go to start a parallel life under the radar of society. “Although he has been working hard, outsiders including his own family showed a discriminatory attitude toward San'ya and day laborers,” Yuki says. “He eventually ceased contacting them.”

Hideto Oki, a university student living in Tokyo, is helping homeless people in the same neighborhood. The living conditions in San'ya are very bad, he tells THE PERSPECTIVE. According to him, most of the people he encounters would actually be eligible to receive social assistance. However, many are reluctant to get it, Oki points out. “Because if they apply for it, they could be caught.” As many fear to be discovered by authorities or the ones they left behind, they rather decide to endure homelessness and poverty only to be able to live under the radar. “If you want to live without using any ID, being homeless and earning money from informal jobs or illegal activities would be almost the only option”, Tsubasa Yuki confirms. While this aids in staying

off the radar, it also means they are not able to use their resident cards, which they need to be eligible for many social security and insurance systems. The refusal to get social aid could also be related to a stigma deeply rooted within Japanese culture:

"There is a word, ‘一人前 ichi-nin-mae,’ which means a person is capable of handling their things,"

says Takenosuke Matsuura, a Japanese student currently living in Sweden. There is usually a strong feeling of shame connected to failing high societal expectations. For some people realizing they cannot meet them, it ultimately leads to the decision to abandon their old life rather than getting help. The reason for Kazuko's family to disappear reflects this pattern. At the time, her stepfather ran a successful architecture firm. But then he got into a debt of roughly 100 million Japanese Yen—today, a bit more than 960,000 US Dollars—because he was the guarantor of a promissory note of a relative.



The first white paper about the phenomenon, issued by the Japanese labor ministry in 2016, revealed that compensation payments for deaths linked to mental illnesses have risen over the years.

© Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare of Japan

“So, he decided to bankrupt his company and do the *yonige*,” Kazuko explains. Remaining hidden was not so easy, as the creditors even sent people to her university to look for her stepfather. “Luckily my teacher was kind and lied to the people, saying I didn’t know where my family was and that I was having a hard time myself,” she remembers. “Even our relatives didn’t know where we were.”

Paul O’Shea, a researcher in Japanese studies at Lund University, confirms that in Japan, “there is absolutely a stigma associated with being unable to provide for yourself.” Having to rely on social welfare in Japan would be mostly seen as “failing and deeply embarrassing.” Tsubasa Yuki from the independent living support center in turn stresses that in his opinion, “it is more about institutions and systems rather than the mentality of people.” He believes that a culture of blame and humiliation connected to being able to provide for one’s family could be tactically used by the Japanese government to save on the social security budget: “For example, when one applies for Public Assistance, the public office will reach out to the applicant’s family first to ask whether they can economically and/or emotionally support the applicant.” According to him, only 20–40% of all the people who would be eligible to receive public assistance make use of it.

The topic of evaporating people is “not very well-publicized” within Japan, O’Shea says, which arguably adds to the stigma surrounding it. This is further fueled by another prevailing norm in Japanese society which is, in his opinion, often overlooked in this context: persisting traditional gender roles. While they might be changing slowly, the woman is still expected to be “the good housewife and mother” while “the man should be the breadwinner,” he tells THE PERSPECTIVE.

How negatively this affects not only women, but also men, is not really discussed enough, O’Shea

finds. “Males are overlooked, since it is assumed that they are the ones with access to good jobs, money, power,” he adds. Especially since the financial crises of the early 1990s, this assumption does not hold true anymore for the Japanese labor market.

“The reality is that since the bubble burst thirty years ago, the labor market in Japan has changed without a corresponding change in gender role perceptions. So, the number of good lifetime jobs for men, which they can then get and support a family with, have reduced dramatically.” As a result, many men now find themselves in low-paying unstable jobs, unable to fulfill the expectation of being a reliable breadwinner for their families. “The system is not set up for these men,” O’Shea criticizes. “Social welfare itself for a long time was not aimed at men—rather, at, for example, widows and their families.” This corresponds to statistics suggesting that it is more often men who vanish than women. At the same time, despite declining in the last years, Japan still also has comparatively high suicide rates, which spike in times of economic crises and again affect men more often than women.

While many people who disappear under *jouhatsu* will never be found and live a hidden life under precarious conditions, the *yonige* of Kazuko’s family had arguably less severe consequences. “We could still live normally after *yonige*,” she says. When her stepfather finally was discovered by authorities after appealing to the local city council to never reveal their address to anyone, he got sanctioned and lost his voting rights for two years. But on a slightly more positive note, the family only disappeared from neighbors, friends and relatives they were not that close with, and her stepfather paid back his debt in the end, she says. “For some of the people who knew us before, we evaporated. But the people we met and associated with after our *yonige* don’t know any of these details. To them, my family are just normal people who moved in next door.”

# JOUHATSU **PT. 2**

TRACKING DOWN THOSE WHO  
DO NOT WANT TO BE FOUND



WHEN PEOPLE IN JAPAN “EVAPORATE”, THEIR RELATIVES OR LOVED ONES OFTEN TURN TO THE POLICE FIRST TO GET HELP IN FINDING THEM. BUT WHEN THERE IS NO SIGN THAT A CRIME OCCURRED, THE POLICE WILL NOT INVESTIGATE. THAT IS WHEN PEOPLE LIKE MASATO KAWABE AND YOSHIHIDE ŌYA GET INVOLVED—PRIVATE INVESTIGATORS AT TOKYO IT INVESTIGATORS. THE PERSPECTIVE SAT DOWN WITH BOTH OF THEM TO TALK ABOUT HOW THEY FIND PEOPLE WHO DESPERATELY TRY TO REMAIN INVISIBLE—AND ABOUT CASES THAT TURN OUT DIFFERENTLY THAN EXPECTED.

**T**P: So I think I understand the difference between “evaporation” and an ordinary “missing persons” case lies in the will and volition of the disappeared person, but from your expert perspective, could you please explain the difference for us at THE PERSPECTIVE?

