## THE PECTIVE

Nº 03

IT'S HIGH TIDE

**How Climate Crisis** Impacts Kiribati

**PEOPLE VS POLICE** 

A Greek Tragedy?

REALITIES OF **HUMAN SECURITY** 

### **EDITORS' NOTE**

Dear reader.

When you're reading this, we hope that you're well. Sitting somewhere comfortable, covered in SPF, with a beverage of choice in hand and fewer worries about life, the future and all that stuff.

For the last time as Editors-in-Chief, we're proudly presenting you with REALITIES OF HUMAN SECURITY. This last issue marks a lot of things, but what we may have in common is that it marks the beginning of summer. For us, it also marks the end of our studies for the year—for some, a long-awaited forever goodbye to academia—but also the end of the wild ride that was being Editors-in-Chief of THE PERSPECTIVE.

We'd like to say thank you. We had a blast and we are proud of what we as a team have delivered this year. Wrapped in a fresh layout, we scored high-profile interviewees, uncovered interesting stories from around the globe, held workshops and learned a lot about leadership—and what it means to create an environment that's a joy to work in.

It truly was a team effort. As a team we commissioned, researched, wrote and edited a grand total of 54 articles. We collaborated with our partners, sister organizations across Sweden and our very own UPF media committees—spent a gross approximate of 483 hours fighting InDesign to make it all look pretty!

But now, what can you expect of this issue?

For the very last time, the team of THE PERSPECTIVE will take you for a spin around the globe. From Ecuador and Amazonian Kichwas—and their struggle for water governance—to Los Angeles, California, where Indigenous hip hop artist and activist Jaguar Arreola will tell you more about his support toward the Yaanga peoples' fight against colonialism, to Greece, the cradle of democracy that's currently facing a not-so-ancient tragedy: a surge in police brutality.

Delve deeper into the Resignation Syndrome, an underreported—and very much mysterious—condition plaguing refugee children in Sweden and... the Micronesian island of Nauru. Immerse yourself into the election politics of Palestine and discover the controversies between the French "Global Security" Law.

REALITIES OF HUMAN SECURITY will bring you to the Teardrop Island, where you'll witness the Sri Lankan Tamils, haunted by the reminiscents of the civil war. At last, discover the Turkish battleground for women's rights and look into the dispute over Georgia's energy system.

With that said, now go read!

Yours truly,



Agnieszka & Victoria Editors-in-Chief

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### THE PERSPECTIVE EDITORIAL TEAM

### **EDITORS-IN-CHIEF**

Agnieszka Gryz Victoria Becker

### REPORTERS

Adrian Ganic
Anastasia Lazaridi
Andrew Zoll
Carla König
Dato Parulava
Eje Brundin
Enrique Meija
Jade Adil
Julia Kaiser
Ketrin Jochecová
Marcos Echevarria

### **SUB-EDITORS**

Andrew Zoll Julia Kaiser

### **LAYOUT**

Agnieszka Gryz Victoria Becker

### **LEGAL PUBLISHER**

Victoria Becker

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### CONTACT

Utrikespolitiska Föreningen Sandgatan 2 223 50 Lund magazine@upflund.se



### **PRESIDENTS' ADDRESS**

Dear members.

The year has come to an end. It feels unreal to actually write these words, as it seems like just yesterday the activities kicked off after the summer in 2020. The challenges that came with running an association during a pandemic have of course been very present and palpable, however we will not dedicate this page to talk about this. Instead, we will devote this space to achievements

Firstly, for us as presidents two of our main goals of this year were to increase the transparency and inclusivity in the association. Our newly adopted rules and regulations, a document that regulates board and trustee positions' tasks, is one contribution to increasing transparency as well as accountability in the association. As for inclusivity, we adopted a new policy regulating discrimination and equal treatment to further ensure that UPF is a safe environment for all. All of our policies were also revised and updated to make sure they are up to date and promote a transparent and inclusive working environment.

Further, we want to praise our fantastic committees. Webzine, who produced a new all-time-high number of articles, while keeping an impressive quality and covering an impressive variety of topics. Travel, pulling off the first virtual UPF trip with several meetings, activities and dinners, and turning the situation to their advantage by going to two countries in one week. PR, working so hard to keep spreading the word of the association along with its content and events, making sure to keep the organization active and alive. Pod&Radio, producing high quality content in the shape of podcasts or live shows almost every week the whole year for us, with a wide variety of topics and series with something for everyone.

Magazine, producing magazines that look so professional it's hard to believe it is a student association magazine, along with articles of high quality and interesting topics. Lecture, readapting to holding first hybrid and then online lectures, and holding one almost every week throughout the entire year. Career, pulling off both the prep course and mentorship program digitally, while also providing the rest of UPF's members with interesting and valuable seminars to boost our career opportunities. Last but definitely not least Activity, who provided a space for socializing through a range of events while not being able to actually meet, keeping the association together when it's been more important than ever before.

Lastly, we want to thank all of our members for contributing to UPFs operations this year, and let you all know how much your engagement has meant for the association. All of our fantastic trustees and active members who have together with the board kept the association alive with your creativity and dedication, you are all an inspiration and we appreciate every single one of you. To all our members, we are so thankful for your participation in events and engagement in content. We hope to see you continue to engage in UPF and support the next board, and wish you all a lovely summer!

Soha Kadhim & Hedda Carlsson



### THE BOARD OF 2020/2021

### President

Soha Kadhim president@upflund.se

### Vice President

Hedda Carlsson vice.president@upflund.se

### Treasurer

Lovisa Lundin Ziegler treasure@upflund.se

### Secretary

Carl Cotton secretary@upflund.se

### **Lecture Committee**

Demi Bylon Frida Lindberg Karin Mizser lecture@upflund.se

### PR Committee

Gabriella Gut Roja Moser pr@upflund.se

### **Activity Committee**

Henrietta Kulleborn Miljaemilia Walla activity@upflund.se

### The Perspective Magazine

Agnieszka Gryz Victoria Becker magazine@upflund.se

### The Perspective Webzine

Daniel Bergdal Kerime van Opijnen webzine@upflund.se

### The Perspective Pod&Radio

Maximilian Onkenhout Clara Karlsson Schedvin radio@upflund.se

### **Career Committee**

Emma Baker Anna Mizser career@upflund.se

### **Travel Committee**

Maguette Fall Thea Sandin travel@upflund.se

### **UFS** Representative

Mara Glas lund@ufsverige.org

### WORLD BRIEF | UPF EDITORS-IN-CHIEF



Germany

### Official Recognition of Herero and Nama Genocide

On May 28, after more than five years of negotiations, a deal has been struck between Namibian and German delegations: The German government officially recognizes the cruel colonial-era atrocities in modern-day Namibia as genocide, in a quest to try and come to terms with their colonial history which left thousands of members of the Herero and Nama communities dead.

In a "gesture of reconciliation," rather than legally binding reparations, 1,1 billion Euro is set to be spent over the next three decades to support existing "reconstruction and development" projects, the German Foreign Ministry said. Foreign minister Heiko Maas stated the deal aimed at finding "a common path to genuine reconciliation in memory of the victims."

At the onset of the 20th century, the Herero population lost around 80% and the Nama community approximately 50% of its members at the hands of German colonizers in what was thencalled German South West Africa.

While the acknowledgement was met with praise, it was also severely criticized by way of insufficiency. "That's a black cat in the bag instead of reparations for a crime against humanity," Herero chief Vekuii Rukoro told Reuters news agency, describing the accord as "an insult."

Members of the Herero and Nama communities remain critical, saying that it is impossible to ensure the money will benefit all of them. The communities are fractured and only some representatives participated in the negotiations where others were left out.

### VICTORIA BECKER

### United Kingdom Modern Slavery on the Rise

7,779. This startling number stands for the modern slavery crimes committed in the United Kingdom between March 2019 and 2020—officially. But slavery is not staging a comeback—it never ceased to exist. From human trafficking to forced labor, from involuntary servitude to sexual exploitation, to forced marriage—it hides in plain sight.

"There is still a general lack of awareness of modern slavery, which could involve as many as 100,000 people in the UK alone," Justine Currell, Executive Director of Unseen, a British charity working to "stamp out modern slavery," told The Guardian in April 2021. The pandemic has perpetuated that tendency. With fewer faces out in the public—and those out and about covered in safety gears—the signs of slavery remain difficult to spot, warns Unseen UK.

The UK Government identifies clandestine cannabis farms as prominent sites of enslavement.



"The plants were more valuable than my life," recalled one of the victims, a Vietnamese boy smuggled into the country at the mere age of 16. Held in darkness and solitude, he tried to escape but got caught and was threatened to get killed, he told The Guardian in 2019. Following a police raid, the boy was rescued—but not liberated. Instead, the teenager succumbed to the court system that "treated him as a criminal rather than a victim."

Unseen's Annual Assessment discovered that compared to 2019, last year saw a 95% surge of modern slavery cases occurring on the United Kingdom's cannabis farms. In April 2021, The Times reported that Albanian nationals were arrested in connection to running a farm in Brierley Hill, West Midlands. The group posed as victims, not ringleaders of the farming scheme, trying to take advantage of the victim-protection system—a "really contentious" fraud method, the National Crime Agency (NCA) comments.

### **AGNIESZKA GRYZ**

### Iraq Deadly Attacks on Activists and Election Boycott

October 2019 marked the start of mass anti-government protests taking place all over Iraq. Demonstrators have taken to the streets to express their anger at staggering levels of corruption, high unemployment rates, dismal public services and foreign interference.

Mainly young and from a plethora of societal backgrounds, people want to remove the post-2003 political system run by a narrow elite that is incapable of providing living standards even though Iraq holds yast oil resources.

Elections are set for October this year, in response to the civic demands, but few are hopeful this will bring the desired change. 25-year-old demonstrator Hussein told France24 that "anyone who runs as a free candidate will be killed."

The BBC describes the uprisings as the "largest and bloodiest" since the US-led invasion in 2003, leaving thousands injured, abducted, or dead. In late 2020, Human Rights Watch reported excessive violence against protestors and "at least" 560 dead. Authorities routinely fail to identify and hold perpetrators of the killings accountable which in turn leads to more protest.

Recent clashes in late May left two dead and many more injured. Among them was anti-government campaigner lhab al-Wazni whose death inspired the Al-Beit Al-Wata movement—The National Bloc, said to boycott the elections. 17 more groups have joined them so far.

"The people are frustrated," communist leader Raid Fahmi says. "If the doors of democracy and free, transparent elections close, this could lead to a new wave of violence," he adds, speaking to AFP.

### VICTORIA BECKER

### GOOD NEWS IS GOOD FOR YOU

### June 2021

### THE PERSPECTIVE dedicates a section of the

magazine exclusively to good news related to International Affairs and Politics. Why? Consuming the news can be dreadful and overwhelming—because "good" things make the news a lot less often than the "bad" stuff. Lots of people actively decide not to consume news anymore because it takes a toll on their mental health and outlets dedicating their space to good news have seen rapid growth.

### Shopping for help in Poland

n a bid to help victims of domestic abuse, Polish high schooler Krystyna Paszkoset up Rumianki i bratki— Chamomiles and Pansies—an online natural cosmetics shop.

What looks like an upbeat, colorful business is a shopfront for those seeking help. Inspired by concerning numbers of domestic violence during the pandemic and a French example, Paszkoset wanted to offer a lifeline to those stuck in an abusive home.

Disguised as innocent online shopping, "customers" are being assisted in their purchase asking about their skin issues to assess how long they have been going on and how their skin may react to alcohol.

What seems like a straight-forward sales procedure, is actually coded conversation with psychologists. If a "customer" leaves their address or places an order, it is a concealed way of asking authorities to visit their home.

"I thought I would help maybe one person or two, but the shares on Facebook were big, and it became really popular," Paszkoset said in a BBC interview. The website has been contacted by 350 people, mostly young ones under 40.

While the demographics count mainly female individuals, about 10% of the contactors have been male. Paszkoset teamed up with Polish NGO Women's Rights Centre who are providing legal and psychological help to the website.

### "I thought I would help maybe one person or two."

Krystyna Paszkoset

The initiative has been awarded with the European Union's Civil Solidarity Prize, a one-off contest offering €10,000 and is planning to keep the "business", followed by 23 thousand people on Facebook, open.

### VICTORIA BECKER

### Back from "Extinction" and Indigenous Hunting Rights

n a landmark case, the Canadian Supreme Court has given constitutionally-protected rights to hunt on "ancestral lands" to the Colville Confederated Tribes, descendants of the Sinixt People of Turtle Island—as North America is otherwise known.

In 2010, Rick Desautel who resides in Washington state on a Native American reservation was caught hunting elk on Canadian territory without a valid permit. Desautel identifies as Sinixt and states he has been hunting on "ancestral grounds."

The territory of the Sinixt Nation spans modern day borders of Washington state (US) and British Columbia (BC)—a nation the Canadian government rendered "extinct" in 1956. Nowadays, around 4,000 people in the US are descendants of the Sinixt.

In the past, when caught, Desautel would contest his ticket citing his heritage—where he has been told that his people no longer exist—and it would be dropped. But in 2010, he was asked to appear in court in Canada.

