

Returadress:
Utrikespolitiska Föreningen
Sandgatan 2
223 50 Lund

B **PP** Sverige, Port Payé



**ASSOCIATION OF
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THE PERSPECTIVE

N° 01 2024

OCCUPATION

*TERRITORY, TIME AND THE
WORLD OF WORK*

Editors’ Note

Dear Reader,
Welcome to our third and final issue, a collection of pieces centered around the theme of ‘occupation’. We chose this polysemous word deliberately, allowing our committee to explore, discuss, and develop our perspectives on a wide array of topics.

The occupation of Gaza, the West Bank, and Ukraine have been prominent themes in our discussions throughout the year. Additionally, we’ve shared our experiences, hopes, and aspirations for our own future occupations (often inspired by the ‘curry jar’—if you know, you know). From the stress of finding internships to contemplating how to secure meaningful work, we have undoubtedly grown as a group. The term ‘occupation’ aptly captures the essence of these discussions.

We are incredibly proud and grateful for each committee member who has supported us and one another. It hasn’t been easy, with Ffion starting the year as the sole head of the magazine before Philippa joined to fill the vacancy, and both of us facing personal and professional challenges. We hope you, our dear committee members, feel that we have led with candor and passion.

We want to extend our deepest thanks to our readers, writers, sub-editors, and UPF for a year filled with enriching experiences and a steep, but beautiful, learning curve.

All the very best,
Ffion & Philippa

President’s Address

Esteemed Members of UPF,
As this operational year comes to a close, we want to extend our heartfelt congratulations and gratitude to each of you for being part of UPF. In these challenging times, we are reminded of the importance of reflection and maintaining an open perspective. A special thank you goes out to the Presidium and Board of UPF, and more specifically to the Magazine Committee and its heads, Ffion and Philippa, for delivering their final issue.

Many of us are concluding our university years and closing a significant chapter of our lives. We hope you look back on this period with pride in your achievements and the recognition of your growth. However, let this not mark the end of your learning path. In the words of J.R.R. Tolkien; “True education is a kind of never ending story – a matter of continual beginnings, of habitual fresh starts, of persistent newness”.

For those of you moving on from Lund but wishing to stay connected with UPF, we encourage you to explore our alumni network or consider supporting UPF through the Alumni membership. We wish you the best in your future journeys, wherever they may take you. Finally, we extend our best wishes to the newly elected UPF board members and committee heads for 2024/25.

Good luck!

Claudia Muñoz-Rojas and Freeman Elliott Gunnell,
President & Vice-President of UPF

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Merkava tank in a Gaza street,
4 January 2024’ |
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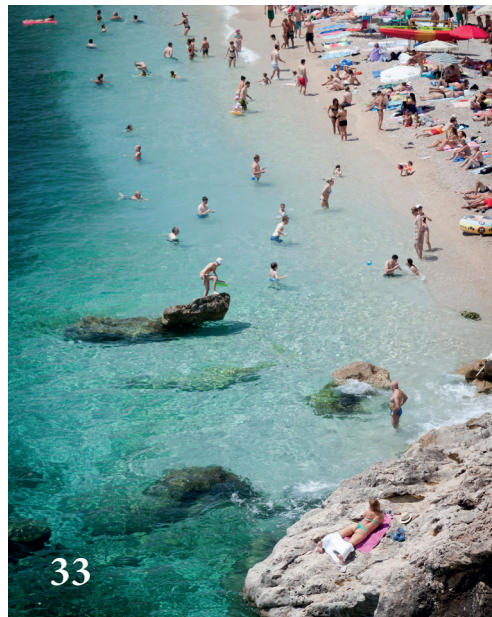
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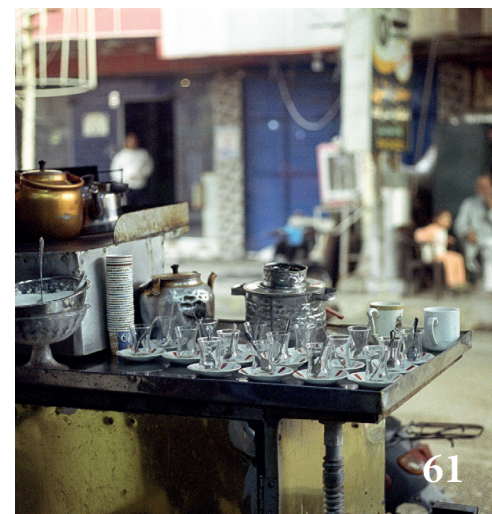
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Editors-in-Chief