Kawabe: What you say is pretty much correct. “Evaporation”—rather than an official kind of terminology—is just a way to express when someone who has gone missing has made themselves missing. For example, if someone’s disappearance is part of a crime or an incident—such as murder or kidnapping—or some kind of disaster, we would just call that a “missing persons” case rather than *jouhatsu*.

**Of course, there are many reasons why someone might “evaporate,” but would you say it’s usually due to economic reasons? Or are interpersonal reasons—abusive relationships, etc—also a major cause?**

Kawabe: Well, according to 2018’s Police Statistics Report, the biggest reasons for disappearances were illness and disease: 26.5% [23,347 people; out of this number, 16,927 people are those afflicted by dementia, which accounts for 19.2% of all missing persons]. So about a fourth of disappearances were due to illness. The next biggest categorical reason is “home environment.” This would be parent-child relations, or spousal relations, that kind of thing [14,866 people; 16.9% of total disappearances]. Third are job and employment-related issues, which would encompass economical reasons [10,980 people;

12.5% of disappearances]. So statistically, illness and disease are the most common reasons for “evaporation.” And in those cases, the end result is typically the death of the evaporated person, usually by suicide.

**I see. When you say “illness and disease,” is that mostly referring to mental illness?**

Kawabe: Those particulars are not released by the Japanese police. But within that group of illness-related disappearances, elderly people with dementia comprise about 19% [of total disappearances; 16,927 people].

**In terms of age, are most people who “evaporate” or go missing the elderly?**

Kawabe: Actually, no. Teenagers tend to be those who go missing most often. In 2018, however, it was those in their 20s. The elderly—those in their 70s—are perhaps the third most prevalent group.

**So those who disappear as teens, what approximately is the ratio of those who were kidnapped and those who ran away from home or evaporated?**

Kawabe: Unless the case is solved, there’s no way to know. Once you find the person, then you understand whether or not it was a kidnapping or *jouhatsu*. So it’s hard to say just based on these statistics.

Ōya: I think we can say, though, that from about middle-school age onwards, it tends to be runaways. For elementary school students and

very young children, the possibility of it being a kidnapping is much higher.

**Makes sense. Well I suppose that brings us to the meat of our interview. Have you as private investigators ever had experiences with jouhatsu?**

Kawabe: Mr. Ōya's your guy.

**Oh? How many times have you worked with a case that turned out to be about “evaporation”?**

Ōya: Usually about once or twice a month... yearly, I would say about ten cases.

**And how many of those have been situations where someone approaches your company asking you to help find someone that they themselves think have evaporated?**

Ōya: Actually in those cases, that's usually how people approach us—“Someone has ‘evaporated,’ please help me find them.”

**In the jouhatsu cases that you've investigated thus far, have you noticed any commonalities or patterns?**

Ōya: Hmmm... yes, mostly in the type of relationship between the evaporated person and our client.

**Oftentimes it's a parent looking for their lost child, or someone looking for their partner—it might**

**be a husband coming to us and just saying, “Look, my wife has disappeared, can you help me find her?”**

Yeah, usually it's a parent-child or spousal relation turned sour and someone packs up their stuff and leaves.

**In the case of parents and children, does that usually reflect the general missing persons statistics in that it's a teenager who has disappeared? Do you often get approached by parents looking for their adult children?**

Ōya: Cases in which the child is a mature adult are common as well. In those cases it often has to deal with marriage—the child introduces a potential partner to their parents, and their parents oppose the pairing. From the perspective of the parents, something about their child's prospective partner is unacceptable, perhaps their lineage... But of course, their child is in love with this person, this person is in love with them, and thus they want to be together. But then misunderstandings and conflicts arise between the generations. The child runs away with their partner, oftentimes removing themselves from the family registry, and then cuts contact with the parents. At that point, the parents come to us asking for help in finding their child.

[Koseki: Japanese Family Registry. Japanese law requires households to report births, adoptions, deaths, marriages, divorces, etc of Japanese citizens to the local authorities, which compiles this information for all citizens within their area of jurisdiction. As such, marriages and acknowledgements of paternity become legal only upon being recorded in the koseki.]

**You've spoken about patterns in age and in interpersonal relationships of people who have "evaporated," but are there visible patterns in gender as well?**

Kawabe: Statistically, men comprise 64% of missing persons, and women 36%. So if there are three missing persons, two are men. But in the case of clients who approach us, I would say it tends to be women who have disappeared. What about in your experience, Ōya?

Ōya: I would probably say it's about half and half. In general missing persons cases, I'd definitely say half and half, but perhaps in the case of jouhatsu, women might tend to be a bit more common.

**I see. The fact that you have experience with "evaporation"—or rather, that you have cases under your belt that you can affirmatively label as jouhatsu—necessarily means you have been successful in finding people who have "evaporated," is that right?**

Ōya: Yes, precisely. You never know if a missing persons case was jouhatsu or not until you find the person who has "evaporated."

**Can you speak to the environment and situation surrounding some of these cases? You've touched on why people might "evaporate," but how does someone really go about making themselves disappear and start a new life in a new town?**

Ōya: Well, someone who really wants to evaporate has probably been thinking about it for a long time and will do everything in their power to make their evaporation successful, so oftentimes it is a very well-thought out process that is executed in a way that is a sudden and clean break from their life. Most cases I've dealt with have been sudden disappearances whose

preparation went unnoticed, rather than anything that might have been visible to anyone else. But while investigating, I'll usually come across information that makes me draw conclusions about the reasons for someone's disappearance.

**Do many of the "evaporated" people in your experience leave most of their belongings behind?**

Ōya: When they're living with someone, then yes, they tend to leave their belongings behind. For example in the parent-child cases we discussed earlier, usually the child would be doing small unnoticeable preparations for their disappearance beforehand, and then when the timing is right they remove themselves from the family registry and disappear. I think it requires a lot of planning.

**And when someone who has "evaporated" moves to a new town, do they operate under a totally different identity? Do people often change their names and make a new life? I just wonder how someone moves to a new place and lives a whole new life without anyone being able to find them.**

Ōya: Well for us as investigators, we can find official documents about tax, residency, other legal documentation and use these as leads to track down where someone is living, who they are living with, what kind of job they are working... then once we find them and track them, we get more details about their daily lives and what they do on the weekends, that kind of thing. Sometimes we find people living their lives happily, and sometimes not so happily.