In 2020, the case reached the Canadian Supreme Court and descendants of the Sinixt have finally won their right to hunt on ancestral lands and the legal status of the Sinixt has been restored.

"I was so nervous before the decision. I don't think I slept more than an hour the night before," said Desautel to The Guardian.

This is the first case of its kind, and experts see far-reaching implications for the recognition of Canadian hunting and fishing rights for tens of thousands of Indigenous peoples in the United

### "I was so nervous"

Rick Desautel

States whose traditional lands predate the modern US-Canada border.

It also highlights questions of whether or not First Nations whose members live in the US—but have treaty rights in Canada—must be consulted over resource projects such as fossil fuel extractions and pipelines, water rights, and mining and logging endeavors.

This ruling is a first step in the direction of opening a once firmly-shut door for more seats at the table for Indigenous peoples.

ANDREW ZOLL

### Renewable Energy's Second Wind

enewables seem to be catching a breeze this year, with several significant advancements in the sector made across the globe. According to the International Energy Agency (IEA) Market Update released this month, 2020 saw a 45% increase in renewable energy capacity globally-the largest year-on-year increase since 1999. Of this new infrastructure, wind energy is seeing particular development.

On May 15, the U.S. Department of the Interior—currently headed by Deb Haaland, the first Native American woman in a Cabinet role—announced its green-light for the 800-megawatt Vineyard Wind 1 offshore wind farm.

This is the first large-scale project of its kind in the country, and it is expected to provide enough power for 400,000 homes and businesses.

Wind-generated electricity is à la mode for several large-scale and iconic sites as well.

New York City's Empire State Building is, as of January 2021, wholly powered by wind energy after its Realty Trust signed multi-year wind energy contracts with Green Mountain Energy and Direct Energy.

Danish wind turbine giant Vestas also unveiled in May its plans to make fully recyclable turbine blades. Typically, the humongous blades are made with a mixture of glass, carbon fiber and epoxy resin. Once combined, these ingredients cannot be separated and blades are thus put to the landfill after a turbine's 20–25 year lifespan.

When a turbine is decommissioned, 75% of the generated waste is constituted by the blades. Vestas, armed with new chemical technology that can help break down the blades into their constituent parts for reuse, hopes to be able to recycle 50% of blade material within a few years.

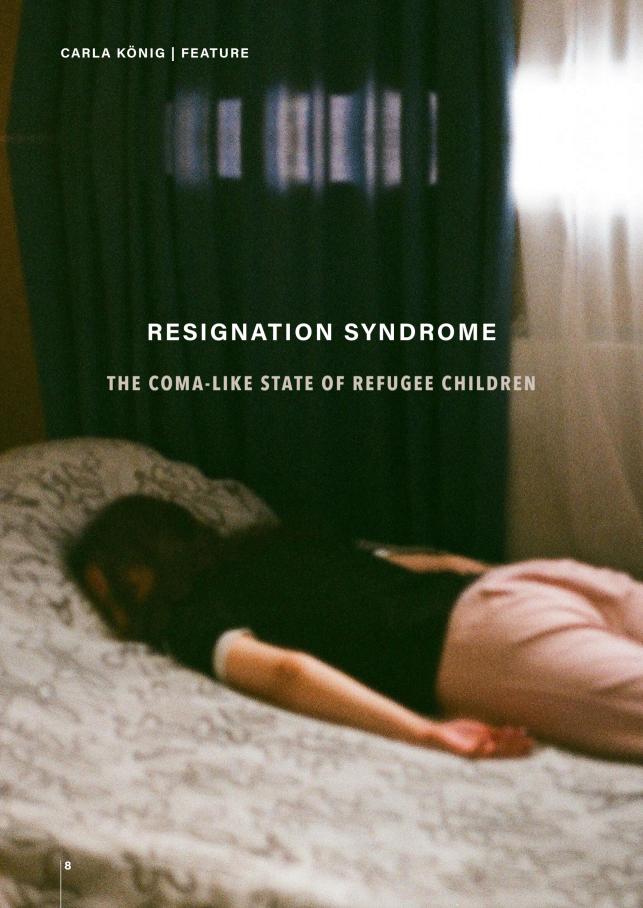
In the long term, they hope to have zero-waste operation by 2040.

Across the Atlantic in Morocco, construction is set to complete on Africa's largest water desalination plant. The Douira Seawater Desalination Plant is to run on wind farm-generated electricity, using desalination technologies that have been shown to be up to 75% more energy efficient than traditional fossil-fuel powered thermal desalination techniques.

### **ANDREW ZOLL**



The Empire State Building in NYC. © Carlos Delgado/Wikimedia



AT FIRST GLANCE, THE CONNECTION BETWEEN SWEDEN AND THE MICRONESIAN ISLAND NATION OF NAURU IS NOT OBVIOUS. YET, IN BOTH COUNTRIES, A MYSTERIOUS SYNDROME WHICH CAUSES REFUGEE CHILDREN TO FALL INTO A COMA-LIKE STATE HAS SURFACED OVER THE YEARS. RESEARCHERS ARE YET TO FIND THE UNDERLYING REASONS FOR THIS PHENOMENON—AND HOW TO TREAT IT. THE PERSPECTIVE SPOKE TO TWO MEDICAL EXPERTS WORKING IN SWEDEN AND NAURU, THE SMALLEST REPUBLIC OF THE WORLD.

t all started when they stopped playing and going to school. Then they would stop speaking, going to the toilet and finally stop eating and drinking, Dr. Beth O'Connor remembers. "When we spoke to the children, they would look through us rather than make eye contact," she says. "They appeared depressed and irritable." The psychiatrist helped refugees in Nauru—northeast of Australia—working with Doctors Without Borders in 2018.

What she observed in some refugee children is a rare phenomenon—but not an isolated case. They suffer from so-called "resignation syndrome." While O'Connor has encountered ten children in Nauru with the condition, Sweden has reported several hundred cases since the 1990s.

### Resignation Syndrome: A Functional Coma?

"No one knows what resignation syndrome really is", Karl Sallin explains. Sallin, a pediatrician and PhD researcher at the Centre for Research Ethics & Bioethics at Uppsala University, has examined several children diagnosed with the disorder. "We know they are not in a coma in a medical sense", he says. "The brain is awake, and the condition therefore is by definition different from coma." One hypothesis is that the state which children who suffer from resignation syndrome slowly fall into is a

## "The cure actually created the disorder."

Karl Sallin to THE PERSPECTIVE

functional coma. "From the outside you can't tell the difference," Sallin says. He admits that the medical community is struggling with treating functional comas.

When the children stop eating and drinking, and eventually fall into an unresponsive, coma-like state, they have to be fed through a tube and tended to around the clock. This type of care was not deliverable in Nauru, O'Connor explains: "Nauru is a small country and did not have the resources to treat these severely unwell children." They needed to be transferred to Australia to receive proper assistance, which in some cases separated families.

She elaborates: "One parent and child were sent to Australia for medical treatment while the other parent remained in Nauru with the other children." Due to patient confidentiality, Doctors Without Borders was not able to provide more details about the wellbeing of the children.

"It is unclear why these cases arose on Nauru," O'Connor says, believing it has to do with the uncertainty of the refugees' situation. "Most children have been on Nauru for over five years already when the cases arose."

Not knowing how much longer they would be detained on the island or what would happen with them significantly worsened the mental health of the refugees, she thinks. "There was profound hopelessness amongst the refugees." Due to Australia's offshore processing policy, asylum seekers were sent to detention centres on the island until their residential status was decided. While the detention centre is no longer operational, about 100 refugees still live on the island, according to the Refugee Council of Australia. In October 2018, the government of Nauru made O'Connor and her colleagues leave the island, stating their help was no longer required. This has left Doctors Without Borders "deeply concerned" about the mental wellbeing of the refugees.

**Cultural Factors Might Fuel the Syndrome** 

Why the syndrome predominantly occurs in Sweden, and almost exclusively amongst families from former Soviet countries and former Yugoslavia, is just as puzzling to researchers. Sallin thinks it's important to see resignation syndrome as culture-bound, meaning that certain sociocultural beliefs, expectations and norms for example how suffering is expressed—can be transmitted to others within the same cultural group.

"Culture-bound functional disorder" would be the most fitting descriptor of the condition, he believes. The novelty of the syndrome lies not in the symptoms, Sallin notes, but rather the magnitude of the problem. "Resignation syndrome patients occur in an endemic fashion in Sweden"—meaning the phenomenon transpires in a specific location and in a specific population.

Other factors, such as traumas, genetic predispositions or even environmental factors, might also weigh in—but these factors need to be investigated

further. "The research on this needs to be more interdisciplinary," he says. He believes it would be especially useful to work with sociologists and anthropologists. "There are a lot of questions which cannot really be answered medically," he points out. In order to advance with research on resignation syndrome, more patients would have to be examined.

### **Circumstances Spark Controversy**

The credibility of the cases has been a hotly debated topic in Sweden. The Swedish Migration Agency

"When we spoke to the children, they would look through us rather than make eye contact."

Dr. Beth O'Connor to THE PERSPECTIVE

reported cases of possible child abuse connected to the syndrome as early as 2005, suggesting that some parents made their children sick to secure permanent residency. Following fraud allegations, the Swedish Parliament issued an investigative order on the syndrome in 2004.

Others, such as then-leader of the Green Party Gustav Fridolin, denied

that this would even be thinkable. Rebutting Barbo Holmberg, the then-Minister for Migration who expressed concerns about a surge in families exploiting sick children to secure residence permit, Fridolin deemed such claims as racist. There have been proven cases of patients simulating the syndrome—something which Sallin encountered in his own research, he says. "But this is not the explanation for all the cases."

Sallin feels a shift in Swedish discourse: "People started to question the previous narrative and see it [as] more nuanced now," he says. According to the researcher, this narrative has enabled a potentially



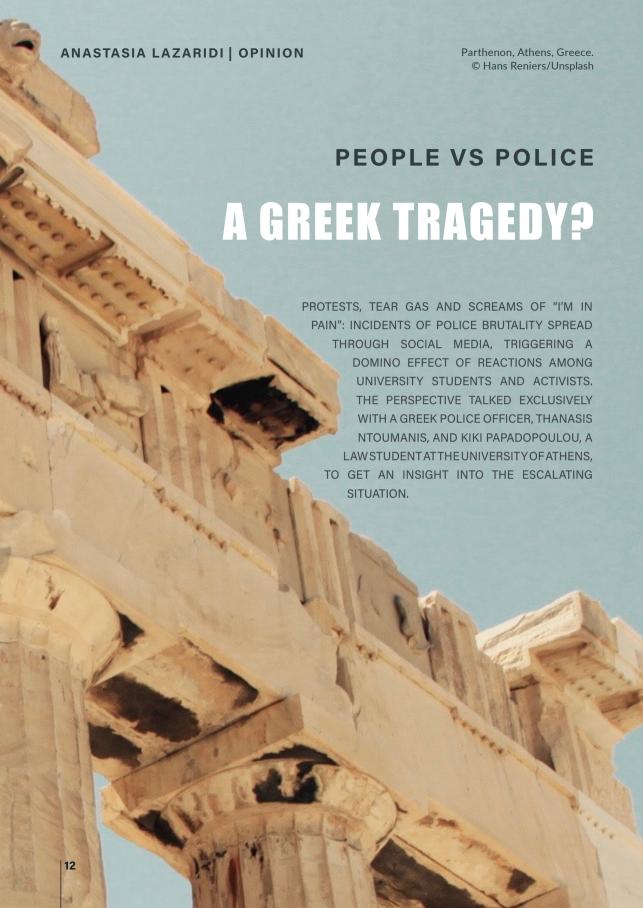
Nauru Australian Immigration Detention Center. Doctors Without Borders' psychiatrists were forced to leave Nauru in 2018, leaving them concerned about the refugees' mental health.

harmful treatment strategy: "Until now, the general idea was that the residence permit is necessary for recovery," he says. Many believe that once the family is relieved of its insecure residence status, the children become open to rehabilitation because of the newly gained security.

Sallin questions that. Anecdotal evidence—which are currently under scrutiny—indicate that residency permits may actually prevent the children from recovering. In that sense, the residency permits would work as a form of external pressure rather than a relief—or a remedy—for the syndrome. In other words: "The cure actually created the disorder," he says.

From her experience in Nauru, O'Connor sees it differently: she believes that resettling refugees permanently helps to reduce cases of resignation syndrome. "The ongoing uncertainty regarding these children's settlement will likely continue to impact their recovery," she says. Most importantly, children should stay with their parents, and separated families should get reunited in order "to allow them to rebuild their mental health."

In a YouTube clip published by Doctors Without Borders, she explains why she thinks it is necessary to work with policies instead of medical science only: "There's definitely a limit to what you can do as a mental health practitioner when it's the context that's the bigger problem."



ere we are: Modern Greece, a tourist paradise for some, a financial disaster for others, and to me: home. In early March, I boarded a plane back to Athens and the reality I faced when leaving said plane was very different compared to Sweden. A mix of cultures in my head, and being the family-designated representative of everything Swedish around the dinner table paradoxically moved me to reflect more about the current state of Greece. Casual conversations about life in the cradle of democracy often turn grim-some things are bad indeed. This love-hate relationship with our country is where magic hides, though. And who can blame us for complaining, right? Our generation has lived through so many disparities with the latest affecting not only Greece, but the whole world.