Ffion McEvoy
Philippa Scholz

Sub-editors

Frida Månsson
Mathilde Perrin
Micol Zubrickaite

Layout

Philippa Scholz

Legal Publisher

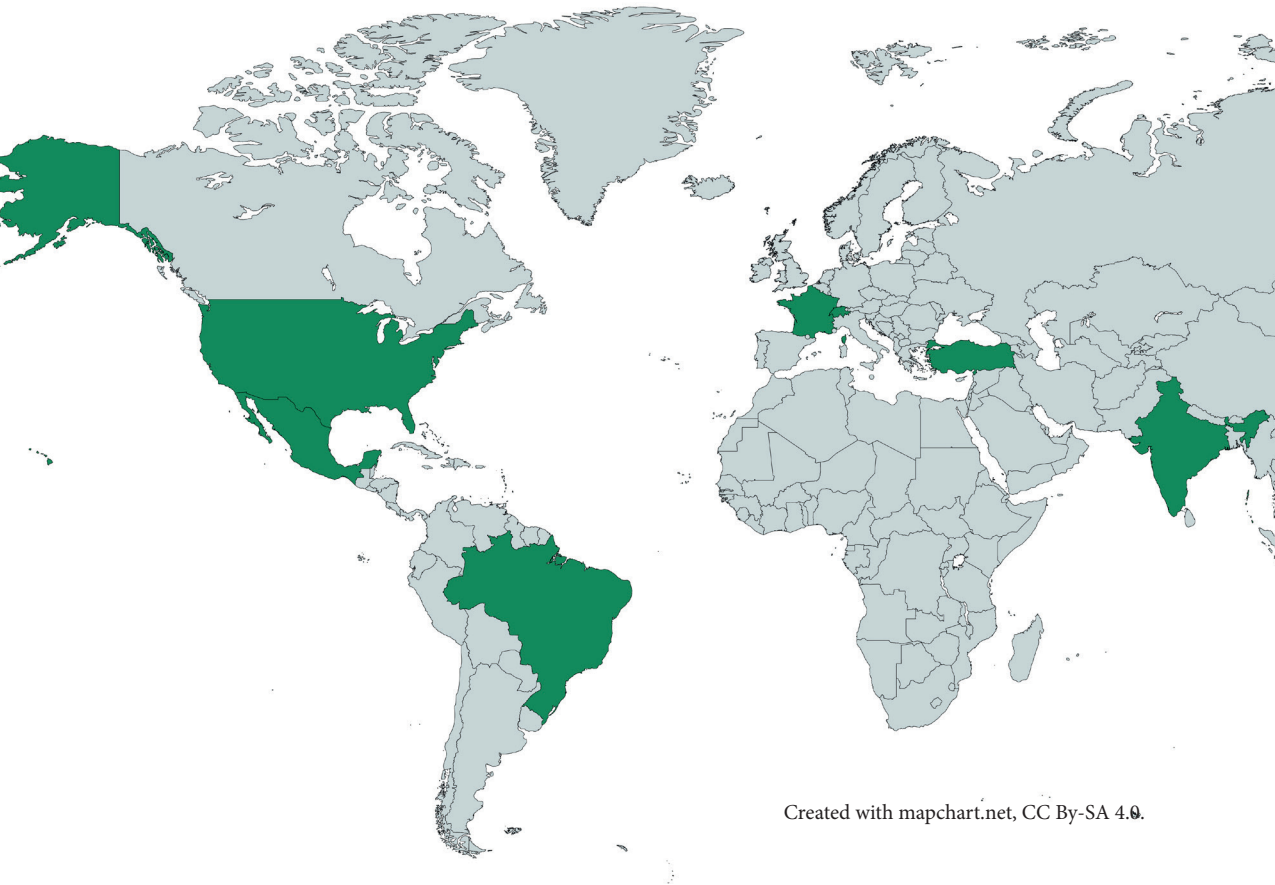
Ffion McEvoy

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Global Report

In preparation for the heavier stories that follow, our writers have concocted a quick dose of positivity to encourage and inspire you. Having scoured the globe, here are a selection of news stories which committee members have found uplifting.



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Mexico | Graciela Moreno Niño

On 22 March, the Chamber of Deputies in Mexico voted in favour of criminalising 'conversion therapies' for LGBT+ people at the federal level. This is an important step forward for LGBT+ community rights in the country, as anyone who threatens the human dignity of a person freely living their identity and sexuality can now be criminally punished.



©Max Böhme | Unsplash

France | Mathilde Perrin

On 9 March, the freedom to have access to abortion was enshrined in the French Constitution. French President Emmanuel Macron announced an aspiration to enshrine the freedom to have recourse to abortion in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.



©Patrick Perkins | Unsplash

Türkiye | Adla Lagström Jebara

President Erdoğan's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) suffered a historic defeat in Türkiye's local elections on 31 March. The leading opposition party, the Republican People's Party (CHP), won with 37.7% of the nationwide vote, surpassing the AKP's 35.5% and securing victory in Türkiye's five largest cities: Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir, Bursa, and Antalya.



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USA | Adla Lagström Jebara

40 members of US Congress, including former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, signed a letter urging President Biden and Secretary of State Blinken to halt arms transfers to Israel. This came after three Israeli airstrikes targeted the World Central Kitchen food convoy in Gaza, killing six aid workers and their Palestinian driver, and signals a potential turning point in the Democrats' long-standing relationship with Israel.



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Brazil | Mathilde Perrin

Deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon reduced by 63% during the months of January and February compared to 2023. President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, elected in 2023, has pledged to eradicate illegal deforestation in the Amazon by 2030.

India | Ffion McEvoy

In a landmark decision, India's Supreme Court ruled that people have the right to be free from the adverse effects of climate change, finding that climate change is infringing upon the fundamental rights to life, personal liberty and equality enshrined in Article 14 and 21 of the Indian Constitution.



Switzerland | Ffion McEvoy

Senior Women for Climate Protection Switzerland (KlimaSeniorinnen Schweiz), an association of women climate activists over the age of 64, won a landmark climate litigation case at the European Court of Human Rights in April. The court found that Switzerland's failure to adequately address climate change violated the European Convention on Human Rights, upholding a human rights-based approach to climate protection.

USA | Mathilde Perrin

The British runner Jasmin Paris became the first woman ever to finish the Barkley Marathons, an ultramarathon race in Frozen Head State Park in Tennessee, USA. She finished the trail race of 160km, with 16,500 metres of elevation gain, in 59 hours, 58 minutes and 21 seconds, just below the time limit of 60 hours.



Beyond Thirst: The Weaponisation of Water in Palestine

Franklin Lagat | Analysis

WATER IS THE most basic and indispensable though oft discounted natural resource. The demand for water exceeds supply in countries around the world, affecting both wealthy and developing countries. According to a 2023 UN Water report, 2 billion people are without safe drinking water and 3.6 billion lack adequate sanitation.

Water is also a human right. In 2010, the United Nations General Assembly recognised the right to water and sanitation as a human right essential for the enjoyment of all human rights. Sustainable Development Goal 6 promotes clean water and sanitation for all. Water should be safe, sufficient and physically accessible.

Even given the magnitude of water scarcity globally, the severity of the water crisis in Palestine is desperate. Israel's legal hold on Palestinian water resources dates back to the early 90s. In September 1993, the then leaders of Palestine and Israel signed the first of the Oslo Accords. The Oslo Accords recognised Palestinian water rights and established a Joint Water Committee to oversee water and sanitation in the West Bank including water extraction permits.

The agreements were supposed to safeguard Palestinians' fair access to water from the Jordan river, the Sea of Galilee and the Mountain and Coastal Aquifers. Over time however, the Joint Water Committee has,

through decisions heavily skewed in favour of Israel, increased water access and consumption disparity between Palestinians and Israelis. The Oslo Accords merely consolidated Israel's control over water resources and consequently, Israel retains full autonomy of all water resources between the Jordan river and the Mediterranean Sea.