Kawabe: It might seem strange, but actually the number of people who go so far as to change their name and make a new life for themselves is pretty low.

Ōya: Yes, that is characteristic of people who might

have criminal ties or are criminals themselves, rather than people who have simply “evaporated.”

**I'm curious about what you mentioned about finding people in your investigations that are living happily in their new lives... Is this ever a moral conundrum for you as an investigator? Have you ever had a case in which you tracked down an evaporated person, and then realized that perhaps it's better if they stay unfound?**

Ōya: Hmmm, that's a difficult question. I approach this job as one that is simply uncovering and conveying facts. Oftentimes there are so many things I want to say to our clients and the people who I track down, but I limit myself to the facts of the situation. So whatever consequences there might be for the involved parties, I set that aside and just try to operate in the facts.

Kawabe: Actually, legally, if we judge our client to have harmful intentions or to be a stalker, we are allowed to breach contract and are not obligated to continue involvement as investigators. So in these cases in which we judge the “evaporated” person to be in some danger or to experience harmful consequences of their discovery, there is legal room for discretion in our dealings with a client.

**Are situations like this—where a client of yours is a stalker—common?**

Kawabe: Yes, actually. If the person is too... desperate, or strangely enthusiastic about finding someone, usually that raises some flags. Or, after we've found someone who has “evaporated” and have talked to them, sometimes information comes up that influences our discretion. For example, we might find someone who, it turns out, was experiencing domestic violence from their partner who is our client. In that case, we would

protect the person's privacy and keep information from our client. What the “evaporated” person chooses to do afterward then, is up to them.

**Do you think particulars about Japanese society or work culture contribute to “evaporation” as a phenomenon? For example, do you think the same forces that lead to karoshi [death from overwork] also lead to jouhatsu?**

Kawabe: That probably depends on the person's age. If they're in their 20s and 30s, then workplace factors might contribute more to someone's “evaporation.” Perhaps they work too long, or are worked too hard and experience mental and physical exhaustion, which leads them to “evaporate.” For people in their 40s or 50s, it might be more common that their company has gone bankrupt, or they've gotten fired, or some other situation that has led to intense uncertainty about their future, which would influence their “evaporation” more instead.

**So, do you ever have to collaborate with police in your work? Have you had experiences where you're looking for a missing person and you realize that it might be something more sinister, something more to do with foul play?**

Ōya: For the most part, no. Usually if someone approaches us and has suspicions of foul play, we would direct them to the police. We rarely have to interact with police in our investigations.

Kawabe: Also, people tend to go to the police first if they are looking for someone. But if the police determine that there is no quality of crime per se, they will not look for the person. In that case, when the police won't handle or investigate a disappearance, people come to us for help. In that way we become involved in cases of “evaporation.”

**Gotcha. Alright well, thank you guys very much.**



Photo by Carina Enestarré

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Centre for East and South-East Asian Studies

## WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN REVIEW

60

1995 saw the largest-ever global gathering on gender equality in The Fourth World Conference on Women. In 2020 the **Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA)**—the agenda adopted by the Conference—remains a milestone achievement for gender equality, claiming that women's rights and equal participation for women are fundamental human rights.

With their ratification of the platform, the individual governments committed themselves to improving women's living conditions in twelve specific areas through national legislation. The goals included fighting poverty, improving health care for women, providing better education, and giving women more say in politics and business. Notable was the adoption of **gender mainstreaming**, a concept positioning gender aspects as a cross-cutting issue in all political areas. **Gender budgeting**, additionally, was to ensure that men and women benefit equally from public investments and expenditures.

The Beijing Platform for Action formed an essential multilateral frame of reference with which women's and human rights can be claimed. All over the world, women use it as a reference to make the status of the implementation public and hold governments to account. In the 25 years since its adoption, a lot has been achieved—131 states have now institutionalized equality policies or passed anti-discrimination laws. Today more than two-thirds of all countries have laws against domestic violence. More girls than ever before are going to school worldwide, and the global maternal mortality rate has fallen by 38 percent, according to the **UN Women's** report *Gender Equality: Women's rights in review 25 years after Beijing*.

## Gender equality has not yet been achieved anywhere

Regardless of equality between women and men being constitutionally anchored in 143 countries, gender equality has in reality not been achieved anywhere. In the Global Gender Gap Report of 2020 the **World Economic Forum** predicts that it will take 99.5 years to achieve gender equality if progress continues to be made at the current rate.

Women today earn an average of 24 percent less than men worldwide. However, they carry the main burden of care work (on average, 2.6 times the work of men). Furthermore, every third woman experiences physical or sexual violence in her life, and five percent of all women from age 15 have been raped. 41 percent of all women live in countries where there is a lack of free access to safe abortions, and 49 countries have yet to enact legislation against domestic violence according to UN Women.

Women have always had to fight for their rights and that is still the case today. The demands that were posed in the Beijing Platform for Action created 25 years ago are yet to be met.

## As long there are women, there is hope

The good news is the wave of mobilization by girls and women we are currently experiencing. Girls and women are the main leaders of many protests for democracy and human rights such as those taking place right now in Belarus, Sudan, Thailand, and Chile. Girls and women form the core of the protests against Trump in the United States, and with the escalation of the climate crisis, it is mainly young women who are getting involved in movements like Fridays for Future and Extinction Rebellion.

More than ever, women are taking to the streets, organizing and engaging, and working online and

offline to put pressure on governments. Women are trying to realize not only their own rights, but overarching social and political rights for the sake of an equal and sustainable world.