The pandemic changed the world as we knew it. But on so many occasions, it scratched pre-existing problems. The rise of police brutality has strained the relationship between Greek law enforcement and the Greek people in recent years. The murder of Alexandros Grigoropoulos, a 15-year-old student shot by a special police officer in 2008, incited violent riots that rolled not only through Greek municipalities, but more than 70 cities across the globe.

In the years that followed, cases like the brutal killing of Zak Kostopoulos, a queer performer and activist known as Zackie Oh!, who was repeatedly beaten by two officers in broad daylight in 2018, sparked a fiery debate on the mis(conduct) of the Greek police forces.

### What is Law? Baby Don't Hurt Me!

"Nobody has a more sacred obligation to obey the law than those who make the law." The words from Jean Anouilh's stage adaptation of Antigone, Sophocles' famous Greek tragedy, recall the tragic conflict between the divine and the human law Antigone faces. Her brother killed himself rebelling against the state. Her moral and ethical duty to bury her brother contradicts the political power of King Creon, who forbids the burial as a form of warning for those who think of rebelling against the state.

Today, Greece is, of course, far from the stories depicted in myths and poems. Societies have evolved. Greek gods are not worshipped anymore and justice enforcement in our society relies purely on humans, mainly in places of power. The classical drama played in my mind again and again while researching modern Greece's very own tragedy—the relationship between police forces and society, that is. As I see it, both sides have their narratives, with a great deal of disparity when it comes to the meanings of right and fair.

In my interview with police officer Thanasis, I asked him about the COVID-related guidelines. Thanasis, a member of Greek police, stated: "Our daily professional life is very different. Our priority is to make sure that COVID-19 rules are enforced, leaving most of the other matters of police enforcement on the side." He added that guidelines are not open to interpretation by the officers who enforce them—a form of an anti-corruption precaution. After all, their job is to protect the people, I suppose.

It was important for me to address the elephant in the room as early as possible, especially after law student Kiki's response, who judged recent police work, by saying: "The police quite often exhaust their authority on unimportant incidents, as when people don't use a mask in public, but they also ignore other violations which have a huge impact on spreading the virus, such as clubs or churches being open illegally."

### Police on Campus: A Trojan Horse of Authoritarianism?

In 1973, a student uprising at the Polytechnic University of Athens demanded free student elections of university bodies. Tragically, the occupation was brutally halted after the military and police forces drove a tank over the gates of the building, killing 24 students. A few months later, the seven-year-long authoritarian regime that ruled Greece came to its end. Ever since the restitution of democracy in 1974, the Greek police was completely reformed and the new "university asylum law" banned police forces from intervening on university premises. The legislation was seen as a symbol of protecting democracy and political freedom among students.

In February 2021, a new education law was passed, which predicted the creation of a special police unit serving at Greek universities. Kiki tells THE PERSPECTIVE: "I disagree with police existing within universities. They don't align with the ideals of freedom that our constitution protects. In no way should the police interfere in university matters, as this will bring about feelings of an

unsafe and oppressed environment to the students." The government, however, has argued that their decision aimed to eradicate criminal activity such as thefts and drug trafficking on campuses, thus leading to better functioning and safer academic institutions.

Student protests spreading through the Greek cities of Athens and Thessaloniki vehemently opposed the authoritarian shift mirrored by the new education bill. The police attempted to diffuse the situation by using tear gas and violence, which reached a peak on February 22nd when police officers entered the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki to evacuate the campus, leading to 33 arrests—and a civilian casualty. A video depicting a young man lying on the ground, with police officers aggressively dragging and beating him in front of other students and professors yelling to "leave him alone," quickly circulated on social media.

### Nea Smirni: Suburban Athens at the Heart of the Protests

Thanasis admitted, the relationship between people and the police changed for the worse during the



pandemic. He argued that the continuous COVID-19 regulations and restricted personal freedom, such as walking outside after curfew—combined with strict fines for disobeying emergency orders—turned people against the police. The debate on police brutality escalated in March 2021, after a viral video captured a police officer beating a 29-year old man to the ground with an iron baton while conducting a COVID-compliance check in Nea Smirni, a southern suburb of Athens.

In an interview published on March 9 in the Efsyn daily newspaper, the young man stated he was trying to defend the families sitting on the square by persuading the officers not to fine them for breaching the COVID rules. An official police statement said that the officers were in the area to check if there are restriction violations in the area. The victim's screams of "I'm in pain" that could be heard in the video quickly went viral.

The incident was followed by a demonstration of roughly 5,000 people who gathered in Nea Smyrni on March 9, marching with banners that read "Cops out of our neighborhoods." The assembly ended violently. A police officer was severely injured after being pulled off his bike and beaten by the protesters, who also attacked a police station with petrol bombs and set garbage cans on fire. The police responded with tear gas.

"Similar incidents of violence have often occurred before the pandemic. This conflict has been slowly brewing," Kiki stated, not at all surprised by the recent clashes in Nea Smirni. She also shared that violent incidents like these are bound to take place in big cities—like Athens or Thessaloniki. "In smaller cities, police officers and people know and trust each other. There is a feeling of community, which is probably lost in a big city like Athens," she believes.

Hybris, Nemesis and Catharsis: The Three Acts of a Greek Tragedy

Behind every tragic event, there is an act of *hybris*, representing the injustice in the world. In Antigone, King Creon triggers the rage of gods upon him when he acts cruelly towards the protagonist and her dead brother. Hybris is followed by *nemesis*, the divine punishment—the time when the tragic characters face their wrongdoings and are led to *catharsis*.

Catharsis means the cleansing of the soul. A tragic hero is ushered into a new state of mind, more empathetic towards others. Upon seeing his son's lifeless body, King Creon instantly regrets his past actions towards Antigone and undergoes an inner change.

In this modern Greek tragedy of people vs. police, is it the officers who committed hybris? As a citizen of Greece, I can empathize with the feeling of powerlessness. I mean, who in the world doesn't feel restricted during these strange times when Hades broke loose in the form of a pandemic? Still, the lawyer within me is trained to take into consideration the sense of duty that Thanasis and his colleagues feel—the obligation to enforce the law and to follow the rules, or else, as he confessed to me, their jobs might be at stake.

The public rage against the unprovoked and brutal attacks of the police is undeniably justified. But ancient Greek theater never saw violence. Instead, the audience would only hear off-stage screams or descriptions and see the aftermath of the act. Today, social media has made us all witness every hit of every murder, of every hybris. And we can only wish for a *deus ex machina* to bring this tale to a happy ending—to true catharsis.



IN NOVEMBER 2020, A COMPREHENSIVE BILL ON SECURITY AND POLICE FORCE SHOOK THE FRENCH PUBLIC WITH ITS "FREEDOM-VIOLATING" PROVISIONS—ESPECIALLY FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION. IN A CONVERSATION WITH THE PERSPECTIVE, JEAN-MARC LEGRAND, A POLICEMAN AND THE DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC SECURITY IN THE FRENCH TOWN OF CLAMART, AND JEAN YVES VIOLLIER, AN INDEPENDENT JOURNALIST DISSECTED THE DISPUTED LAW.

cts of resistance against the police seem to be a French speciality. "Unfortunately, this defiance exists. It is the result of some policies of repression implemented by the government, and stories on police violence—stories that are true, even if sometimes amplified by the media," Jean-Marc Legrand told THE PERSPECTIVE. The relationship between the citizens and the police is rather troubled, fueled by the yellow vests movement that infamously took over the French streets in 2018.

June 2019, Nantes. During Fête de la Musique, France's national music celebration day, 24-year-old Steve Caniço died in the midst of a police intervention. Summoned due to noise complaints, the officers raided the festival around 4 AM. Greeted with violence, the police retaliated with tear gas. Panic burst out, some people fell in the water—and Steve disappeared. Protesters quickly took over the streets, chanting, "Where is Steve?" The answer was a sad one. His body was retrieved from the Loire 38 days later.

January 2020, Paris. Four police officers conducted a routine check on a delivery man—an intervention that went terribly wrong. Caught using his mobile phone while driving, Cédric Chouviat, after allegedly resisting arrest, was knocked to the ground with his helmet on, causing a laryngeal fracture, and ultimately—death.

Yet, civilians are not the only ones subjected to violence—in May 2021, Éric Masson, a 36-year-

old policeman from Avignon, was fatally gunned down during an anti-drug check. While no convictions have been made, the two suspects were arrested while attempting to flee to Spain. "Policemen and women are victims of an outpouring of hate, relayed by social networks. Should I recall that more than one hundred fifty policemen and women commit suicide each year because of pressure and hate?" Legrand told THE PERSPECTIVE

According to the legislators, the bill in question offers French citizens "global security" as well as increased power and protection to police. On October 20, 2020, Alice Thourot and Jean-Michel Fauvergue—two members of the National Assembly, French Parliament's lower house—submitted the first draft of the "global security" law. Explaining the need for an "innovative bill," the two members of Macron's liberal-centrist *La République En Marche* party, said they wanted to implement better cooperation between different private or public security actors and equip them with "expanded means to act."

Divided into five important sections—powers of local police, private security sector, photo and video surveillance, protection of the police and transportation—the bill faced a barrage of criticism from journalists' unions including Le Syndicat national des Journalistes (SNJ) and human rights defenders. Together they created #StopLoiSecuriteGlobale, a campaign aiming to prevent the enactment of the law, especially Article 24.

### A "Freedom-Destroying" Law

Punishable by up to one year of imprisonment and a fine of €45,000, the bill wants to prohibit the broadcasting of images of police officers with malicious intent. So states Article 24 of the bill of law. The public—especially journalists—was particularly concerned with the term "malicious broadcast," and feared that it might ultimately mean any visual record of the police. "The bill is aberrant," states Jean Yves Viollier, an independent journalist and the author of *Bisque*, *Bisque*, *Basque*! blog. "If the journalists cannot capture police abuse during demonstrations, we would not be able to identify the seriousness of

certain situations. It is an absolute breach of freedom of information," Viollier tells THE PERSPECTIVE. He sees the bill as "politicians' attempt to muzzle the journalists into compliance." Despite the controversy, the French lawmakers passed the bill on November 24, 2020.

"We are supposed to be a state in which freedom of expression is respected."

Jean Yves Viollier to THE PERSPECTIVE

obliged to react quickly. Unfortunately, the law is not well structured."

The French Senate recognized these concerns and promised to address the situation. While the protests commenced, another case of police violence came to light: On November 21, a Black music producer, Michel Zecler, was assaulted by three white policemen following an unjustified dispute over Zecler not wearing a face mask. In an ironic twist of fate, the incident was video recorded by CCTV cameras and quickly circulated all over the internet. The protests prompted the government to react: on November 26, Prime Minister Castex expressed his concerns

regarding the bill, wanting to create an independent commission to rewrite it—a proposal withdrawn after receiving strong backlash from parliamentarians who felt excluded from the legislative process. However, the Senate Law Commission rewrote the text before submitting it to the French Senate on March 3, 2021.

### Retaliatory demonstrations

took place across France—in Paris, a crowd of 133,000 took to the streets and demanded an alteration of the law. Slogans such as "Global security, total impunity" or "We would love to have nothing to film" could be read on cardboards carried by the protesters. Viollier describes the bill as a "tote bag" where the lawmakers put all the possible dispositions—including Article 24—to appease police officers and give an impression of acting in line with the public. "During the yellow vests crisis, some images have stunned the public opinion—for example during the demonstration on November 18, 2018, a grenade shrapnel hit a man in his eye. Therefore, the government is

### Amending Article 24: Clashes or Ceasefire?

While the amended Article 24—now Article 52—no longer penalizes the circulation of pictures and videos that allow identification of police officers with an "aim to damage their physical or psychological integrity," it introduces a new crime with an increased sanction: provocation to identification, punishable by five years of imprisonment and a fine of €75,000. In short, disseminating imagery itself is not a crime, unless it aims to harm the officers on duty. According to the Senate, the amendment meets the legislators

and the activists halfway: it accomplishes the original bill's aims without preventing the freedom of press.

Despite the "compromise," the clashes have not ceased-not even the legislators stand united. Patrick Kanner, the President of the Socialist Party and Leader of the Opposition in the Senate, considers the law to be "useless" and "damaging the trust between the population and the police," while Senator Esther Benbassa, backed by the Green party, is concerned that the amendment unalterably undermines freedom of expression. #StopLoiSecuriteGlobale The movement. supported by human rights associations, argued that the article could prevent people from documenting police misconduct and lead to further abuse of authority. On its social media, especially Instagram, the movement encouraged people to denounce the risks and take the streets, as the law could result in press self-censorship. In fact, Article 24's definition of punishable offence is not clear: what does a "aim to harm" mean? Drafted this way, Article 24 may lead to hazardous and arbitrary interpretations. Who is to know what exactly can be reproached?