The Oslo Accords merely consolidated Israel's control over water resources

Israel maintains complete control of water and its administration extends to rainwater

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harvesting in the West Bank, permitting for new water wells and installation of pumps. The occupation implements a discriminatory water policy. Israelis can draw upon water resources at will while Palestinians are bound to a fixed 15% allocation. As of 2016, Palestinians in the West Bank consumed three times less water than Israeli residents and settlers. Furthermore, roughly 80% of water consumed in the West Bank, sourced from the mountain aquifer in the West Bank, is purchased from Israel at a much higher cost.

In the occupied territories, access to water is unpredictable and subject to Israel's acquiescence. The scarce water is neither safe nor clean. Palestinians in the Gaza Strip rely on a coastal aquifer, polluted by untreated wastewater, with 97% of the water not suitable for human use. An estimated 90,000m³ cubic metres of raw sewage flowed from Gaza into the Mediterranean Sea daily. B'Tselem, an Israeli human rights organisation, revealed that Israel exposes the Palestinian population to environmental hazards by exploiting Palestinian land for treatment of Israeli waste. Israeli waste treatment facilities set up in the West Bank and make the most of less rigorous environmental standards, contaminating the soil and water.

Before October 2023, the Gaza Strip depended on desalination and water treatment plants to tap into the coastal aquifer. After 7 October, the Israeli government declared and initiated a complete siege on the Gaza Strip involving termination of supply of electricity, food, gas, and water. Since then, the unrelenting Israeli bombardment of Gaza coupled with blockades on fuel and electricity cuts has decimated the wastewater network.

Constant airstrikes have severely damaged existing water infrastructure. American Near East Refugee Aid (ANERA), a humanitarian and development aid organisation, concluded that within the first week of November 2023 only, Israeli bombs had destroyed seven water facilities across Gaza. Alternatives to the

dwindling water supply, including trucking, are impeded by Israel's obstructions and damaged roads.

Water deprivation has forced Palestinians to resort to contaminated salty water resulting in the spread of infectious diseases and deepening the crisis faced by an already decimated health system

The World Health Organization recommends 100 litres of water as the minimum standard for daily per capita water consumption. Before October 2023, households in the West Bank could only access 80 litres of water per day. Presently, Palestinians in Gaza access on average between 2-3 litres of water per day for all purposes. To present a more vivid image, this is about a third of the water used in a toilet flush and roughly a fifth of a minute's worth of shower water. Water deprivation has forced Palestinians to resort to contaminated salty water resulting in the spread of infectious diseases and deepening the crisis faced by an already decimated health system.

A 2021 UNICEF report found that unsafe water and lack of water is more fatal than violence in conflict settings. Water is life and no one should be denied access to water. The prolonged Israeli chokehold on water resources is significantly contributing to severe levels of malnutrition in Gaza. While the sustainable development goals are founded on the premise of 'leave no one behind', Palestinians are clearly an exception.



Centre for Advanced Middle Eastern Studies

The Centre for Advanced Middle Eastern Studies (CMES) supports, creates, and coordinates multidisciplinary research on the Middle East at LU.

Upcoming events:

30 May: Inside the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict (18:00-19:30, at Dept. of Political Science)
Public seminar with **Samir Abu Eid** (Swedish Public Service Television)

3 June: Haifa – Memories of Jewish-Palestinian Futures (15:00-17:00, at CMES & on Zoom)
Research seminar with **Elad Lapidot** (University of Lille)

13 June: AI in the Service of Socio-Politically Adapted Sustainable Dust-Storm Control in the Middle East (13:15-14:30, at CMES and on Zoom)
Research seminar with **Hossein Hashemi, Amir Naghibi, Sara Brogaard, Ali Mansourian and Pengziang Zhao** (Lund University).

26 June: Kriget mellan Israel och Hamas (13:15-14:30, Hästgatan 13 in Visby)
Public Almedalen seminar with **Nina Gren, Torsten Janson, Lisa Strömbom and Karin Aggestam** (Lund University).

For more information about the events, please visit www.cmes.lu.se/calendar



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Past Imperfect: Russian Memory Wars

Lera Lindström | Opinion

MEMORY STUDIES IS a relatively new academic field that explores how societies remember, interpret, and integrate their past – especially traumatic events – into current identities and policies. A crucial part of memory politics is reconciliation, which includes healing historical wounds, acknowledging and weaving traumatic experiences into a unified collective narrative. The nature of this process is similar to achieving psychological closure with the past which facilitates a more harmonious existence in the present. But what happens when a society fails to undergo this reconciliation process?

In his famous book 'An Inconvenient Past' Nikolay Eppele, a Russian researcher of historical memory, notes that in modern Russia "history has overtaken politics". Indeed, there is a certain fixation on the past in modern Russian society, where Soviet era atrocities continue to haunt people. However, because the full scope of Stalinist terror has never been publicly acknowledged by the late Soviet or by Russian regimes, there remains no clear pathway for societal healing.

The absence of closure has resulted in a nation divided. Russians live in two parallel realities, in one country, but with different, often contrasting histories. Some are descendants of oppressors, others of victims, and there is no universally accepted narrative able to unite these disparate histories.

A significant number of Russians continue to hold revisionist views of the USSR's role in history, believing that the Soviet Union never occupied Eastern European countries but rather saved them from Hitler. Even more astonishingly, some question the brutality of the GULAG system, denying these events' historical documentation. The division between two parallel 'Russias' often leads to fierce, cut-throat disputes in which both parties fail to find a single historical fact they can agree with.

*Merely mentioning the
USSR's invasion of Poland
in 1939 or acknowledging
Soviet anti-semitism would
trigger harsh accusations
of being a fascist.*

Born and raised in Russia, I have experienced this divide firsthand, especially while speaking with my family. Merely mentioning the USSR's invasion of Poland in 1939 or acknowledging Soviet anti-semitism would trigger harsh accusations of being a fascist. Similarly, expressing scepticism about the current war against Ukraine can result in being labelled a traitor or 'foreign agent'.

In the deeply fragmented Russian society, polarised historical narratives are utilised as tools for political manipulation. Hybrid regimes (or, in other words, non-liberal democracies) such as Russia tend to control the historical narrative and use it as a strategic method to discourage civil society and prevent political engagement.