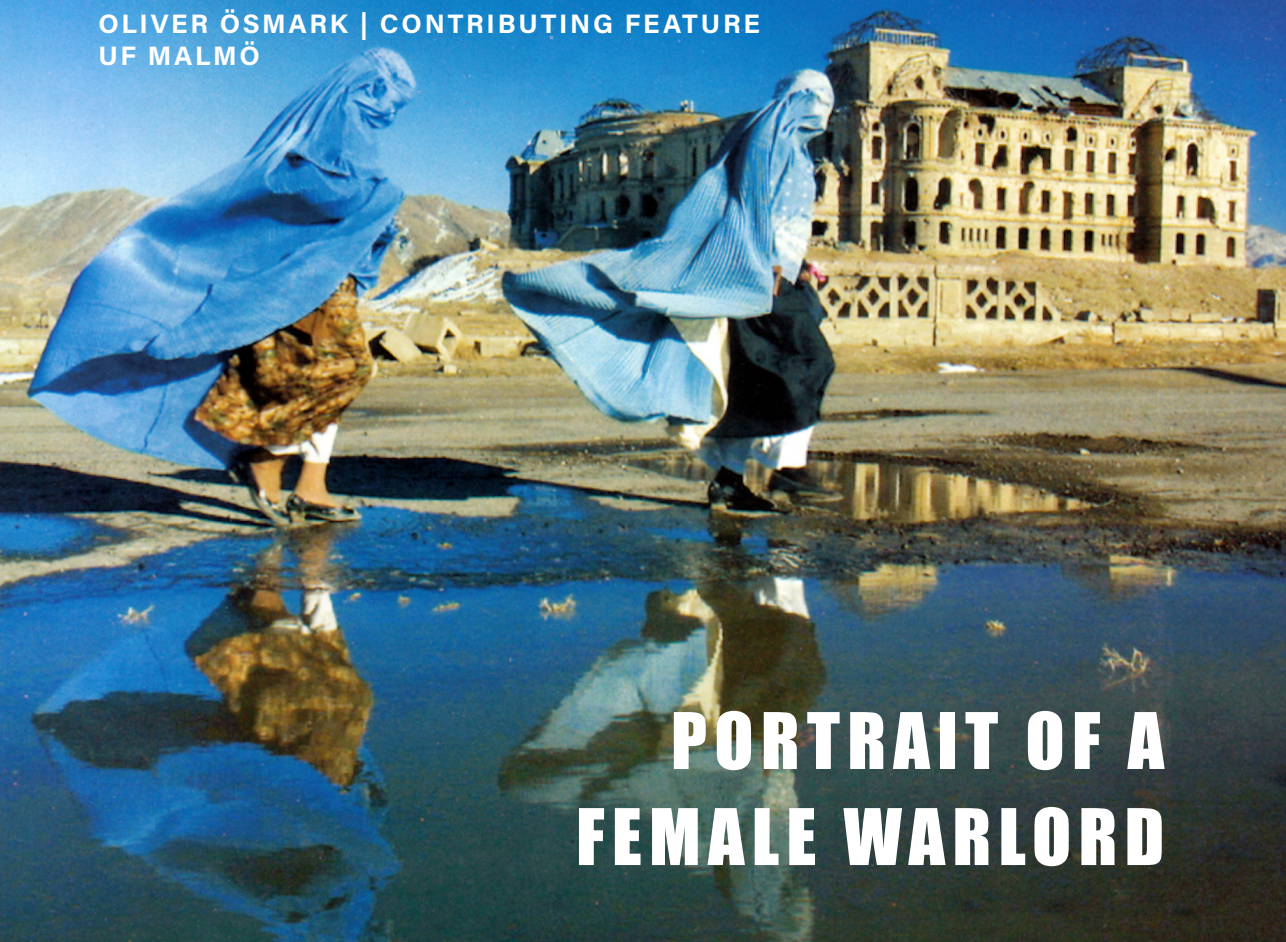
### **A long and winding way to go**

Though progress has been made, it is clear that the implementation of the Beijing Platform has fallen short of the initial promise. This shortcoming has been amplified by the coronavirus pandemic, and experts fear a lasting setback for women as a result of the associated economic crisis. Would it not, therefore, be time for a fifth World Conference on Women? Opinions are divided; though experts agree upon the need to rethink and accelerate the process towards gender equality, many fear regression, especially with the sexual and reproductive rights of women. As a consequence of the conservative turn that has taken place in many parts of the world with right-wing populists and certain conservative religious leaders, a new conference would also mean risking setbacks.

UN Women is mobilizing for the 25th year after Beijing under the motto "Generation Equality" and wants to reach international attention. The alliance and building bridges with young women will only succeed if equality is not understood exclusively as white women's economic and political participation. Equality policies and their institutionalization are by no means sufficient. Intersectional perspectives must be reflected in political actions. It is essential to make the heterogeneous feminist movements all over the world more visible and to let diversity shape this movement.

More than ever, new forms of solidarity need to be developed worldwide as a response to the roll-back and as a strategy for an equal world. The key to fighting inequality and achieving the goals of the Beijing Platform lies in the diversity and heterogeneity of the global feminist movement.

OLIVER ÖSMARK | CONTRIBUTING FEATURE  
UF MALMÖ



## PORTRAIT OF A FEMALE WARLORD

**T**he Taliban are well-versed in crime. En masse, they've effectively run the gamut of all crimes founded on a total contempt for humanity, in all its forms, except for those that abide by the constrictive and unaccommodating codification of ethics only they have authorship of. As is common among terror organizations and their death-worship, they set those enthralled under their tyranny up to fail, and relish in imparting the brutal—many times fatal—penalties for noncompliance. Amoral and psychopathy are rewarded with the spoils of their “holy” war, and in a society which offers no commensurate glory for the person with little aspiration for the homicidal narcissism of the Taliban Jihadist, fear prevails.

With good reason. More than 10,000 civilians in Afghanistan were killed or injured last year, of which 47% is attributed to Taliban actions. These numbers have been stable since 2014, from which they escalated at a worrying rate in 2009. The UN estimates that civilian casualties have exceeded 100,000 since the organization began documenting the impact of the Afghan war more than a decade ago. Much like ISIL's genocidal murder and abductions of thousands of Yazidi men, women and children shortly after declaring themselves a state in June 2014, the Taliban have their own sins yet to be answered for.