### Whistleblowers: Unchangeably Unprotected

The concerns do not cease either. The final proposal introduced by the Senate on April 7 and proclaimed by the National Assembly on April 15 increased sanctions in the case of violation of an agricultural, commercial, professional, or industrial property. But the question is: where is the connection to the original bill? The senators have quietly introduced an amendment that protects industrial properties, which has nothing to do with police security. However, associations for animal protection quickly connected the dots: the more protected the agricultural exploitations are, the more difficult the denunciation of animal abuse is—which, in numerous cases, was revealed through undercover video footage showing the unbridled cruelty inside French slaughterhouses. Last May, a slaughterhouse in the northwestern city of Briec closed its doors after video footage showing paralyzed and beaten pigs was released by a French animal welfare NGO L214. Activists and associations actively campaigned for denunciation

December 2020, Paris, France. Protest against the "global security" law.

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December 2020, Paris, France. Protest against the "global security" law.

© Koshu Kunii/Unsplash

of the secret amendement, claiming that the new addition indirectly prohibits whistleblowers from acting. In their eyes, the informants are targeted and muzzled—a claim rebutted by the right-wing senator Laurent Duplomb and 90 of his fellow Republicans, who intended to punish trespassing into slaughterhouses with 3 years imprisonment and €45,000 fine.

### **Constitutional Council: The Sacred Voice**

On April 15, the French Parliament passed the amended bill along with all of its controversies. But the law was yet to be enacted. Intending to erase all doubts concerning the alleged infringement of press liberty, Prime Minister Castex has referred the matter to the Constitutional Council—the highest constitutional authority in France. On April 20, more than 90 members of the National Assembly, supported by journalists' unions and the Human Rights League, questioned the Constitutional Council on the legality of the "global security" bill. Just a month after, the Council found the articles to be contrary to the Constitution—including Article 24 (now Article 52), which was

deemed unclear, constituting a threat to the principles of the Republic. Some fragments were banned due to the absence of any direct link to security—the offense against the whistleblowers being one of them. "A semi-victory for freedom, a humiliation for the government" stated #StopLoiSecuriteGlobale, happy with the turn of events—despite the regret over some articles not being scraped. For example, the Council did not find any problem allowing police officers to carry their weapons off duty-encouraging the growing militarization of public space. "The most important problem is the use of arms which leads to growing repression and violence, and scandalizes foreign observers because we are supposed to be a state in which freedom of expression is respected," said Jean-Yves Viollier, sharing his concerns with THE PERSPECTIVE. When it comes to the government, the pill is hard to swallow: On May 20, Gérald Darmanin, French Interior Minister, tweeted that he intended to take up the contested provisions with the Prime Minister. Despite the humiliation, the government has something to celebrate: the law-albeit without the rejected articles-was enacted on May 25, 2021.



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### RECKLESS LICENSING OR THE FUTURE OF ENERGY INDEPENDENCE?

### BEHIND GEORGIA'S NAMAKHVANI HYDROPOWER PLANT PROJECT

t's been more than 200 days since the residents of several villages in Western Georgia's Rioni Gorge have been protesting against the construction of the Namakhvani Hvdropower Plant (HPP), the largest energy project set to be implemented in Georgia since the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Fearful for their safety, the protesters have been taking shifts in tents near the construction site to prevent what they believe will bring devastating environmental and social impact.

The Georgian government insists that the HPP is crucial for Georgia's energy independence without delivering solid explanations to citizens. Unwilling—or unable—to provide proof that the protesters' fears are irrational, it has instead sent police to violently disperse the protests.

Meanwhile, human rights and environmental groups stand by the protesters, convinced that the government has not thoroughly investigated the environmental and social impact of the project. They even claim that the project benefits only the construction company to the detriment of the country's resources and interests.

### Georgian Energy System Depends on Hydropower

Namakhvani HPP is being implemented in Georgia by ENKA Renewables, a Turkish company, with a direct foreign investment of \$800 million. The project encompasses two separate HPPs on the river Rioni: the Lower Namakhvani HPP (333 MW) and the Upper Namakhvani HPP (100 MW), enough to increase annual domestic generation by 15%, according to ENKA Renewables. The reservoir surfaces of the HPPs are 5,1 km² and 1 km², respectively.

Georgia uses a variety of resources for generating energy.

In 2020 alone, approximately 74% of total energy generation came from HPPs, followed by thermal plants (25%) and wind power plants (1%). HPPs generate excess power during wet seasons and struggle to generate enough during dry seasons. Because of such fluctuation, Georgia imports energy from neighboring countries. In 2020, it imported a total of 12% of its energy from Azerbaijan, Russia and Turkey.

In 2020, Georgia generated only 87% of its energy domestically. According to ENKA Renewables, Namakhvani HPP is a project of strategic importance for Georgia, because it will meet 20% of peak demand in the country. The company also promised to create jobs for local residents. In January 2021, Georgian Minister of Economy Natia Turnava said that Namakhvani HPP is an important project for the sustainability of Georgia's energy system.

Maka Suladze, together with Rioni Gorge residents carrying a cross to the construction despite opposition from police. © Sopho Aptsiauri/Publika.ge



"We do not have oil. The resource that we have in abundance is water. We should make the most out of it in order not to be dependent on this dynamic and challenging region. Because of this, our green energy is very important, we should develop our own hydro energy. Therefore, we are doing everything to support this project," says Turnava.

But at what cost should the HPP be built? What is at stake? These are some of the questions the residents from Rioni Gorge are still demanding answers to. Despite calls for transparency, the Georgian government refused to publicize the contract with the company and said that it is confidential. Local media and rights groups have uncovered the official documents, questioning who will really benefit from the project.

### What is at Stake?

"I will not leave my land willingly. Over my dead body," says Maka Suladze, the resident of village Mekvena in Georgia's Imereti region. She is among over 100 families to be displaced if the HPP is built. She has refused the generous compensation she said she was offered by the company in exchange for abandoning her household. "Had the government convinced me that my sacrifice is necessary for my country's development, I was ready to make this sacrifice even without compensation. However, they couldn't convince me that this project is beneficial," states Suladze. Skepticism towards the project has united protes-

ters in the Save the Rioni Gorge grassroots movement. They are backed by environmental and human rights groups, which have raised questions about the lawfulness and the benefits of the Namakhvani HPP. "I can't believe that giving such a large piece of land to the company for 99 years and the remaining large part in permanent ownership serves the country's economic development. It's very hard to believe that this serves anything good at all," says Marita Museliani, another protester from the Save the Rioni Gorge movement.

Green Alternative, a non-governmental environmental organization, uncovered that the company was granted ownership of a large piece of land. The group insists that the construction is illegal because it hasn't fulfilled the demands of the Ministry of Environment.

Irakli Macharashvili, the representative of Green Alternative, told THE PERSPECTIVE that the Georgian government had granted the company a construction permit before it would conduct the environmental impact assessment, which goes against all logic. "This is a key moment here because the government has given the land for construction to the company for the duration of a whole century, without being certain that the project is safe. The government became the hostage of its own decision because it wouldn't be able to reject the project, no matter how poorly the company conducted the environmental impact assessment," says Macharashvili.

"I can't believe that giving such a large piece of land to the company for 99 years and the remaining large part in permanent ownership serves the country's economic development."

Marita Museliani to THE PERSPECTIVE



Kutaisi, Georgia's second-largest city. Experts say the new hydroplant might put the city at risk if an earthquake would occur because its location is only a few kilometres away.

© Michael Bourgault/Unsplash

The main concern regarding the environmental impact assessment, Macharashvili says, is that the government hasn't conducted a cost-benefit analysis. "The law requires the impact on ecosystems and social environment be measured and contrasted with the benefits. When no such comparison exists, it is impossible to prove that the project is necessary and beneficial. We don't know whether we will win or lose from this project," explains Macharashvili.

According to Green Alternative, Georgia could face severe negative impacts concerning the local wine production due to potential change of microclimate, the flooding of forests or the rare self-sustaining population of sturgeons in Rioni river—whose protection is Georgia's responsibility under the Bern Convention and the Association Agreement with the EU.

Experts believe that the possibility of heightened

seismic risks hasn't been thoroughly considered either. According to the Institute of Earth Sciences, a magnitude 7 earthquake was registered in the region in 1991, while the HPP would barely withstand a magnitude 5 earthquake. Since the HPP is set to be built just a few kilometers away from Kutaisi, Georgia's second largest city, the consequences could be severe.

"Under such risks, the local population and the whole country is endangered," warns the Institute of Earth Sciences in their March 2020 statement.

### Who Will Benefit from the Namakhvani HPP?

Until 2021, the agreement between the Georgian government and ENKA Renewables, signed two years prior, was not made public. The details of the contract were published in February by Ifact, a group of investigative journalists. The Social Justice Centre, a Georgian rights group, analyzed the contract and found that the project will

### "Big construction projects are accompanied with big interests."

Irakli Macharashvili to THE PERSPECTIVE

be detrimental to the country: the project won't contribute to Georgia's energy security but will imply heavy and indefinite fiscal burdens on the country's budget.

"The analysis of the agreement shows that the company is actually using Georgia's natural resources free of charge and does not take on an obligation to sell energy on the domestic market, which overturns the arguments of the country's energy security or even economic benefits," Social Justice Centre, a local human rights NGO concluded. According to the contract, they elaborated, the government is obliged to compensate the company should it suffer damages beyond the control of the state.

Social Justice Centre's concerns were exacerbated by another document, the Opinion of the Ministry of Justice on the Namakhvani HPP project, which was uncovered in February by local media group Mtis Ambebi. In the report, the Ministry criticizes the scale of commitments undertaken by the government whilst, "On the other hand, [the company's] rights are protected to the maximum extent and its responsibilities and obligations are limited."

"There can be a wide variety of interests," Macharashvili from the Green Alternative tells THE PERSPECTIVE.

"It's hard to say decisively when you don't have proof. But looking at how many violations the government has turned a blind eye to, it's logical that somebody has interests, right? Big construction projects are accompanied with big interests," he adds.

However, not everyone sees so many risks. Murman Margvelashvili, director of energy research organization World Experience for Georgia (WEG), believes that Namakhvani HPP is an opportunity to reduce reliance on imports and reduce energy deficits. He described it as "one of the most important energy projects in Georgia."

"After the 15-year redemption period, it will become a cheap local source of energy. The station will create an emergency reserve for the system and store a significant amount of water to fill the energy shortage. It will replace expensive imports with peak generation and strengthen Georgia's regional integration capabilities," explains Margvelashvili. He elaborated that it is impossible to fully replace Namakhvani HPP with other sources such as solar, wind and smaller hydropower plants as they are more expensive and can't provide the same benefits.

### Peaceful Protest is Met with Police Violence

On October 29, 2020, the residents of Rioni Gorge carried a large cross to the construction site of the HPP and planted it in the ground—a gesture of protection for their land. Ever since, they have been demanding the company to cease construction and to leave the Rioni Gorge. For several months now, they have been holding peaceful demonstrations near the construction site which were violently dispersed by police on numerous occasions.

The Georgian government has notoriously used police violence against protesters, especially in demonstrations against HPP projects. They have

also instrumentalized pro-government media in demonizing the Save the Rioni Gorge Movement, by attempting to portray their protests as xenophobic or coordinated by Russia.

Eventually, in response to the backlash against the project, on April 24 the government announced a "9–12 months moratorium" on the construction of the Namakhvani project until additional feasibility and safety research would be done. However, ENKA Renewables continues to operate on the site, which they call "preparatory work."

"You don't know the kind of things we have to put up with. For example, a governor or other official comes. They believe that they are better than us. We, the residents of this gorge, feel this. It is humiliating when the officials elected by you come and tell you that they know better. When somebody dares to resist, they'll be silenced with batons," Varlam Goletiani, the 28 year-old leader of the Save the Rioni Gorge movement told local media group Radio Tavisupleba.

On May 26, after holding a series of demonstrations in the Georgian capital, the movement re-

turned to Gumati village to resume their protest. They were—again—met with iron barricades, set up by police, blocking their way towards the construction site.

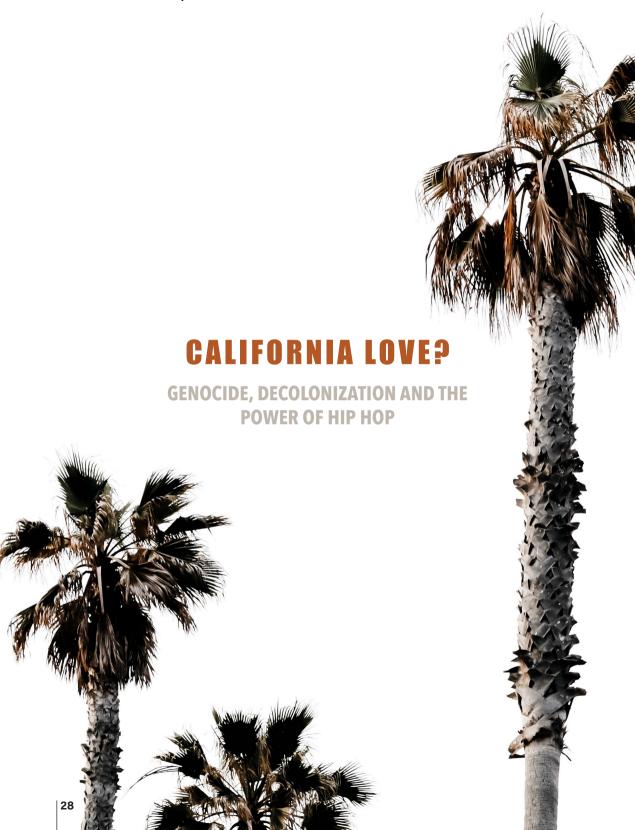
Now that the movement has gained thousands of supporters across the country, the dilemma of Namakhvani HPP has become the subject of national debate. Despite assurance on safety and law abidance from ENKA Renewables, the protesters don't just take their word for it. They say the government, not the company, should be talking to them and that they are not giving up their land for nothing.