In the absence of a commonly shared understanding of the past, it becomes significantly easier for state-led propaganda to sow confusion and apathy among the people. The prevailing sentiment in Russian society that "nothing is clear, and we do not know the whole truth" is particularly evident in the context of the war in Ukraine, where abundant controversial information and strategic misinformation campaigns have perpetuated a state of uncertainty, division and 'silent support' of the regime.

As long as there is no public discussion of the past, Russian society will continue to oscillate between extremes with no common ground, perpetually searching for external enemies to blame for internal woes. Given the regime's unwillingness to confront historical truths, the spread of disinformation and division will continue and it seems increasingly clear that under Putin any reflection on Russia's difficult past is impossible.

Unfortunately, the dissonance is not confined within Russian borders; it resonates in Europe and in countries of the former Eastern Bloc, in particular. There is a critical need for 'closure' – not just for the sake of Russia's internal harmony, but for the whole of Europe. The

hesitance of the Russian regime to address and come to terms with its 'difficult' past complicates relationships within the EU.

Unlike Russia, Germany has undergone a thorough process of acknowledging and reconciling its difficult past

Post-Soviet European nations have endured the so-called 'dual trauma' or 'double victimhood' of both Nazi and Soviet oppression, which means that these countries struggle with competing narratives of victimhood. These nations seek not only security but also the historical validation of their traumatic experience. The pronounced emphasis of the Baltic states on the traumas inflicted by Soviet oppression often results in prioritising this seemingly less acknowledged trauma over the Holocaust narrative. Such a phenomenon seems understandable due to the fact that unlike Russia, Germany has undergone a thorough process of acknowledging and reconciling its Nazi past. This includes decades of dialogue and the careful management of relationships with other states.

The European Union's approach to memory politics has involved attempts to harmonise the dual trauma narratives through various programs that provide financial support for projects aimed at commemorating and reflecting on Europe's traumatic pasts. However, the effectiveness of these efforts and their capacity to adequately address the needs of former Eastern Bloc countries can be debated.

While Eastern Bloc countries seek to affirm their identities and historical truths, Western Europe maintains a 'business as usual' approach with Russia and prefers to close its eyes to alarming signs not just once, but twice – in 2008 and 2014. While sanctions were imposed

after the annexation of Crimea, significant events like the FIFA World Cup in Russia proceeded without disruption, symbolising a continuation of friendly relations.

This relatively mild reaction of the West to Russian aggression can be seen as a sort of 'historical amnesia' – a neglect of the uncomfortable aspects of Europe's shared history with Russia. This oversight is significantly shaped by the USSR's role as one of the victors of World War II, exemplifying the popular 'winner takes all' mentality. This mentality impedes any efforts at post-colonial reconciliation, ignoring the fact that some young European states were never among the winners. Instead, they lost twice.

For the former Eastern Bloc countries, the invasion of Georgia in 2008 did not go unnoticed. Lithuanian political scientist Ainius Lašas, in his article 'When History Matters: Baltic and Polish Reactions to the Russo-Georgian War', examines why Baltic states and Poland were "willing to incur considerable costs standing up for a country that had little geopolitical and economic relevance". According to Lašas, the unusual alacrity and decisiveness of their response is mainly influenced by their historical-psychological legacies and a collective memory of past conflicts and occupations by Russia (formerly the USSR). He contrasts these reactions with the more cautious approaches taken by other European countries.

Given all the above, it becomes clear why these countries' perspectives and reactions to events often diverge from those of Western Europe. Some of their statements and decisions over the past two years might appear controversial and have been even labelled 'Russophobic'. However, it is essential to recognise that their support of Ukraine in the face of Russian aggression is not only a matter of geopolitical alignment but also an expression of psychological and historical solidarity.

States, much like individuals, adopt the identities and struggles of others as their own

Maria Mälksoo, in her analysis 'The Postcolonial Moment in Russia's War against Ukraine', argues that "the full-scale war became a decolonising moment for Baltic states". Mälksoo introduces the psychological term 'vicarious identification' to describe how states, much like individuals, adopt the identities and struggles of others as their own. For the Baltic states, identifying with Ukraine's struggle against Russian domination resonates deeply, reinforcing their own narratives of resistance and survival. Consequently, the outcome of the Russo-Ukrainian war is critical not only for Ukraine's future but also in shaping the identity and trajectory of the Baltic states.

For Europe, figuring out how to mend ties with Russia after the Russo-Ukrainian conflict will invoke a major turning point. The EU will face a dilemma: following the usual strategy and fostering good relations with Russia or insisting, first, on a significant transformation within Russian governance, and societal recognition of not only the Soviet past but also of the atrocities of Putin's regime?

A demand to take responsibility seems legitimate. History shows that guilt cannot be imposed from the outside – internal dialogue and acknowledgment are essential first steps towards taking responsibility and reconciling.

The stakes are high for the Baltic states and Ukraine. Without a genuine and negotiated reconciliation with Russia any 'business as usual' will risk deepening fractures within the EU, potentially destabilising its integration efforts.

The least that European leaders can do today is to actively engage in memory politics, ensuring a future for Europe that acknowledges the past pains of all its member states and beyond.

Drug Cartels as Desperation: Unveiling Mexico's Labour Crisis

Graciela Moreno Niño | Feature

CAN YOU IMAGINE living in a city more expensive than Milan or Washington, and your average salary being €273 per month? Can you imagine living in a city where you lose more than 20 days a year commuting? Can you imagine living in a city where you have almost a 50% chance of working informally? Well, this is the reality faced by Mexico City's workers, and the labour conditions in the capital of the Mexican state are just a reflection of the reality lived in the rest of the country.

Mexico heads the list of countries belonging to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development with the longest working hours. While all member states average a legal limit of 40 hours per week, only Colombia and Mexico exceed it by 8 hours, and in Mexico, at least 26% of the population works more hours than those allowed by law.

In April 2023, Mexican Deputy Susana Prieto presented a constitutional reform initiative to reduce the working week in Mexico from 48 to 40 hours, with the support of her party, which is currently in power and claims to be socialist. However, since President Andrés Manuel López Obrador called on legislators to postpone the discussion because "it is not an issue that has to be resolved urgently", and after inviting deputies to listen to businessmen, this reform has remained stuck and lost the party's support.