In the mid-1990's, the Taliban committed to a strategy of fear and bloodshed targeting civilians. UN officials stated that between 1996–2006 there

had been as many as 15 massacres. One such was the attack on Mazar-e Sharif in August 1998, representing one of the single worst examples of killings of civilians in the wars that have raged in the Afghan region since the Soviet invasion of 1979. In what is considered an act of ethnic cleansing, the Taliban launched an attack on the city and began killing an estimated 5,000-6,000 ethnic Hazaras, Tajiks, and Uzbeks indiscriminately. This society of dread and servility under threat of death will have shaped generations that have known little else but war.

#### **Kaftar, the dove of war**

In the mountains outside of the Baghlan Province in northern Afghanistan, an ex-commander with the mujahideen that fought the Soviet forces operates out of a compound with an alleged 150 fighters. Her name is Bibi Aisha Habibi and she is Afghanistan's only known female warlord. She is referred to as Kaftar, or "dove" in Dari; a diminutive sobriquet—by one account—given to her by her father because she would quickly move from place to place as if she were a bird. She was born in 1953, in the village of Gawi in Baghlan province's Nahrin District, the daughter of an important community leader, or *arbob*. She was one of the middle children of 10, and,

being as she remembers it, her father's favorite. She'd follow him around as he worked to settle disputes and give advice to villagers on matters of farming and family affairs.

She was engaged at the age of 12 to a man 10 years her senior. This was normal practice for most girls living in rural Afghanistan; where around 80% of the Afghan population live. Unlike other girls she wasn't removed from public life and it was agreed—and consented to by her husband—that she'd continue to be allowed to act on her father's behalf as an *arbob*. She took pleasure in working as an intermediary in marriage disputes; sometimes forcing families to allow women to choose whom they wanted to marry. Also, she implemented rules to reduce dowries, which was an obstacle for many couples not able to marry under previous conditions. In the wars to come, her husband would stay at home with their 7 children while she rode into battle.

In 1979, the Soviets invaded. A group of Soviet commandos swarmed her mountain and killed many villagers, including her son. She took to Jihad and against the Soviet forces for the next ten years. She lost family both to the Soviets as well as the Taliban which was in conflict with the mujahideen. After the

Soviets, the Taliban would eventually take Kabul and control up to three-fourths of the country. In the years to follow, Kaftar would lose brothers, sons, nieces, and nephews to the Taliban.

She considers herself a collector of lost and exiled men. Her fighters consist of ex-Taliban, ex-mujahideen, fighters of dejected ethnic minorities compelled to take up arms against the threat of bandits, brigands, and Taliban. Yet, she has herself lost family that swore allegiance to the Taliban and has, on numerous occasions, been a target of assassination attempts orchestrated by relatives. Regarding this she says,

**"It's really painful when your own family members come to kill you, and then later it's painful when you kill them."**

#### **War all the time**

With the U.S. invasion in 2001, she thought that peace would be imminent. The Taliban were routed to the south and east part of

the country by coalition forces and trained Afghan security forces. Armed unaffiliated militia groups like Kaftar's were seen as a destabilizing factor, and in 2006—convinced by the prospect of peace—she agreed to surrender most of her and her fighters' weapons as a part of the UN's Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups programme.

But disarmament hasn't proved an effective strategy for peace in a culture already plagued by unresolved endemic conflicts. The Taliban were revived with a fresh dynamism. Troubled by family feuds of tit-for-tat violence and regular death threats made by the Taliban, Kaftar has experienced none of the peace promised to her by the UN and the "democratic transition of power" heralded by the war against the Taliban.

As the U.S. prepares to withdraw their forces from Afghanistan, many fear the return of Taliban rule. This time, however, her fighters aren't prepared for active revolt. The

legitimacy granted to the Taliban by the current peace talks give them a political advantage over the poorly armed rural resistance fighters. In a 2014 interview, she says that she would like to seek asylum outside of Afghanistan, but has to ensure the passage of 30-40 of her family members first. Without help or enough weapons, she fears that the extremist militants will target her and her family. "I was proud of my career," she says. "But since I have been getting threats and I'm struggling and suffering, now I think I should not have become a commander.

I wish I would have been just a normal housewife. That no one would know me, no one would come to talk to me, and I would have been just a normal housewife. Now I am sitting awake at night, always on guard, with a gun, ready to protect myself."

### Blood can't wash blood

While she has, in her own way, worked to moderate the divides between men and women, and has taken an unlikely role in her society as the leader of a community and armed fighters, she is not a respected woman among warring factions and squabbling relatives. The old Afghan proverb "Zar, zan, zamin"—

gold, women, land—still motivates violence in a culture of guns and rivalries. Until the paradigm of fundamentalism and lawlessness is dismantled by means of education and stable government institutions, the rule of the sword will persist and those able to fight will give their lives to protect those they hold dearest.



A young Afghan girl carries her younger brother as she makes her way to the school house.  
© Kenny Holston/Flickr

Kaftar knows this life all too well, but doesn't wish it on the generations to come. The life of a warrior is a precarious one, but if it comes to the choice between fighting and submission, the prospect of subservience under Taliban rule will always inspire bloody insurgency. Despite her hardships, she knows this: "It makes no difference if you are a man or a woman when you have the heart of a fighter."

Deriving from Russian, Turkish and Persian languages, Nagorno-Karabakh means "Mountainous Black Garden" © Michal Knitl/Shutterstock

**The (Un)Resolved Dispute Between  
Azerbaijan and Armenia?**

**NAGORNO-KARABAKH**

ON THE NIGHT OF 9–10 NOVEMBER 2020, A RUSSIAN-BROKERED DEAL ENDED ACTIVE HOSTILITIES IN NAGORNO-KARABAKH, THE LANDLOCKED REGION IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS. FOR DECADES, THIS REGION BETWEEN ARMENIA AND AZERBAIJAN HAS BEEN A CONTESTED AREA. THE PERSPECTIVE SPOKE WITH KAMAL MAKILI-ALIYEV, AN AFFILIATED RESEARCHER AT RAOUL WALLENBERG INSTITUTE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AND HUMANITARIAN LAW IN LUND AND A SENIOR LECTURER AT THE DEPARTMENT OF GLOBAL POLITICAL STUDIES OF MALMÖ UNIVERSITY.