The government's moratorium on the construction will end in April 2022 at the latest. Meanwhile, the residents of Rioni Gorge hope that the government will be more transparent about the project that has transformed their lives: they need assurance that the changes that are to come are for the better, not the worse.

Left: Mini hydropower plant on the Rioni river, Racha region. © UNDP in Georgia/Alex Turdziladze Right: A hydroelectric dam on the Inguri River. © Alex Bagirov/Unsplash







LOS ANGELES. HOLLYWOOD. THE PACIFIC OCEAN. PALM TREES. I ASSUME YOU KNOW WHAT EACH OF THESE PLACES AND THINGS ARE. HOW ABOUT TOVAANGAR, YAANGA, PAYMI, KUUKAMONGA? NO? WELCOME TO YOUR FIRST LESSON ON THE CALIFORNIA GENOCIDE AND AND INTERVIEW WITH INDIGENOUS HIP HOP ARTIST AND ACTIVIST JAGUAR ARREOLA. YOU ARE ABOUT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT DECOLONIZATION AND MUSIC IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA, COURTESY OF THE PERSPECTIVE.

hat is commonly known as Los Angeles, was once called Yaanga. It is located in Tovaangar, the unceded territory of the Tongva people, who to this day fight for federal recognition despite being one of the most well-documented Indigenous groups in California. Paymi is one of four sacred rivers in Tovaangar—or what we know as the Los Angeles River, famous for high-speed car scenes and its concrete encasement. Kuukamonga is now called Rancho Cucamonga and is situated in the far end of Tovaangar, unabashedly named the Inland Empire.

Though Rancho Cucamonga at least retains a semblance of its historical name, the addition of *rancho* is loaded with memory of the Spanish colonial land grab. It is amongst a few places in Southern California whose name retains the history of its Indigenous inhabitants. The discontinuity of place-names, ecological knowledge and culture is not coincidental. Colonization by the Spanish, Mexicans, and then, finally, Americans, has ravaged the life of California's Indigenous peoples.

### The Ghosts of California's Past

The Spaniards enslaved Indigenous peoples to construct churches—known as the California Missions—and work the fields. The Missions served two grand purposes: to physically mark the land as Spanish and to convert the Indigenous peoples to Catholicism. After gaining independence

from Spain, Mexicans took control of California, abolished the Mission system and allowed all Indigenous peoples to become citizens as long as they continued their conversion to Catholicism and learned Spanish. The return of land was promised—but in a majority of cases it was never fulfilled. After the Mexican-American War of 1848, the Americans took over California and coercively signed land tenure treaties with Indigenous peoples. However, these were never ratified in Congress which means that the Indigenous land continues to be illegally occupied.

While acts of genocide were committed under both Spanish and Mexican rule, it was under American occupation that the final blow was dealt to California's Indigenous populations. Peter Hardenman Burnett, the state's first governor, said in 1851: "That a war of extermination will continue to be waged between the races until the Indian race becomes extinct must be expected... While we cannot anticipate this result but with painful regret, the inevitable destiny of the race is beyond the power or wisdom of man to avert."

Sanctioned by law, American settlers faced little obstacles in enslaving and murdering Indigenous peoples while colonizing their lands. Between the years 1846 and 1900, the Indeginous population of California was decimated from 150,000 to 15,000 through a mix of state-sponsored campaigns, vigilante groups, and poor health conditions. This does not include those who died from hunger or disease, nor the children who were abducted to be raised by white parents or forced into residential schools,

nor the rape of Indeginous women forced to carry the children of colonizers to term.

### "We Didn't Cross the Border, the Border Crossed Us"

Some Indigenous peoples have won important victories concerning land rights in the United States, such as the Lakota in the Black Hills. Many Indigenous groups in California, however, have yet to even obtain federal recognition. The complicated history of waves of colonialism and genocide have made Indigenous peoples minorities on their own lands. Additionally, if we take the United Nations' 1994 Human Development Report as a baseline for what constitutes human security, we see two important violations happening in Tovaangar:

First, as the report notes, "Indigenous groups often lose their traditional freedom of movement." The imposition of militarized borders on unceded land results in exactly this. Lack of federal recognition of indigenous identity extends beyond those with lineages placing them in Tovaangar—the indigenous identity of those originating in Mexican territory or other nearby Mesoamerican countries is unrecognized, too. This is despite vast historical evidence



of trade, migration, and war linking the Indigenous cultures of Mesoamerica and North America, and even further—to those of South America. There is a popular saying critiquing the borders characteristic of modern nation-states: "We didn't cross the border, the border crossed us."

Many Indigenous activists find that the United States' foreign policy over the past few decades has disrupted societal cohesion in México and Mesoamerica. The United States' involvement in right-wing coups, protection of the interests of transnational corporations that violate human rights, and manipulation of free-trade policies have all contributed to various generational diasporas of Mexicans and Mesoamericans. Promised with a better quality of life in the United States, many of them now call Yaanga and the rest of Tovaangar home.

Yet, in recent years, the increasing militarization of the US-Mexican border, family separation policies, forced sterilization and demonization in the media has created a hostile climate for Indigenous refugees.

Second, according to the report there are two fundamental freedoms that describe human security: freedom from fear and freedom from want. If these are genuine for all peoples, then the freedom from fear and freedom from want must be decolonial because the institutional legacies of colonialism, such as the capitalist economy, patriarchy, and the continuous subversion of Indigenous cosmologies by Abrahamic religions, are incompatible.

### Hablan de Jaguar: They Talk About Jaguar

To get a grasp on the realities of Indigenous peoples living in Tovaangar and the decolonial movement, THE PERSPECTIVE reached out to Jaguar Arreola, an Indigenous hip hop artist and activist from the Inland Empire, Southern California. Jaguar

Jaguar poses in his hip hop regalia. Inland Empire, California, February 5, 2021. © Jaguar Arreola

is of Otomi and Purhepecha descent, whose traditional territories are in the states of Guanajuato and Michoacán, México. Through hip hop, he creates "timeless art" that is "celebrating our people and voice our experience to the world because we're linked to a global struggle against colonialism in all of its forms." Alongside fellow Purhepecha artist, Native Threat, Jaguar is also one-half of the hip hop duo Kozmik Force.

Hip hop—and the likes of Snoop Doog, The Game and Easy E—has been with Jaguar since he was a child. He credits his friend DBZ Swavey as the first person believing in him, allowing him to record his initial track in January of 2016, and ultimately, laying the basis for his musical endeavours with messages of militant and cultural empowerment.

This is in contrast to a mainstream expectation of materialist content and a music industry that, in Jaguar's view, would never push a message as "anti-colonial, unpatriotic, and anti-capitalist" as his. Because of Jaguar's political stance and lyrics, he dons a pre-Hispanic Otomi inspired mask to conceal his identity. The teal on his mask represents the colors of his ancestors' regalia. "It matters less who I am. My ideas and art and message are what matters. I am not the first with these messages of anticolonial struggle and I will not be the last," explains Jaguar, who is using his 22k-follower-boosting Instagram account as a platform to spread awareness, too.

Despite this critical view of the mainstream music industry and his five-years-ago start, Jaguar continues to find success in performing around the hip hop scene in Tovaangar, collaborating with other Indigenous artists, receiving praise from big names in underground hip hop such as El Vuh and Immortal Technique, and being featured in a number of interviews for local publications and podcasts. In addition to a series of single tracks, he

recently released a full-length album titled *Maria's Seed*. "Music is EVERYTHING to me. I literally only think of recording my next track. It's complete freedom. It allows me to turn into a monster, a villain, an anti-hero, an armed militant in a [Mesoamerican] jungle for five minutes to tell a story about reality... I know that I have a story to tell from my perspective... The perspective of an Indigenous person from the so-called New World where Christopher Columbus was found lost on our Caribbean shores," he says.

### The Micro and the Macro: Decolonial Living

According to Jaguar, hip hop has always had a close relationship with decolonization, referencing its close ties to Black Consciousness and Pan-Africanism when people began "speaking in slang or vernacular that only our hip hop community can understand. I see that as speaking in code so that the colonizer doesn't understand us." While there are many different cultures and peoples in the hip hop community, Jaguar acknowledges that "hip hop is a Black art. I celebrate that, it's decolonial—as it had many of us change our government names to a street name." He continues: "The education that my Africano brothers were giving me on the mic about white supremacist systems really made me reflect on my own Native peoples' experience with white terrorism."

A staunch critic of the United States' foreign policy, the capitalist economy and Christianity, Jaguar highlights two levels of decolonization inspired by the Osage scholar Jimmy Lee Beason II: the micro and the macro. On a micro-level, he has returned to a more traditional way of eating, practicing ancestral agriculture and getting his "anatomy physically ready to defend [his] community by any means necessary." A part of this physical preparation is staying sober. "Colonial authorities did not want me sober. Colonial forces did not want me to



recover from my cultural amnesia... But I know who I am and I know that my people have been here for thousands of years before the US, Canada, and the Republic of México existed. I'm indigenous to North America and I will always honor the blood that colonizers tried to erase from the face of the earth," he tells THE PERSPECTIVE.

On the macro-level, Jaguar discusses pan-Indigenous solidarity. Not just in North America—but across nations all over the world that are "under the colonial boot of capitalist fascists." Decolonization aims to support Indigenous sovereignty, remove colonial borders, and practice food sovereignty. Part of this effort means "abolishing the police, capitalism, border patrol and the colonial military." He relates his struggle to that of indigenous Palestinians. "Undoubtedly, Palestine is holy land and so is our entire continent, Turtle Island [North America]," which includes Yaanga. He continues, "Yaanga is one of the world's largest Native reservations. It's literally full of Indigenous peoples, whether Tongva, Tatavium, Chumash, Juaneño, or the Mesoamerican

diaspora from south of the colonial border."

While not Tongva himself, Jaguar is proud of his conversations with "the original people." It is key for him to "always acknowledge the origins of the people whose land [he's] on and build with them." Through hip hop, he supports "the Yaanga peoples' fight against colonialism in all of its forms."

Talking about decolonization, the Western-based readership of the magazine, and Sweden, Jaguar concludes the interview saying:

"Educate yourselves about the involvement and complicitness that Sweden has played into European colonization and Western imperialism. It is important that we acknowledge and teach about the harm that 'New Sweden' committed against the many East Coast Indigenous tribes of Turtle Island and parts of the Caribbean. Inform yourselves and advocate for the causes related to #mmiw #abolishice #abolishpolice #tinyhousewarriors #blacklivesmatter #stopasianhate #kidsincages and all other intersectional fights. I send my love from occupied Tongva and Yuhaviatam territory."

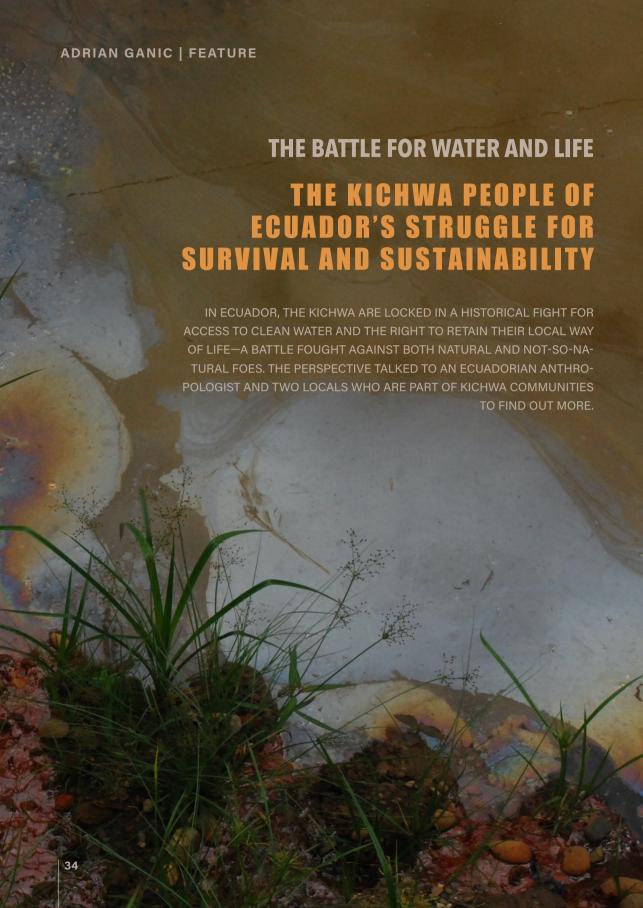
# Middle Eastern Studies Centre for Advanced

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here is a Kichwa saying that goes:
"When an indigenous community
goes looking for water, Mother Nature always reaps one sacrifice." This
could be, like most sayings, seen as a
bit of an overstatement, but it is not far from the
truth. While different Kichwa communities across
Ecuador may face different types of challenges,
their quest for water and life remains the same.