In this year's second presidential debate the presidential candidate, Xóchitl Gálvez Ruiz, who claims to come from the Marxist Workers' League and have a Trotskyist ideological background, when questioned about her position on this proposal, said that, "first, we must support the employers and thereby, they

will be the first willing to lower the working day".

This has overly shown that no matter what ideological stance the Mexican parties or rulers have, even though the country's working class has demonstrated its discontent with these stances and is begging for reform of the system, their voices remain unheard, and the government continues to disregard those who keep the country on its feet.

The current minimum wage in Mexico is approximately €412 per month, and five out of ten workers earn the minimum wage or less

In addition to the long working hours that Mexican workers are subjected to, which largely deprive them of quality time with their families, as well as rest and leisure, and which end up negatively impacting their health, these are, in most cases, poorly paid. The current minimum wage in Mexico is approximately €412 per month, and five out of ten workers earn the minimum wage or less. Despite this, a Mexican family spends on average €1,110 per month which puts Mexico in the spotlight of international organisations for its high percentage of child labour exploitation, given the need for the population to start working at an early age to be able to subsist.

From official government data, it is clear that the institutions protecting workers are weak and inefficient, since, by 2023, the website of the Mexican government published that 54.8%



of workers in the country work informally, earning around €240 per month for women, and €315 per month for men.

This means that more than half of the workers in the country have no one to protect them from employers who impose longer working hours than allowed by law, deprive them of benefits and rest days, and do not even pay even the minimum wage, which is already extremely low. This also ends up exposing workers to health vulnerability because they are not insured or signed up for access to health services in the country.

There is no doubt that this is one of the reasons why Mexico is an appealing country for large corporations and foreign companies, as labour in the country is up to 26.1% cheaper than in other countries, such as China.

Despite the recent reform of paid holidays for Mexican workers which increased paid days off from 6 to 12 from the second year of service, Mexico still tops the list of countries in the world offering the fewest paid days off to its workers, not to mention the poor benefits provided by law to workers who become

parents, granting 6 paid weeks before and 6 paid weeks after childbirth to women, and only 5 paid days off after childbirth to men.

In Mexico, people live to work and do not even have the chance of working to live

These are just some of the examples that reflect the shockingly poor working conditions that Mexican workers face on a daily basis. Not only does Mexican legislation open the door for employers to keep their workers performing under terrible labour conditions but the inefficiency of Mexican institutions and the unwillingness of those in power lead many Mexicans to work under almost inhumane conditions. In Mexico, people live to work and do not even have the chance of working to live.

What are the consequences of low wages, long working hours, few formal job opportunities, and the weakness and inefficiency of the institutions that are supposed to protect your rights?

Mexico is home to the six most dangerous cities in the world due to the violence generated by the operation of drug cartels which are becoming increasingly more powerful and influential, nationally and internationally, to such an extent that the United States Department of Justice considers the Sinaloa Cartel to be the most powerful cartel in the world.

In Mexico, 'narco-culture' is widely talked about and promoted through the glorification of narcotrafficking from an early age, and it is almost inevitable that in a country with so much impunity and so few good opportunities for work and growth, young people see drug trafficking as an 'easy' and attractive option.

It is estimated that the most powerful cartels in Mexico have to recruit about 360 people per week to replenish their personnel due to incarcerations and murders, making these Mexican criminal organisations one of the largest sources of employment in the country.

Around 460,000 children and teenagers had been recruited by criminal groups in Mexico

Unfortunately, the easiest targets for drug cartels are those in the most vulnerable situations, especially the poor and the young.

A study published in 2021 by the Network for Children's Rights in Mexico and the National Citizen Observatory for Security, Justice and Legality estimated that around 460,000 children and teenagers had been recruited by criminal groups in Mexico.

Although several social, cultural, family and economic factors influence the recruitment of a person by a drug cartel, in a country that is drowned in highly normalised violence, offering €1,650 a month for pulling a trigger to someone in a vulnerable situation who does not understand the consequences that this may entail, might sound far more appealing than working 10 or 12 hours a day and earning less than €412 a month.

Alternatively, the best path for these children is to take up arms from the age of 6, be trained and enlisted as 'community police' to start defending their communities against organised crime, either because the police in Mexico join these same criminal gangs due to the appalling working conditions they are subjected to or simply because there is no police to protect these communities, such as in Ayahuatlampa, Guerrero, where kids from 6 to 11 years have been recruited in the last years for this purpose.

The situation for youth in Mexico seems to be taken out of a horror story.

The situation for youth in Mexico seems to be taken out of a horror story. Having to be subjected to labour exploitation at an early age to provide for their families, joining drug cartels with the promise of a bright future, or giving up their childhood and innocence to take arms and protect their population are becoming the main paths taken by children in Mexico.

The Mexican government must start listening to its people and its workers. Stronger institutions and stronger protective laws are urgently needed. New job opportunities and better working conditions are essential for those who are beginning to set out on the path to their future at an early age. Both governments and employers must understand that, without their workers, they and their companies would not be holding together.

We must urgently stop being indifferent as a society and begin to demand the authorities to carry out their duties and remind them that, if we chose them, it is to represent our interests and meet our needs. A Mexico with higher social security and labour justice means a significantly safer Mexico.



American Towns Are Recruiting Residents, Median Earners Need Not Apply

Sabina Rameke | Analysis

“I THINK IT’S A remote Mecca that’s in the ground stages”, says a man featured in a promotional video for Tulsa Remote, a programme whose mission is to attract thousands of remote workers to Oklahoma’s second largest city. It’s succeeding: as of early 2024, over two thousand people have participated, agreeing to relocate to the city for at least a year. But what do they get out of it, and in return, what do they give to the city of Tulsa?

On the face of it, it’s a simple transaction. If your application is successful, Tulsa Remote will give you \$10,000 to live there for a year. In return, they’re hoping new arrivals will help combat a population decline, exacerbated by the outmigration of highly educated young people, and a stagnating local economy. On top of the \$10,000, so-called ‘Tulsa Remoters’ are offered access to coworking spaces, events specifically created for participants, and passes and vouchers to local businesses.