**A**s Armenia and Azerbaijan struggled for sovereignty during the tangled dissolution of the Soviet Union, Nagorno-Karabakh emerged as a separatist territory. Nagorno-Karabakh is a 4,400 km<sup>2</sup> ethnically Armenian enclave within Azerbaijan, internationally recognized as an Azerbaijani region. A brutal war over it—which led to around 30,000 casualties and hundreds of thousands of refugees on both sides—finally ended with a ceasefire in 1994. However, little has been done to resolve the status of the region throughout this period and there have been occasional military clashes between the two sides. The conflict that ignited in 2020 is said to be the most serious one to date since 1994.

In 2018, Armenia underwent a peaceful revolution, in which its former President Serzh Sargsyan was forced to resign after days of mass protests. During the 2018 democratic elections, protest leader Nikol Pashinyan became the Prime Minister of Armenia. To counteract tensions, Pashinyan agreed with Azerbaijan's President, Ilham Aliyev, on initiating the first military hotline between the warring parties. The "tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan sparked in August 2019, when Pashinyan proclaimed that "Artsakh is Armenia, and that's it" to the public in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh. This statement infuriated the Azerbaijani side and was one of the reasons that led to the armed hostilities that broke out in July 2020.

The main objective of THE PERSPECTIVE was to analyze two distinct opinions of Azerbaijani and

Armenian citizens. Interpreted from the perspective of an Azerbaijani native, Dr. Kamal Makili-Aliyev (KMA) who specializes in international law, conflict resolution and peace-building—shared his thoughts on the latest Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Unfortunately, the multiple Armenian sources which THE PERSPECTIVE reached out to refrained from commenting.

**TP: What do you think triggered the sudden escalation in fighting in Nagorno-Karabakh between Armenia and Azerbaijan on Sunday, September 27?**

KMA: Well, I think my question would be "was it so sudden"? For the past approximately two years for those studying the conflict in academia, all of the signs that the hostilities are coming back were there and were quite clear. The question was how long until the situation truly explodes and what will be the scope.

**How was it different this time compared to the over 26 year-confrontations?**

The change in the government of Armenia in 2018 can be seen as a turning point. Before that, the conflict was mostly in the "smoldering" form (not frozen like some suggested), with the biggest flare-up in 2016. That flare-up in 2016 actually showed two important things: firstly, Azerbaijan has not ruled out the exercise of its right to self-defense in the absence of the peaceful solution—not only in theory (public statements) but in practice as well (military action on the ground). Secondly, Russia had effective contact and mediation levers that

could influence both parties to stop the hostilities. Strangely, it seems that by 2020 those two facts became widely forgotten.

### **How did the 2018 power shift in Armenia contribute to this conflict?**

The 2018 power shift in Armenia led to a government that has proven to be very populist. So much that it became this government's goal to demonstrate—to the population of Armenia—that it is even "tougher" on the negotiations with Azerbaijan than even the previous government led by former military commanders and separatist leaders from Nagorno-Karabakh.

What the Armenian government didn't take into account is that populism escalates public events very fast and that

## **populism in such a sensitive issue as the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is probably one of the worst ideas ever.**

And so the Armenian Prime Minister's statements like "Karabakh is Armenia... period," that brought the discussion outside the parameters set by the long-running peace process led by Minsk Group of OSCE, statements that militarily threatened Azerbaijan with loss of other territories should it try to resort to force, actions taken to challenge Russia as Armenia's main ally and then finally the border escalation—in July 2020—away from the conflict zone with Azerbaijan, led to the loss of hope in Azerbaijan that any normal return to the negotiations process is possible. The final act that can be

named as a point of no return would be the killing of Azerbaijan's Major General Polad Hashimov during the July 2020 escalation of the conflict. Then the internal pressure made the government of Azerbaijan act. Azerbaijan has been openly preparing for such a scenario since the first ceasefire agreement in 1994.

Now, after July 2020, it just waited for the next escalation on the line of contact which happened at the end of September 2020 and pushed the military forward to return territories by military means. I think the resumption of active hostilities was far from sudden or unexpected, especially after July 2020.

### **Both Armenia and Azerbaijan have support from major regional powers. Could the conflict risk pulling in these greater powers—namely, Russia and Turkey?**

The short answer would be—the risk was and is minimal. Why?

Firstly, because Russia is still much more powerful and present in the South Caucasus than Turkey.

Secondly, Russia and Turkey will try to avoid the risk of direct confrontation as much as possible, which was proven by their other engagements—it is simply not worth the risk for both. They prefer acting through proxies instead, which leads to:

Thirdly, the Nagorno-Karabakh war is not a civil war or internal strife with irregular forces that can be used as proxies or influenced by the powers easily. There are two regular state armies that were fighting each other. That is not a proxy conflict, so direct engagement is unlikely. That is why both Russia and Turkey limited themselves to the arms sales/provisions and military advisory.



Soldier with an antitank grenade launcher and a flag of Artsakh, also known as Nagorno-Karabakh Republic sewn on the military uniform. © Bumble Dee/Shutterstock

**What were the priorities of each side? What were they looking to gain and how far might they have been willing to go to secure their respective goals?**

That is not an easy question to answer because it is not a very precise question. If we take it restrictively, Armenia wanted to continue the status quo of the occupation of the territory of Azerbaijan waiting for the opportunity to somehow recognize its territorial gains from the 1990s de jure.

Azerbaijan wanted to restore the de facto control over all of its de jure territories. But both were limited by the security concerns of regional powers, mainly Russia. When Azerbaijan started to return its territories militarily, Russia got into an unpleasant situation.

Despite its leverage against both Armenia and Azerbaijan, the strategic goal of Russia was to solve the situation in a way that will not alienate either country. That meant that it could apply pressure

on both to a certain limit and push the situation to the point where both countries would agree to a supervised ceasefire (peacekeepers). That meant taking the risk of hostilities running longer than in 2016, but it seems that Russia also understood that if it would simply stop the hostilities, like in 2016, it would end up in the exact same situation soon or in the near future. That is why it looks as if both Armenia and Azerbaijan were limited by Russia's interests in their ultimate goals.