#### Fragile Andean Ecosystems

The Páramos are alpine tundra ecosystems often referred to as "water factories." Their humid climate and high altitude function as a sponge that absorbs water and lets it flow down the mountains, creating natural sources of freshwater. Their spongy qualities make the Páramos important for water supply in Ecuador's mountainous regions: They are the main water provider to the Quito metropolitan area, home to around five million people.

Mining in these fragile ecosystems has caused their climate to change. For Arawi Ruiz, the Director of the Kichwa Academy of the Humanities who identifies as Kichwa-Otavalo, the change is visible through his kitchen window. "I live in Quito, 2,900 meters above sea level. I have a volcano right in front of my house that I see every morning. When I was a child, the mountainside was covered in snow. Now, with every year that passes, I see less and less snow."

Still, the mining industry remains an important part of Ecuador's economy because of its growth potential. In 2020 alone, it generated \$810 million in exports, \$430 million in taxes and \$374 million in foreign direct investment. Proponents of mining praise the financial possibilities, saying it will create national wealth and make Ecuador a mining power able to rival Peru and Colombia.

But the Kichwa measure wealth differently: "For us, wealth is pure air, clean water, an abundance of fish and mammals, healthy lands, peace, and tranquility," explains Franco Viteri, one of the leaders of the Kichwa-Sarayaku community and former president of the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of the Ecuadorian Amazon.

#### Indigenous Water Governance

The Chocó Andino Reserve, northwest of Quito, is one of the latest battlegrounds for these contrasting ideologies. The area falls victim to illegal mining and extreme levels of deforestation. At the same time, the Chocò is vital for the Kichwa communities living in the Andean valleys in the region, who use the local waterways not only as a source of drinking water but also as hunting grounds and sanitation facilities. "These villages are remote but close to the Chocó, meaning that if the ecosystem is affected, so too are the Kichwa villages," Ruiz warns.

The Kichwa, along with other indigenous communities inhabiting the Andes, have developed independent ways of governing the scarce freshwater supplies. This means that communities in mountainous areas are "usually in constant struggle with government officials, as they demand the state to recognize local ways of accessing, distributing and using water," notes María Belén, a postdoctoral scholar at the Center of Environmental Futures at the University of Oregon.

#### Oil Drilling in the Ecuadorian Amazon

In the Amazon, large-scale petroleum extraction operations have marked the biggest threat to indigenous peoples' way of life ever since oil was first discovered in the region in 1967. Since then, Ecuador's economy has become increasingly dependent on it. "Fortunes were made

during the high price of oil in Ecuador between 2007–2013. The government increased subsidies and at the same time, oil extraction increased at a pace and scale not seen before," Belén tells THE PERSPECTIVE.

Selling crude petroleum is lucrative. In 2019, it was Ecuador's biggest industry, accounting for slightly more than a third of the country's total exports. This economic development has ecological consequences: Last year, 57,000 liters of petrol spilled into the Coca and Napo rivers, directly affecting Kichwas from 105 communities.

This is far from an isolated incident. In an ecological disaster known as the "Amazon Chernobyl," the oil company Texaco was accused of dumping at least 68 billion liters of toxic waste and 64 million liters of crude oil—equivalent to roughly 27,000 Olympic-sized swimming pools—on sensi-

Chocó Andino
Quito
Giana Micro Mino
Sarayaku territora

Approximate locations of the Napa River, Coca River, Chocó Andino, Sarayaku territory, and Texaco's alleged oil spills and Quito.

© NordNordWest/Wikimedia Commons

tive rainforest soil between 1964-1992.

After a controversial verdict, Texaco was cleared of responsibility by the international tribunal in The Hague in 2018.

Texaco may be long gone, but the region is still reaping its poisoned fruit. Micro-spills plague the region, reportedly occurring as often as every two to three days. Just like in the Andean valleys, the Kichwa living in the Amazon depend on the local waterways for their survival. "We need healthy rivers because they supply us with water and fish, the main staple food of the Amazon," Viteri says.

## Civic Upheaval, *Buen Vivir* and Fruitless Countermeasures

To counteract pollution and environmental degradation, the Ecuadorian government has taken

steps such as banning gas flaring, decreasing mining concessions and, most notably, granting nature constitutional rights in 2008. The constitutional amendment dubbed *Buen Vivir* (Well Living) was met with praise upon ratification but has since come under scrutiny as it has not been able to prevent environmental hazards. Ruiz and Viteri agree—*Buen Vivir* may be a good idea on paper, but no government has ever respected it in practice.

The shortcomings of measures intended to protect the environment have inspired numerous indigenous protests and uprisings related to clean water and sanitation accessibility, such as the case of the Amazonian Kichwa-Sarayaku community.

In 1996, the Ecuadorian government allowed oil companies to drill in Sarayaku territory. But after a long legal fight, the Sarayaku succeeded in pushing the petroleum operations out of their territory. In 2012, Ecuador's government acknowledged responsibility for illegally licensing an undisclosed oil company. Later the same year, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACHR) also ruled in Sarayaku's favor. The court demanded that Ecuador consult with the Sarayaku on any future oil operations on their lands and compensate them for physical and "moral" damages.

Franco Viteri was one of the driving forces behind the lawsuit and a key witness during the IACHR trial. Almost ten years later, his personal conviction remains the same: "A lack of understanding and knowledge of cultural diversity and different ways of living has resulted in a lack of protective public policies."

#### **Echoes of Extractivist Colonialism**

This "lack of understanding" symbolizes a much larger and older conflict between the Kichwa and the capitalist nation-state—a dispute tracing back to the arrival of the first Spanish conquistadors in the early 16th century. "Indigenous communities have always been seen as groups of people hindering Ecuador's development," Ruiz states. Adding that through an environmental lens, the indigenous movement is "more modern than the so-called modern people with European heritage who run this country. The people in power do not want to diversify the economy—they just want to depend on oil and minerals."

While this might be true, lawmakers may not have much of a choice. Ecuador's economy shrank by 9% in 2020 due to the pandemic, and the country's national debt accounts for 63% of its total GDP.

"For us, wealth is pure air, clean water, an abundance of fish and mammals, healthy lands, peace, and tranquility."

Franco Viteri to THE PERSPECTIVE

"The economic crisis Ecuador is experiencing forces any government to not only keep extracting [oil and minerals] but furthering extraction, especially after the economic wounds left by COVID-19", Belén states. This only worsens the Kichwa's already vulnerable position as their communities are disproportionately affected by the negative ecological consequences of increased mining and oil drilling.

The newly elected conservative president Guillermo Lasso has promised to construct thousands of social housing units for indigenous communities and intends to audit the "environmental costs" of oil drilling in the Yasuni National Park. But Ruiz does not think Lasso's electoral victory will change any societal conditions for the Kichwa. Making a bleak prediction about the future, he concludes by saying: "2022 will come at us hard. The battle for life will keep going, and I believe there is a big chance of another indigenous uprising, with people getting beaten and killed as a consequence."

When it comes to the battle for water, experts and locals share the same sentiment: In the end, the issue affects indigenous communities and large cities alike, and it needs to be dealt with sooner rather than later. If not, Mother Nature will inevitably, as the saying goes, reap more sacrifices.

# SHEIK JARRAH AND ELECTION POLITICS

# ARE WE WITNESSING THE THIRD PALESTINIAN INTIFADA?



THE WORLD'S ATTENTION TURNED TO JERUSALEM ON MAY 10 WHEN ISRAELI FORCES STORMED THE HOLY AL-AQSA MOSQUE. A TREE CAUGHT FIRE, GIVING THE ILLUSION THAT THE 1300-YEAR-OLD PLACE OF WORSHIP WAS ABLAZE. ROCKETS WERE LAUNCHED BY HAMAS FROM GAZA INTO WESTERN JERUSALEM AND ISRAEL RETALIATED WITH AIR RAIDS, KILLING BOTH MILITANT OPERATIVES AND HUNDREDS OF CIVILIANS, MARKING THE WORST OUTBREAK OF VIOLENCE SINCE 2014.

ut let us first take a few steps back. The year is 1987, two decades into the Israeli occupation of Palestine, and the Israel Defense Forces vehicle kills four Palestinians in an accident. The resultant Palestinian protests are violently repressed by Israel, escalating into a four-year-long popular uprising, leaving 2,000 dead: the first Palestinian Intifada. Intifada comes from the Arabic term nafada, meaning "shake off" or "get rid of."

Next: the year is 2000. Several peace talks between Israel and Palestine fail and a provocative visit to Temple Mount by Israeli opposition leader Ariel Sharon follows. Subsequent Palestinian protests become violently repressed—this time with twice the number of casualties than in 1987—and escalations lead to five years of violence, later labeled as Al-Aqsa Intifada.

The year is now 2021 and we are witnessing the start of the third Palestinian Intifada—or of another Gaza War. Sheikh Jarrah dominated news media outlets across the globe in the week preceding May 10. It is the name of

Palestinian neighborhood in
East Jerusalem,
sold to a right-wing settler group

by the Israeli government. Their reason: Jews bou-

ght parts of the neighborhood from Palestinians under the Ottoman rule in 1876. Several deals have been both made and disputed since then, and many Palestinian families have been forcefully evicted from their homes. Over the years, small protests continued to happen over this housing conflict, but they grew larger during Ramadan 2021 as the Israeli Supreme Court edged closer to a decision on the legal rights of six Palestinian families in the neighborhood (postponed at the time of the writing).

The origins of the recent unrest—not the larger conflict—could be traced to a video posted on TikTok, only two days after the start of Ramadan, in mid--April. The footage shows a Palestinian teenager slapping two unsuspecting ultra-orthodox boys on the Jerusalem light rail; the teen was arrested a day later. The viral video caused Israeli outrage and resulted in anti-Palestinian attacks by groups of mainly young, ultra-nationalist mobs who actively searched for Palestinians on the streets. Far-right Israelis marched through Jerusalem's city center chanting "Death to Arabs"—Arabs being a label used to deny Palestinians' historical claim to the landall while Palestinians faced movement restrictions. Tensions escalated until the breaking point of May 10-in the following eleven days, more than 200 lost their lives, the majority of which were Palestinian.

## What Does Netanyahu's Election Politics Have to Do with This?

The Israeli government has been led by the Prime Minister and chairman of LIKUD, the National-Liberal movement, Benjamin Netanyahu since 2009. In March, Israel held their fourth election in only two years due to the parties' inability to convert the election results into a majority government. After Netanyahu once again failed to form a government,



Jerusalem. © Robert Bye/Unsplash

the opposition leader—Yair Lapid from the centrist party Yesh Atid—was saddled with the task on May 5 and announced a new coalition government June 3. During the election years, however, Netanyahu increased both demolitions of Palestinian homes and constructing Israeli settlements on the occupied territory. This could be interpreted as simple appeasement of right-wing voters, since it only worsens the outlooks on a two-state solution between Israel and Palestine.

May 10, only five days after Lapid was tasked with forming a government, marked the Israeli "Jerusalem Day," which celebrates taking control of the city after the Six-Day War in 1967. While a tree was burning on the Al-Aqsa compound after police had shot tear gas into the mosque during prayer, a large crowd of Israelis played music and commemorated the occupation of Jerusalem.

For Netanyahu, pushing for complete control over Jerusalem and evicting Palestinians was beneficial considering the elections. Why? Not only is he facing charges of bribery and fraud, but half of all religious Israelis and 23% of secular Israelis indicated support for stripping Arab Israelis of their

citizenship, according to a recent poll conducted by the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Even after hundreds of rockets have been fired from both Israel and the isolated Gaza Strip, Netanyahu displayed no signs of attempting to deescalate the situation. On May 11, the Prime Minister stated on national television that Israel would "increase even more the strength of the strikes and also the rate of the strikes," while Hamas, the Islamic Resistance Movement—or a terrorist group, depending on who you ask—and the de facto governing authority of the Gaza Strip, has expressed interest in de-escalating the situation. As of June 4, the US and Egypt have stepped in to facilitate negotiations, prompting a ceasefire and a potential prisoner exchange. The tensions are, however, still high and the risk of reignition will not douse for a long time.

#### ...And What About the Palestinian Elections?

Palestine's political landscape is equally tumultuous. In late April, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas postponed the first parliamentary and presidential elections in 15 years.. The decision was met with harsh criticism from the opposition party Hamas, who argued that Palestine should host

an election in East Jerusalem regardless of Israel's permission. As of today, Palestinians younger than 34 have not voted in a national election—a staggering 75% of the population. The elections could be an opportunity for the new generation of voters—roughly 50% of Palestine's eligible electorate—to finally unite the country under democratically elected (and, widely hoped, younger) leaders against the Israeli oppression.

In the November issue of THE PERSPECTIVE, the Palestinian Ambassador to Sweden spoke exclusively about the then-forthcoming elections. However, Palestinians faced yet another disappointment as this was, or still is, the fifth attempt at holding the nation-wide democratic elections in Palestine. With the Israeli non-response of allowing the vote to proceed in East Jerusalem, election processes remain difficult.