Similar benefits are offered by the more than a hundred cities and counties in America currently running this type of programme, though usually on a much smaller scale. Possible perks include a chat over coffee with the town’s mayor, ‘Grandparents on Demand’ (a programme in Greensburg, Indiana pairing remote workers with local senior citizens who provide childcare free of charge), and a one-year tennis association membership.

Eligibility requirements may vary slightly depending on the programme, but in virtually all cases, applicants need to be at least 18 years old, have the legal right to work in the United States, and live outside of the destination state at the time of applying. They also need to be remote workers, and retain their jobs when moving, because these locations are not looking for workers, they are looking for residents. New Yorkers who participate in one of these programs will still be working for their New York-based company, but they’ll do so out of Topeka, Kansas or wherever else they choose to make their move.

Some were quick to predict a mass urban exodus in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns, when rural life seemed both safer and freer. This major demographic change failed to materialise. Cities seem to have retained the appeal that has drawn people in since the dawn of the Industrial Revolution, whether that be for their cafés, the nightlife, or, and likely among the most significant factors, for the opportunities that they provide. All the while, small population centres may be struggling to compete: 2021 census data showed that out of America’s more than 3000 counties, less than half experienced population growth over the course of the previous decade. All ten of the country’s biggest cities did.

Population stagnation, or outright decline, can be a major challenge for a region. A shrinking tax base means there is less money to invest in infrastructure and development projects. It also means that there are fewer people

spending money and keeping local businesses alive, or starting new ones. Additionally, many of those who choose to leave are young and highly educated, and when they go, they take their human capital with them.

Human capital underpins innovative capacity, and innovation is key to economic growth.

With a few exceptions, there is a movement away from the central third of the country toward the two coasts. This human capital transfer is a brain gain for big cities such as New York, Los Angeles and Austin, but a brain drain for many states, including Vermont and West Virginia (which operate statewide programmes for attracting remote workers called ThinkVermont and Ascend West Virginia, respectively). This may pose a problem since human capital underpins innovative capacity, and innovation is key to economic growth.

For these reasons and more, some places have fallen in love with the idea of incentive-based programmes to attract remote workers – with a marked preference for high earners. Many programmes have minimum income requirements: Evansville, Indiana asks that you earn at least \$60,000 annually, and Columbus, Georgia wants you to make at least \$75,000. According to a survey of participants in the Tulsa Remote programme, accepted applicants tend to have higher incomes than rejected ones. These stagnating regions are looking to remote workers to help stimulate economic growth, but there are enough interested parties out there to allow for a degree of selectivity: remote work is more common in lucrative sectors such as tech and finance, and there are many more fish in the sea now than there were just five years ago.



A pandemic-induced shift in favour of rural living may yet hold some promise

While COVID-19 didn't have urbanites running for the hills the way some people anticipated, it did have a significant impact on how we do work. An early 2023 poll by Pew Research Center found that 14% of employed Americans worked remotely full-time. Those 22 million people constitute a sizeable demographic for relocation programmes to try to appeal to. This is where a pandemic-induced shift in favour of rural living may yet hold some promise, if only on a very small scale.

Success, however, is not as simple as that. Many of these programmes are meeting their goals in terms of new residents recruited, but the underlying objective was always to promote economic growth and local investment. Are these locations getting back more than what they're giving out, whether that be five, ten, or twenty thousand dollars, gym memberships or 'Grandparents on Demand'? The answer appears to be yes.

The aforementioned survey of Tulsa Remoters found that more than half of participants thought they might stay for at least five years. The financial benefits are only available for the first year, which means that Tulsa is successfully bringing in long-term residents whose spending and other contributions to the city will likely exceed the cost of the initial investment, maybe even as soon as year one. MakeMyMove, an intermediary service pairing prospective applicants with relocation programmes, claims that Perry County, Indiana, saw a twelve-to-one return on investment on the seven households whose relocation they organised, in the form of over \$300,000 in new economic output per year. That, however, is not to say that every programme is a success story – and sceptics tend to focus on issues other than whether these programmes meet their own goals.

There are multiple ways to stimulate economic growth, such as investing directly into the local community by improving infrastructure, increasing support for low-income residents, and funding entrepreneurial ventures. These locations are likely already allocating funds for such measures but some amount of money

goes to the new people moving in – people whose income is generally higher, sometimes significantly higher, than that of the people already living there.

Worries about gentrification and whose preferences are prioritised by local governments are yet more sides to consider

It is certainly a more indirect approach, where the hope is that new money will flow into the local economy, increasing economic potential and activity. Which approach has the greater return on investment, and for whom? These types of programmes are still in their infancy,

and it may be hard to say. Worries about gentrification and whose preferences are prioritised by local governments are yet more sides to consider.

Some remote worker relocation programmes predate the pandemic but the ensuing rise of remote work undeniably accelerated the trend and increased their potential. The creation of templates makes it both easier and cheaper for small towns and counties to start their own. The single biggest consideration that a location needs to make might very well be what perks they want to offer to prospective participants. It remains to be seen, however, whether this experiment fully pans out, and what the long-term benefits and drawbacks might be. If it doesn't, Middle America might need to get even more creative.



Calling in Gay: Occupation as a Force for Change

Samuel Lithner | Feature

FEELING A BIT queer today? Then you better call in sick. And that is what many activists in Sweden did in 1979 to stop homosexuality from being considered a disease.

RFSL, the Swedish Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex Rights, has been fighting for gay rights for many decades. In 1944, homosexuality was decriminalised and no longer punishable by law but it was still considered a disease that could be cured and being gay or bisexual could lead to you ending up in a mental asylum. Since 1971, RFSL had tried and failed to remove the disease classification. There was a growing frustration inside the movement that the regular methods of writing letters and calling politicians were not enough. There was a need for more drastic measures.

During homosexual liberation week (later pride week) in 1979, a plan to occupy the Board Of Social Affairs And Welfare was made. The target was obvious: the government agency responsible for the classification became the main adversary for the movement. Fredrik Silverstolpe, a gay and socialist activist took part in the planning. It was hard to find volunteers because of the illegal nature of the protest but in the end RFSL Stockholm was willing to participate.

On 29 August 1979, the occupation started. The activists entered the building in small groups to not arouse suspicion. Soon 30-40 activists blocked the stairs leading into the office. They rolled out their banners and started to shout and make noise, demanding that their voices be heard.