**For settling the conflict by both sides: Had the Minsk Group or other diplomatic channels a chance of assisting in restoring stability?**

I would say that the Minsk Group and other diplomatic efforts have proven to be ineffective during all this time. The conflict sides were very far away with opposite ultimate goals, stated above. When mediation proves to be non-functioning, there is however another option—arbitration. The parties

need to pre-accept the solution by a credible arbiter—for example an ad hoc Commission created by the UN or International Court of Justice—to solve the issue through international law.

Here the political pressure from major powers could have been used to push the sides to such a solution. This is consistent with the research that I have done on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the Aland Islands precedent of the resolution of the conflict between Sweden and Finland. After diplomacy has failed, the arbitration remains the only other peaceful way of resolving the conflict. And the conflict is, of course, still unresolved. The status of the Nagorno-Karabakh is not agreed upon. Instead, it is in the air for the next 5 years awaiting further negotiations—that will probably be as fruitless as previous ones—and supervised by Russian peacekeepers.

#### **And finally, do you think that the Nagorno-Karabakh war is really over?**

As to the last question: The answer would depend on what you mean by war. The war-like situation that started with the dissolution of the Soviet Union never really ended.

The ceasefire implemented in 1994—after the "first war"—has lowered the intensity of hostilities to a simmering phase with larger escalations occurring regularly and the largest escalation happened in 2016—"four-day war." This year hostilities returned full force and became known as the "second

war." However, the correct interpretation of the events since 1991 is a continuous war with different periods of intensity. No peace treaty was concluded in 1994, 2016, or even now in 2020. We now have a new ceasefire agreement with a monitoring and peace-enforcing mechanism—Russian peacekeeping force. This will undoubtedly play a role of a deterrent for any escalation of hostilities.

On the other hand, their presence is limited potentially only to the next five years and after that, any side of the agreement—Armenia, Azerbaijan, or Russia—can ask for their removal unilaterally.

What will happen if this is the case is very hard to predict. It will depend on the situation on the ground in this theoretical instance in the future:

1) Have the sides opened communications and have economic and diplomatic relations? 2) Has the status of the Nagorno-Karabakh finally been defined? 3) Have all the IDPs been able to return to their original places of residence? These and many other questions will need to be answered. So has the war formally ended? No. Has the war de facto ended? Not clear as it will depend on development during the next five years.



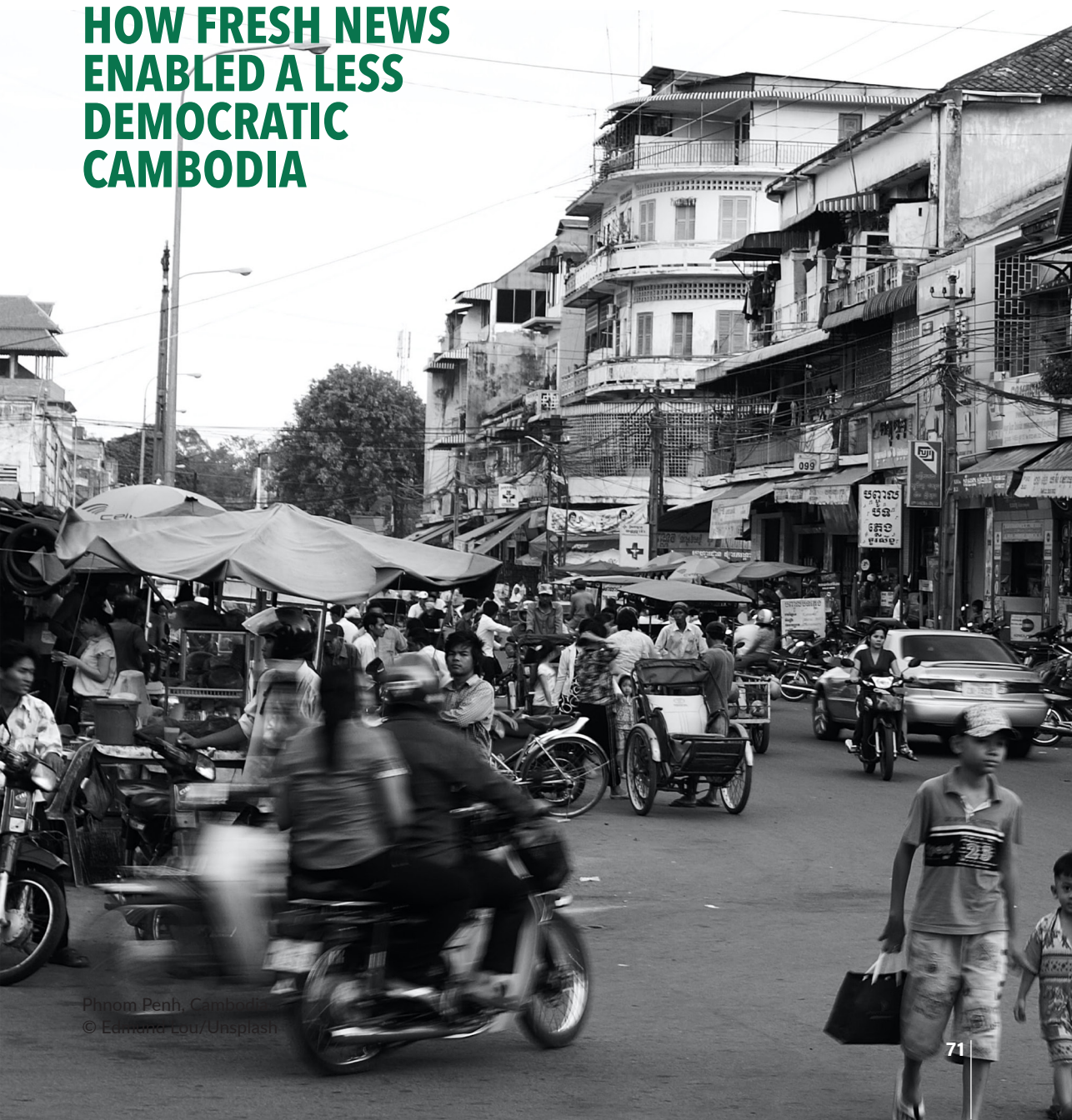
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THE RUSSIAN-BROKERED TRUCE IS SEEN AS A VICTORY FOR AZERBAIJAN AND A DEFEAT FOR ARMENIA. IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN WHETHER THE PEACE WILL PREVAIL OR WHETHER THE DEEP-ROOTED CONFLICT WILL VIOLENTLY BREAK OUT LATER ON.