Will Palestine hold an election without East Jerusalem? If those voters are ignored, could the move be interpreted as Palestine discarding its claim to the city as their capital? And if the elections happen after all, how could the government ensure the accuracy of the results? These questions continue to plague the goal of a democratic Palestine, and do not ease tensions between Hamas and the ruling, secular, non-violent party Fatah.

#### So, What Now?

While at the beginning of June 2021 the situation is still unfolding, the recent violence and death toll is

the worst since the 2014 Gaza War. In only eleven days, more than 200 lives were lost. The two previous Palestinian intifadas did happen in the then--occupied Gaza Strip. However, since 2005 it has been under a blockade which makes similar intifadas improbable without Israeli forces within Gaza to protest against. The only option is to march to its guarded walls, but this did not prove to be successful during protests 2018-2019. Should the violence reach the same intensity as this recent May-possibly in Jerusalem instead of Gaza-and for a longer period of time, the casualties will be higher than ever before. But the lessons of 2014 hold out hope for the ceasefire. Then again, the two Palestinian intifadas were several years long, and only the future will tell if May 10 was the beginning of an intermittent war or "simply" constitutes a power battle within Israeli politics.

Going forward, how US funding to Israel might change will be a key development in the international support of Israel. This is due to voices within the Democratic Party against the funding of Palestinian evictions, or the killing of Palestinian children for that matter. Israel's new government's behavior and a shift in Hamas' popular support considering the recent destruction of Gaza could inform short-term observations. While the history of this conflict is long and complex, the dynamics of the occupation shift slowly.

Whether or not the current situation indicates a long-lasting turn for the worse, or if it deescalates as quickly as it escalated, remains to be seen.



STORM SURGES AND SEA LEVEL RISE THREATEN THE FRAGILE ECOSYSTEM OF KIRIBATI'S ISLANDS—AND THE LIVELIHOOD OF ITS CITIZENS. IN A CONVERSATION WITH RIMON, A FORMER ASSOCIATE OF THE COUNTRY'S ADMINISTRATION, AND VINCENT, A KIRIBATI LOCAL, THE PERSPECTIVE DELVES INTO THE DAILY STRUGGLES THAT THE COUNTRY FACES.

an you imagine waking up one day, shaking off the nightly daze, looking around, and suddenly realizing that your whole room is flooded? In fact, your house and everything around it is also full of water? Probably not, right? Vincent Guglielmelli can, because he lived it. "The first time I experienced the impacts of climate change was when a high tide flooded the place where I lived," he recalls.

Unfortunately, this is reality for many living in Kiribati, a sinking country in the Equatorial Pacific Ocean. Among them is the family of Vincent, who explains the current situation on the islands: "My biggest worry is the contamination of drinking water." As higher tides come in, sea water mixes with drinking sources, making it undrinkable. "If water becomes unavailable to prepare food, to give to children—who are most vulnerable—or to the cattle, it will be very difficult to sustain the current situation."

The Republic of Kiribati, an insular country situated in the Western Central Pacific northeast of Australia, is formed by 33 small atolls and the volcanic island of Banaba—all of which face the challenge of the rising sea level. The country is home to around 120,000 people, of which nearly 50,000 live on the island of Tarawa. Apart from the climate crisis, the country is facing other troubles such as underdevelopment and overcrowding—in some areas, its population density can be compared to Tokyo.

But the picturesque landscape is being gradually devoured by the sea. Vincent tells me that the

country has changed massively in recent times not only in terms of scenery: "There is the problem of overpopulation. Families have a lot of mouths to feed. Before, mothers would use coconut milk to feed their vounger children, which is quite rich in protein and healthy in general." However, with saltwater intrusion causing coconut quality to decrease, people increasingly buy milk. But there are no cows in Kiribati—milk has to be imported, which comes at a steep financial cost. "Twenty years ago, mothers did not use diapers for their children, they simply cleaned them in the water. Now, they buy diapers for every kid, which often end up as garbage pollution in the sea," he adds, concerned about the growing waste contamination that threatens the surrounding landscape and water sources.

#### When Taking a Shower Becomes a Swim in the Sea

In trying to better understand the peculiarities Kiribati is facing, I spoke with an I-Kiribati—a Kiribati native—journalist and an ex-public relations officer, who has worked with the country's former administration. Rimon, who is actively advocating for the fight against the climate crisis, explains how the government reacted when scientific studies revealed the true nature of the problem: "It took a while for the government to realize the anthropogenic change that was causing such a sea level rise. Personally, I was quite alarmed to see the science of the problem." He worked on campaigns helping to educate the local population about the gravity of the changes. "We started to realize that 'Hey, this does not look good, we might be doomed."

Rimon explains that global warming has brought some devastating impact to the islands: "Cyclones

### "We started to realize that 'hey, this does not look good, we might be doomed."

#### Rimon to THE PERSPECTIVE

usually did not affect Kiribati back in the day, but now they do, as they get closer to the country because of climate change." As a result, many families had to build walls around their houses to protect themselves, but it's a highly time and energy-consuming activity—especially if the walls get knocked down over and over again.

Being such a small set of islands, "The slightest changes in the climate already affect Kiribati," Rimon clarifies. He puts it this way: "If I were to be at the west coast and throw a stone to the other side, it would be possible to reach the east coast in many parts of the islands." The width in certain areas of the country is only a few meters, making flooding of homes and roads common. Marine pollution poses serious health threats, as water becomes undrinkable. Freshwater reservoirs get continuously contaminated, and with storms frequently flooding the wells, people are left without water for days—or weeks. Taking a shower becomes a swim in the sea, and basic health habits become difficult to carry out. "Of course, other countries are affected by climate change, but what we are experiencing now is much more worrisome. It takes its progressive toll on the island," he adds.

#### The Great Flood: Will God Save Kiribati?

"There is a problem of science vs. religion," explains Vincent. "Most of the population is Christian. Many think Kiribati will not sink, arguing that God will make sure of that." There is a general belief that

things will resolve themselves, which causes many islanders to take life day by day. But some see the gravity of the situation differently: "Some people, the youngest, the most informed—or those with access to scientific evidence on climate change—know that life will be very difficult in a few years from now."

Rimon seconds this—he told me about the apparent inaction of some I-Kiribati: "The people had mixed feelings at first. Kiribati is a very Christian country; most people here are religious. Many believed at first that the Great Flood from the Bible was coming," he explains. "Others think God will save us."

#### The First Climate Refugees?

The government took a decisive approach. It declared that due to the climate crisis, Kiribati will most likely need to progressively relocate some of its population over the next few decades. To secure the livelihood of its citizens, the government bought land in the neighboring Fiji Islands—a safer choice, as the country sits on higher altitudes. As Rimon argues, "The government has a responsibility to safeguard the people. So, if the people want to migrate, the government must be able to provide that option."

But I-Kiribati are proud and remain very connected to their historical and geographical roots, and many don't want to leave their home behind. Rimon tells THE PERSPECTIVE, "You need to understand that Kiribati will always be our home. We grew up here; our grandparents, mothers and fathers are buried here. This is home." But if they are forced to leave, Rimon is convinced that the culture and tradition will remain with—and within—them.

Still, they are not willing to leave without a fight. Rimon explains that "What worries people is the concept of migration with dignity. When you are



forced to migrate to another country, you want to make sure that you don't become second-class citizens." The lands purchased in Fiji can provide a secure and dignified transition. However, there might not be enough space for everyone. He elaborates: "Nobody wants to be a refugee. A refugee is in a hopeless situation where they have no choice but to leave, so that they can have a life. For us... we still have time to act on it. That is the understanding that we have."

#### Kiribati S.O.S: Climate Crisis. Are You There?

Many locals support initiatives to combat the climate crisis. Each year, a startling number of volunteers plant mangroves—coastal trees that act as shields against high tides and water intrusion. In 2011, the World Bank reported that over 37,000 seedlings had been planted across the country. Others have started teaching local villagers about water distribution and cooking, which may come in handy as the situation aggravates.

But Rimon doesn't want the rest of the world to pity them: "While people in Europe enjoy their lives, we enjoy ours. We are happy people, and we are most happy in our home. If we can avoid being refugees, knocking on people's doors, then we would prefer to wait. It goes against our culture and against human nature—because we have our dignity."

He calls for action and criticises the current

passivity of global powers to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. "Our president tried to tell the world leaders that their activities were hurting us, and [that they] should stop [emitting them] as much as possible. In countries like the US and China, such words went in one ear and out the other, because they have to maintain a growing economy." Reiterating the urgency, he says, "For us it is right now, today—but for them it is tomorrow, business as usual. 'Let's set some targets for the future,' and it should be enough."

It may be easy to see the islands as too distant to worry about them—the same way the global leaders turn a blind eye to the climate crisis. The problem can be conveniently ignored—but how long can the blissful ignorance last? The "European lifestyle" Rimon mentioned is much closer to Kiribati than we may think; major investigative bodies, such as the European Environmental Agency and the United Nations Development Programme, have already predicted high flood risks for many continental states in the years to come.

While the discussion around the climate crisis is omnipresent in Europe's political arena, it has already become a harsh reality for the pristine lands of Kiribati. To anyone who disregards the climate emergency as distant, imperceptible or "not worth worrying about," tell them the very real story of Vincent and Rimon, and their struggles to save the country they call home.

# THE TEARDROP ISLAND

OLD SCARS, OPEN WOUNDS



SRI LANKA—A PICTURESQUE ISLAND WITH A VIOLENT PAST. TWELVE YEARS AGO, AN ATROCIOUS CIVIL WAR ENDED. TODAY, THE OCEAN-GIRDED COUNTRY IS HEALING, BUT SOME WOUNDS REMAIN OPEN: WHILE ITS RELIGIONS SEEM TO PEACEFULLY COEXIST IN THE MULTIETHNIC STATE, PAST WAR CRIMES CONTINUE TO HAUNT THE TAMIL MINORITY.

When I was about five years old, I would always go to that park with my nanny. For some reason, one day we didn't go there, we went to the temple instead. And that was the day when Tamil suicide bombers and shooters came to that park. They shot down people and a bomb went off. I still remember all the shooting sounds and the Sri Lankan army going around trying to find them [the attackers], because they were hiding in a couple of apartment complexes," recalls Ajala, whose name has been changed for privacy purposes. The young woman from Sri Lanka's capital Colombo calls this lucky coincidence her "second chance at life."

#### War in Paradise

Nowadays, the "jewel of the Indian Ocean" is a popular tourist destination with its white beaches and untouched nature. But the beauty of this small country conceals a turbulent past. The Tamils, a minority group located in the North and East of the country, experienced disenfranchsement and marginalization at the hands of the nationalist state of the Sinhala-Buddhist majority. This process escalated into an armed conflict which lasted for 26 years.

In the beginning of the 1980s, The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), a separatist group that envisioned an independent state of Tamil Eelam, rose. The rebels—popularly known as the Tamil Tigers—launched deadly attacks, including suicide bombings. The Sri Lankan Army responded with counterattacks; in the final stages of the war alone, around 40,000 Tamil civilians were killed. Nearly three decades were defined by rape, exe-

cutions, murder and torture. Tens of thousands of people have disappeared without a trace, including journalists and activists.

While most of the fighting took place in the North-East and the Tamil population lived in a constant war zone, selective attacks also happened in the Sinhala South. Ajala remembers her childhood in Colombo: "My mom's and dad's workplaces were in a similar area, but my parents would never go together in the same transport. They were afraid that, if a bomb went off in one bus and they were in it together, no one could return home to the kids." she shares.

The war officially ended on May 18, 2009 with the killing of the Tamil Tigers' leader and complete military victory of the Sri Lankan government forces over the LTTE. Around 280,000 people fled the conflict region in the last months of the conflict. The civilians affected suffered from illnesses and malnutrition. According to UN estimates, between 80,000 to 100,000 people were killed in the 26 years of fighting.

## A Multicultural Society: Between Contiguity and Division

The country is home to about 21 million inhabitants. Three quarters of the population are Sinhalese, mainly following Buddhism or are part of the smaller Christian community. About 15% are Tamils, who are mainly Hindus, with some practicing Christianity. The official languages are Sinhalese and Tamil, while English is used as a link language.

Ajala was raised in a multiethnic household: Her

father is Sinhalese—his parents being Buddhist and Christian—while her mother is a Tamil from India and is a Hindu. Ajala's parents' native tongues therefore are Sinhalese and Tamil—English became the family's lingua franca. "I speak English with my parents and they speak English with one another, but I speak Sinhalese with my cousins and with my maternal grandparents, it's a mix of Tamil and English." she tells THE PERSPECTIVE.

Despite the violent past, Ajala doesn't perceive animosity between Tamils and Sinhalese in day-to-day life. "I would say the Sri Lankan community as a whole, even today, is very close, very hospitable and very friendly," she says. "If we had a Tamil neighbor, that wouldn't stop us from giving them a present for New Year, or if they needed help, we would always be there to help them."