Before the occupation, several activists and sympathisers called in sick to the Social Insurance Agency claiming that they felt gay and therefore could not come to work. One woman from Småland actually received sick pay after she called in sick and claimed that she was “feeling lesbian” that day.

One woman from Småland actually received sick pay after she called in sick and claimed that she was “feeling lesbian” that day.

Police were called to the protest, but after making sure that everything was peaceful they chose not to intervene. The board asked the activists to send up a committee that could speak with the director. But the activists instead demanded that the director come to them. The director was the newly appointed Barbro Westerholm, who would later become a strong voice for gay rights in the Swedish parliament, serving many terms in office for the Liberal party. The protesters explained what they were fighting for and soon found the director agreeing with them. Both agreed that love should never be considered a disease.

The protesters were shocked that they did meet more resistance from the director. At first they didn't believe Barbro's promises of quick reform. But a few weeks later, it was removed from the list. Reflecting on the protest, Barbro said in an interview to SVT that homophobia still exists and is found if you just look beneath the surface. “I'm proud of what we did, at the same time I realise that we must be vigilant and defend [our progress]”.

Timeline

- | | |
|------|---|
| 1944 | Homosexuality is decriminalised. |
| 1979 | Homosexuality is no longer considered a mental illness. |
| 1994 | Gay couples are allowed to enter registered partnerships. |
| 1999 | Discriminating against gay people in the workplace is banned. |
| 2006 | Discriminating against gay pupils in the school is banned. |
| 2009 | Gay marriage is legalised. |



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Unexpected Item in Bagging Area: Self-service Checkouts amid the Rising Tide of Automation

Daniel Sowerby | Opinion

SELF-SERVICE CHECKOUTS – to some a glorious excuse to avoid human interaction, to others, a nuisance that only hampers their quick trip to the shops. The criticisms levelled at the machines are varied; some say they take jobs from real people, while others claim that the number of cashier overrides needed renders them useless. Why do self-service checkouts receive so much criticism? And are they a sign of a machine-dominated future to come?

A major gripe of X (Twitter) and Facebook users, as well as customers in-store, is that self-service checkouts are reducing job numbers by replacing cashier-manned checkouts. In Molenbeek-Saint-Jean, Belgium, this is certainly the view, and a tax has been introduced on self-service checkouts as a reaction to their alleged negative effect on employment opportunities. But does the evidence support this kind of initiative?

In supermarket chain Tesco's global operation, for example, the number of staff per square foot of selling space actually increased between 2019 and 2023, suggesting that the increasing numbers of self-service checkouts does not automatically lead to a downward trajectory in employment opportunities.

Experts, such as Professor Gary Mortimer, Professor of Consumer Marketing at Queensland University of Technology, have attempted to explain the popular perception by suggesting that workers are moving into less visible roles focused on fulfilling online orders and similar jobs that have emerged in the last decade or so. The online grocery

market is projected to grow by over 700% by 2032, and this boom will doubtless create new jobs in the industry, thus opening cashiers up to continued employment in the sector.

*Self-service checkouts
are not in themselves the
enemy of jobs, but they are
a warning for what comes
further down the line*

Of course a time will come, in the not-too-distant future, when machines will be able to complete these jobs too, and the cycle will repeat. But there is a finite variety of roles that can be created in one sector and so this cycle can only happen that finite number of times. As it is repeated in every sector, and automation fulfils an expanding number of roles, humans will increasingly be forced out of work. Self-service checkouts are not in themselves the enemy of jobs, but they are a warning for what comes further down the line.

Another major complaint with self-service checkouts is that they force the customer to do the work that a cashier should be doing; in effect that supermarkets are looking for unpaid labour to increase their profits. It is undoubtedly true that businesses look for all opportunities to reduce their costs, but in this case the criticism may be a little too enthusiastic. After all, checkouts form only a small part of the shopping experience.

Customers in most supermarkets already fill their trolleys themselves, unload them onto a conveyor belt, pack the items, and transport them to their cars. This is a far cry from early stores, where clerks would fetch each item for the customer and individually weigh out and package a certain amount. Often, trips to multiple shops were needed to complete a full food shop.

When Piggly Wiggly opened the first 'self-service' supermarket in 1916, it shaped the future of the retail industry. Through this change, the bulk of the work in a shopping trip was given over to the customer who now browsed the shelves, picking up items themselves and filling their baskets. In this way, most of the labour involved in a supermarket shop has already been placed on the customer. Even with the recent changes, staff numbers have remained stable and while this could possibly be the first stop on the journey to job losses, it is not the destination.

*Dutch company Jumbo
introduced slow lanes, or
'Kletskassa' in Dutch, aimed
at alleviating loneliness*

A more valid criticism of the prevalence of self-service checkouts is the loss of a human connection. Going to the shops has always provided people with a guaranteed social interaction, and this can be a lifeline for vulnerable people and those suffering from loneliness. This impact is beginning to be recognised, with several supermarkets in Europe following Dutch company Jumbo in introducing slow lanes, or 'Kletskassa' in Dutch, aimed at alleviating loneliness and providing an opportunity for people to talk. It has been observed that this not only helps customers but also has a positive impact on staff's job satisfaction.



In the short term, we may be happy to get in and out of the shop quickly, but now we have the experiences of the COVID pandemic and lockdowns to illustrate the detrimental impact of going without human interaction. Therefore, supermarkets should seek to balance the perceived convenience and larger profit margins of automation with the value of maintaining a human connection. Supermarkets are not unique: every industry has ways to help people and should remember that there is a responsibility not only to satisfy shareholders, but to do the best to help others. As human connection falters, so does our ability to see those who are struggling.

Guilt, which regulates moral choices, is less prevalent in human-machine interactions

Beyond checkouts, a major, and growing, plague hitting shops is shoplifting. In the US, stores are projected to lose over \$140 billion in 2025, while in the UK there were nearly 350,000 recorded cases of shoplifting in 2023. This trend is undoubtedly encouraged by self-service checkouts as they provide a moral grey area which emboldens people to carry out actions they usually wouldn't. Research suggests that guilt, which regulates moral choices, is less prevalent in human-machine interactions and this becomes more applicable the less human a machine is. People feel, compounded by the aforementioned complaints, that they have more of a right to take items which won't scan or to simply not scan certain items. However, this rise in shoplifting does not appear to be motivating companies to rollback their self-service checkouts.