DR. ASTRID NORÉN-NILSSON | CONTRIBUTING FEATURE  
CENTRE FOR EAST AND SOUTH-EAST ASIAN STUDIES

# CAMBODIA'S AUTHORITARIAN TURN

HOW FRESH NEWS  
ENABLED A LESS  
DEMOCRATIC  
CAMBODIA



Phnom Penh, Cambodia  
© Edmond Lou/Unsplash

IN SEPTEMBER 2017, CAMBODIAN OPPOSITION LEADER KEM SOKHA WAS ARRESTED ON CHARGES OF TREASON. TWO MONTHS LATER, THE PARTY LED BY SOKHA, THE CAMBODIA NATIONAL RESCUE PARTY, WAS DISSOLVED BY THE CAMBODIAN SUPREME COURT. BY JULY 2018, THE CAMBODIAN PEOPLE'S PARTY PROCEEDED TO WIN 125 OUT OF 125 PARLIAMENTARY SEATS IN ELECTIONS THAT WERE NEITHER FREE NO FAIR.

**T**his marked Cambodia's unusual transition from competitive authoritarianism – a system in which the electoral arena is skewed in favour of the incumbent, and electoral competition is real but unfair – to hegemonic authoritarianism, in which there is no real electoral competition. The shift from competitive to hegemonic authoritarianism is, on a global level, rare. This has called for great authoritarian inventiveness by the ruling Cambodian People's Party in navigating the shift. At the centre of the government's efforts has been a veritable "war over reality". Since 2016, when Facebook became Cambodia's most important news source, online news is the main battle site for establishing political truths in a deeply polarized society. In an article in press, I argue that the online news outlet Fresh News – launched in 2014 -- represents a governance innovation to support the shift to hegemonic authoritarianism. Fresh News has played a singular role in enabling, legitimizing, and seeking to craft support for a less democratic Cambodia.

### **The Threefold Innovation Offered by Fresh News**

Warfare over reality is not only part of the zeitgeist – it is at the core of authoritarianism today. Dutch political scientist Marlies Glasius has suggested that authoritarianism in the contemporary world should be understood in active terms of accountability sabotage through institutions within, below or beyond the state, disabling access to information and/or disabling voice. Mediating access to information and voice, online news outlets lend themselves particularly well to such initiatives. In the case of Fresh News, this has taken three

distinct expressions. First, Fresh News has articulated a government-aligned redefinition of democracy which celebrates strongman rule on nationalist grounds. In the week leading up to Sokha's arrest, Fresh News published posts from a Facebook account under the name of Kone Khmer ("Child of Cambodia"). The posts outlined a US-backed "color revolution" to overthrow the Cambodian government involving the CIA, the American Embassy in Phnom Penh, NGOs, journalists, and the CNRP. Fresh News reporting spread these accusations of treason from an anonymous source – disabling access to information through secrecy. Three hours before the arrest, a 2013 video of Sokha reappeared on Fresh News in which Sokha claimed to have received assistance from the US government as part of a strategy to trigger political change in Cambodia. The Cambodian government would go on to cite this clip as evidence of treason. When Sokha was arrested in his home, Fresh News live streamed the arrest even though there had been no prior announcement that it was to take place.

Second, Fresh News reporting has been integral to the ongoing judicialization of Cambodian mega-politics – the reliance on courts for addressing core moral political controversies that define whole polities. When Kem Sokha was arrested, Prime Minister Hun Sen cited claims of a US-backed conspiracy – popularized by Fresh News – as the reason. At Kem Sokha's trial, which began after a long delay in January 2020, material posted by the anonymous Kone Khmer account and reproduced by Fresh News was presented as evidence. The "accountability sabotage" this represented became a key point of contention: Kem Sokha refused to respond to

## "Fresh News has played a singular role in enabling, legitimizing, and seeking to craft support for a less democratic Cambodia."

Dr. Astrid Norén-Nilsson

claims made by an anonymous source and requested the court provide a clear source of evidence. One of Kem Sokha's defense lawyers then requested that evidence pulled from the Kone Khmer Facebook page be excluded because of the page's questionable reliability. The presiding judge rejected his request.

Third, Fresh News contributes to an epistemic shift which reflects the emergence of a global "fake news" debate. Authoritarians worldwide have weaponized this notion to cherry-pick which news items carry truth value. Only a small minority of Fresh News coverage of alleged fake news refutes rumors that do not have political ramifications. Since 2018, Fresh News has portrayed the

political opposition as complicit partners of independent media in spreading fake news. In connection with the run up to the 2018 election, Fresh News reporting on alleged fake news stories rose sharply, often blaming the banned CNRP as the originator of these. The increase suggests an ambition to take control over the national narrative on an election that lacked popular legitimacy.

### **Accountability Sabotage: Long-term Implications of Skewed Journalism**

A hard look at Fresh News shows ways in which an expanding digital media system can be mobilized in the service of authoritarianism. By drawing on the particular opportunities for accountability sabotage that digital media afford, Fresh News emerged as a key actor at all stages of Cambodia's hegemonic authoritarian turn. The authoritarian innovations it has introduced are likely to have long-term implications for the hardening of authoritarian rule. Independent journalists I interviewed were concerned that Fresh News reporting erodes media literacy and has lessened trust in professional journalists. Yet, their response has largely been limited to providing fact-checking accounts of Fresh News stories. To a great extent, Fresh News now successfully sets the national news agenda.



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