However, the young woman resents that the government and media create a certain divide. Because of the island's linguistic diversity, there are English, Sinhalese and Tamil outlets—the coverage is very biased depending on who has written it, according to Ajala. "The Buddhist media would focus more on the Sinhalese and the Tamil would always be about supporting the Tamil community," explains Ajala. According to the World Press Freedom Index, Sri Lanka ranks 127 out of 180 countries.

The educational system is another issue: Some schools are segregated according to ethnicity and language. This practice "probably also creates a sort of divide, because you remain in the same group of people and you're not exposed to different groups. You're isolated." Ajala herself went to a multicultural school and has many Hindu and Muslim friends. "In my class there were so many different people and we didn't despise each other or accuse one another in the sense of 'your community is killing ours.' We all understood that

we are in this together and that this is all a very politically motivated issue." she adds.

#### Missing People: The Open Wounds of the War

Yet, political issues continue: In early 2020, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa declared the 20,000 people who went missing during the war as dead. Among them are mostly Tamil civilians and around 5,000 members of the state security forces. However, the President's statement didn't answer the question of whether anyone should be held accountable for the "deaths."

In 2017, the government established the Office on Missing Persons (OMP), which gathers data about people who went missing—but it has been criticized for its lack of progress. Last November, the OMP released a list of "missing persons," after mourning families petitioned the 2019-elected government to expand relief payments. As Amnesty International reports, families had received Rs6,000 (approximately €27) per month to ease the severe circumstances they have endured. But the payments only reached a limited number of families before being halted altogether in 2019.

Families continue to demand clarification: Many protests are women-led, mourning mothers and grandmothers show pictures of their missing loved ones at the side of the road, demanding answers to the fates and whereabouts of their children.

#### Movements Beyond the Indian Waters

The past conflict also has repercussions in the international arena: In March 2021, the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) passed a resolution accusing both the Sri Lankan government and the Tamil Tigers of atrocities during the war. It recognizes "the importance of preserving and analysing



Mourning families demand justice for their missing relatives.

© Tamil Guardian

evidence relating to violations and abuses of human rights and related crimes in Sri Lanka with a view to advancing accountability [...]."

But for some Tamil activists, the resolution doesn't go far enough. The international Tamil non-profit organization PEARL (People for Equality and Relief in Lanka), for example, is advocating for justice and self-determination for Tamils in the North-East of Sri Lanka. THE PERSPECTIVE spoke to Sagi Thilipkumar, PEARL's Senior Advocacy Officer for the UNHRC.

Sagi's parents fled the war separately sometime around 1990 and met in Switzerland, where he grew up. "We still have family in the North, but most of us are living in the diaspora. We went back to the Tamil homeland first in 2012 after the end of the armed conflict, to see my grandparents and other relatives and friends," he reports.

Sagi explains that many different Tamil groups and organizations have called on the UN to recognize "the self-determination of the Tamil people in the North-East of the island and the Tamil genocide" and demand UN members stop economic and military engagements with Sri Lanka. Tamil activists also call on Sri Lanka to "end the militarization and Sinhala-Buddhist colonization of the Tamil homeland, demand the repeal of the Prevention of the Terrorism Act and stop ongoing human rights violations against Tamils and Muslims," Sagi tells THE PERSPECTIVE. The situation remains tense.

Twelve years ago, an atrocious civil war ceased in Sri Lanka, but reconciliation is a long process: Only time will tell whether the open wounds can not only be treated, but cured. If society grows together, as Ajala wishes—if Tamils receive justice, as activists like Sagi demand. Then the Teardrop Island may heal for good.

#### **HOW TURKISH WOMEN SLOWLY LOSE THEIR RIGHTS**

# WAVING GOODBYE TO THE ISTANBUL CONVENTION



IN A CONTROVERSIAL MOVE TURKEY STRIKES YET ANOTHER BLOW AGAINST WOMEN'S RIGHTS. INTERNATIONAL AND FEMINIST ORGANIZATIONS RAISED CONCERNS AND A WAVE OF SOLIDARITY WITH TURKISH WOMEN SWEPT ALL OVER THE WORLD. THE PERSPECTIVE SPOKE TO HANDE HEPSEN, A TURKISH JOURNALIST AND ACTIVIST, AND EBRAR NEFES, A VOLUNTEER AT THE MOR ÇATI WOMEN'S SHELTER FOUNDATION IN ISTANBUL.

That night was really awful. I woke up in the middle of the night to check Twitter and the whole world crumbled upon me," reports Hande Hepsen, a Turkish journalist, NGO worker and women's rights activist. The date she is referring to is March 20—the night Turkey pulled out of the Istanbul Convention. Withdrawing from the international human rights treaty on combating violence against women prompted thousands of protesters to pour into streets in the middle of the pandemic.

"You can't imagine how many times I have lost my voice from yelling at the protests all day, and these people just tell us overnight: 'you no longer have rights'," says Hande, 26, who works with displaced and disadvantaged people at Istanbul&I, a community promoting social inclusion of youth from different backgrounds and volunteerism. She is a journalist and an activist for the women's rights movement, too, joining protests and various projects for female empowerment. "In Turkey, unfortunately, every woman I know has been abused in a horrible way. And without the Istanbul Convention, the domestic law is really weak," she says.

To date, the Convention has been signed by 45 countries and ratified by 34 Council of Europe Member States. Turkey was the first to sign in Istanbul in 2011—hence the name—and the first one to scrap it. "The Istanbul Convention, originally intended to promote women's rights, was hijacked by a group of people attempting to normalize homosexuality—which is incompatible with Türkiye's social and family values," stated the Director of

Communications Fahrettin Altun explaining the withdrawal.

Ebrar Nefes, a social work volunteer in the Mor Çati women's shelter and solidarity center in Istanbul, says the Convention was an important tool that forced the government and other legislative bodies to follow their responsibilities. "The Convention triggered changes in Turkish law on domestic abuse the violence was no longer seen as physical only, but also psychological and sexual," she tells THE PERSPECTIVE. Mor Çati Solidarity Center provides social, psychological and legal support for women who experienced violence, monitors implementation of laws, and writes policy proposals with the goal of empowering women and eradicating gender inequality. Women facing gender-based violence can stay in the confidential shelter to recover and rebuild their lives.

The treaty also includes support mechanisms for women who were subjected to violence and provides a framework to effectively prosecute the offenders. Even though the Istanbul Convention brought positive changes to Turkish society, it was never fully implemented, causing criticism. For example, the obligation to ensure that culture, custom, religion, tradition or "honor" are not accepted as justification for crimes is being violated.

Similarly, as pointed out by GREVIO, a body responsible for monitoring the implementation of the convention, Turkish criminal legislation does not completely align with the requirements of the Istanbul Convention, for example when it comes to

offences such as stalking, forced marriages and violence commited against underaged girls.

#### What is the Reason?

The main reason for withdrawing from the Convention were powerful lobbying efforts of religious anti-feminist and anti-LGBT+ groups. These bodies, one of them being the Turkey Thinking Platform composed of conservative journalists and former AKP lawmakers, have been attacking the Convention for the past couple of years. In recent years, hardliners have gained more influence in domestic politics, and the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) became more conservative to gain their support. According to conservatives, the Convention encourages divorce and may lead to the acceptance of same-sex marriage. "In recent years, there has been an increased hatred against the LGBT+ community," says Ebrar Nefes,

adding that "The Convention says you should protect LGBT+ rights, but the government doesn't want to admit their existence." The Interior Minister Suleyman Soylu went so far as to call the community "deviants" in a tweet leading the platform to hide the post. Turkish president Erdoğan has rejected their existence altogether.

#### Who is Opposing?

Pulling out of the Convention has also caused a stir within AKP, as its major voting base is female. The controversial move intended to attract conservative voters ahead of the 2023 Turkish general election. Despite the "effort," AKP party polling stands at a historically low 30–32%. The skeptics include KADEM, a pro-government women's rights organization known for its attacks on the LGBT+ community where Erdoğan's daughter, Sümeyye Erdoğan Bayraktar, serves as vice-president.

People demonstrating for women's rights.

© Rad Pozniakov/Unsplash



A legal debate on the constitutionality of the withdrawal has also added fuel to the flames. The Istanbul Convention allows denunciation of the treaty following the three-month notice period. Nonetheless, the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties states that the parties might only withdraw from the international treaty after it has been implemented. International law aside, Erdoğan withdrew from the Convention by issuing a presidential decree, in which the Turkish Parliament had no say. The legality of such a move is being questioned by women's rights groups.

#### Gender-Based Violence on the Rise

With femicide and violence against women on the rise, Erdoğan's move attracted widespread criticism—both foreign and domestic. According to the platform *We Will Stop Femicides*, 300 Turkish women were murdered in 2020—although the actual number could be much higher, as femicides are often covered up as suicides. The organization started compiling the cases in lieu of unreliable (or in some cases, non-existent) records kept by the government—a clear obliteration of the Convention, which requires state parties to collect statistical data on all forms of violence against women. Data from the World Health Organization shows that 38% of Turkish women are subjected to violence from their partners, compared to an average of 25% in Europe.

Femicide is a deeply rooted cultural issue in Turkey. So-called honor killings—an ancient practice—are still exercised today, even in diasporas all around the world. They refer to the killing of a female family member on the basis of bringing shame to her family by violating a social, cultural or community norm. Honor killings punish women for refusing forced marriage, being the victim of a rape, divorcing or inappropriate dressing. How deep the roots of this practice run can be illustrated by Turkish courts: men justifying themselves on the ground of

defending family's honor often get reduced sentences. Other extenuating circumstances allowing for shorter sentences include religion, impulsive behavior, and even wearing a suit and a necktie to the courtroom, which has led to dubbing the practice as "tie reduction."

In 2004, Turkey adopted a revised law to end impunity for such crimes, which introduced life sentences for the perpetrators. However, there have been cases when a woman was forced to commit "honor suicide" in order for her family to avoid punishment. The statistics for honor killings are hard to find as a lot of the cases go unreported, but The Turkish Human Rights Directorate estimated the number at one per week in Istanbul alone. The number of femicides, including honor killings, has roughly doubled since 2012.

Turkish officials say national laws are sufficient to ensure protection against gender-based violence. "The guarantee of women's rights are the current regulations in our bylaws, primarily our constitution. Our judicial system is dynamic and strong enough to implement new regulations as needed," tweeted Zehra Zümrüt Selçuk, then-Minister of Family, Labour and Social Services, in March 2021. But according to some activists, this is not enough. "With the withdrawal, the government is giving protection to the murderers and abusers. The police are not making any records or notes, and just sending the women home to their abusers," Hande Hepsen tells THE PERSPECTIVE.

#### Gender Inequality: The Root of the Problem

One of the biggest problems, according to Ebrar Nefes, is the administration not acknowledging gender inequality in the first place. "The government says that women and men are not equal and this is in our inherent nature, so we shouldn't do anything about it," explains Ebrar. Hande Hepsen adds that

# "In Turkey, unfortunately, every woman I know has been abused in a horrible way. And without the Istanbul Convention, the domestic law is really weak."

Hande Hepsen to THE PERSPECTIVE

Turkey's government does not see women's rights as a topic worthy of discussion. "There is this culture, where they only see women as someone's property. That is what we are trying to change—that women are not only mothers, daughters, sisters or wives of the men; women are humans who are special and valuable without having to be assigned any role," says Hande, adding that the populist government uses the language of a conservative middle-aged man to lure in voters. The poor state of the economy and the migration crisis have significantly weakened the support for the AKP.

Remarks undermining gender equality, homophobic statements and references to stereotypical gender roles have been getting more and more popular with Turkish politicians—one example being Erdoğan calling child-free women "incomplete" and urging them to have at least three children.

Pulling out from the treaty triggered nationwide protests and street marches. "In the morning after the withdrawal, I woke up and I knew it was not logical to go to a protest because of a pandemic—but I had to. I can survive Corona, but how will I survive if I don't have any rights?" asks Hande.

The number of protests has, however, gradually diminished due to the deteriorating epidemiological situation and newly imposed lockdown. Many of the protesters moved online and social media activism has intensified, reaching beyond Turkey. The murder of Pınar Gültekin and rising gender-based violence have inspired the women's rights

Twitter campaign #kadınaşiddetehayır ("Say no to violence against women") and #istanbulsözleşmesiyaşatır ("Enforce the Istanbul Convention").

#### What Does the Future Hold?

Poland is considering leaving the Istanbul Convention for similar ideological reasons as Turkey. The "Yes to Family, No to Gender" bill calls for denunciation of the Istanbul Convention, banning abortion and same-sex marriage. Several countries, namely Armenia, Bulgaria, Hungary, Czechia, Latvia, Lithuania, Lichtenstein, Moldova, Ukraine, Slovakia and the UK, have yet to ratify the Convention. Some of the countries claim that their legislation is sufficient and there is thus no reason for the ratification. Others hold views that the agreement enforces "gender ideology," undermines traditional family values and legitimates illegal migration. States that have ratified the Convention are legally bound by its provisions.

Hande, however, remains positive. "Turkish women are fed up with this chain of abuse and violence, so we will not stop before changing this decision," she says. "I know that when I am at a protest, this woman next to me that I have never seen before will protect me over their life. We are losing so many women, unfortunately, but we cannot let them just be a number. We are fighting for them." Hande concludes that solidarity and togetherness is what makes women all over the world powerful.



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