While it is true that other factors also affect shoplifting – organised crime groups and a shift in societal attitudes, for example – it seems axiomatic that a company would do all it can to stop the trend. Nevertheless, instead of returning to manned checkouts, even as a temporary measure to give time to reassess, many companies have attempted to automate their way out of the problem by introducing receipt scanning gates at exits. While this is quietly accepted in many countries where it has been the norm for some time, an attempt by Sainsbury's to introduce the system in the UK left shoppers 'outraged' and 'furious'. Although this change is not in itself a big deal, frustration is fuelled by companies' desires to double down on troubled systems. It is perhaps the clearest example of confusing motion with progress – simply adding more innovations does not always solve problems.

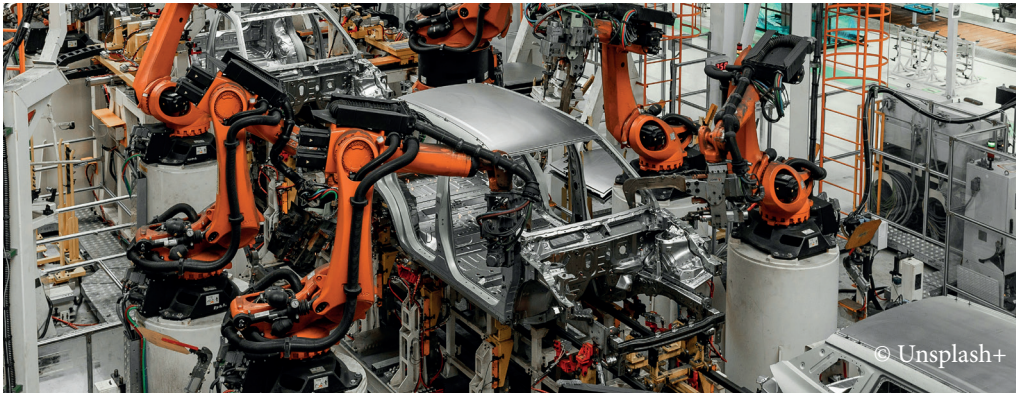
Shoplifting is not the only issue. Abuse and assaults against shop workers have come into sharp focus post-pandemic. In the UK, incidents of abuse towards, and assaults on, shop workers increased 50% to 1,300 a day in the year leading up to September 2023 – a highly concerning indictment of attitudes towards service workers. This is a global problem, with retail workers becoming targets in many countries.

In Hungary, 20% of staff have experienced physical violence, while in Turkey, half of workers say customers are treating them badly, and in Japan 60% of surveyed workers said unreasonable complaints against staff increased during the pandemic, and the list could go on. In principle, self-service checkouts could have a small impact on this, by limiting the opportunity for this abuse to take place. But in reality, they are not having this effect. The prevalence of cashier overrides often increases irritation, leading to more abuse. Customers may want human interaction when shopping but with the aggression that staff are now facing, further automation may become a question of safety.

So with such wide-ranging arguments against self-service checkouts, have the criticisms had an effect? Well, yes. Already, British supermarket chain Booths have removed almost all of their self-service checkouts amid customer complaints, citing the loss of the 'warm Northern welcome' which was fundamental to their DNA. In an ever-automating world, it is becoming clearer that people still crave human interaction, and providing customer service is becoming a significant USP. This is likely to be the motivation for many chains to remove their self-service checkouts, even if the reversal of perceived progress may be difficult to swallow.

The efficacy of customer pressure as a driver for the removal of self-service checkouts highlights an important lesson. The technical issues of the machines and the rise in shoplifting did not initially compel companies to remove





their self-checkouts; instead they simply added more technology, such as requiring customers to scan their receipts to leave the store. The human voice and customers voting with their feet were the drivers of Booth's removal. But for roles that do not involve physical interaction with customers (a large proportion of jobs), this pressure will not exist. In these roles, automation becomes invisible.

Already, tasks such as customer support and email marketing are carried out by AI, and businesses are beginning to prefer this as it cuts labour costs. Furthermore, production lines can be quicker and more accurate with machines. This process has been ongoing for decades but is acknowledged less than self-checkouts by the average person.

There will come a point when automation runs away with itself

While in some cases, there is a net positive to automation, freeing up time and people for other things, or creating more efficient experiences, there will come a point when automation runs away with itself. Without customer pressure, this point is likely to be reached and any reskilling programs that have been developed will be overwhelmed.

We should all be striving to make society fairer and improve outcomes for all people, but this process is slower than that of automation, and

will be outstripped. Lower income families will be disproportionately affected by the tide of automation, with manual jobs being lost before senior management, for example. It is true that industries and job numbers rise and fall but it is detrimental to society, families, and individuals for unemployment to rise due to a clearly identifiable and somewhat manageable factor. We should not be stifling innovation or holding the world back from progress, but we should be taking a moment to think about the best way and time to progress; after all, motion is not always progress.

Any specific prediction for the future would be futile, with technology advancing at an exponential rate. It is over 100 years since the innovation of Piggly Wiggly, but it will certainly not be 100 years before we have robots that can stack shelves; indeed, we already have the technology to pick and dispatch online orders. So, in the absence of a prediction, a warning must suffice – we should not confuse motion with progress, and we should consider the long-term health of humans and society before we automate.

Technology evolves more quickly than society and a jobless world would lead to misery and suffering for swathes of people, with any increased profits likely cancelled out by the contributions needed to alleviate that suffering. So, while self-service checkouts may not be the evil that some make them out to be, their effect should be a warning and should compel companies to ask the question: is it worth it?

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Beyond the Sunny Adriatic: Croatia's Struggle with Labour Shortage

Ida Gribajcevic | Analysis

CROATIA HAS BEEN a popular tourist destination ever since international tourism was established. The former Yugoslav republic has seen a rise in tourism in the past 20 years and welcomes millions of visitors every year. In 2023 alone, over 20 million tourists visited the country. The tourism industry accounts for more than 20% of the country's economy and is thus key to a well functioning Croatian society.

In recent years, however, the tourism industry has been struggling to fill job positions, mainly in restaurants and hotels, which are essential to the whole sector. This has led to a labour shortage that finds itself at odds with the ever-expanding tourism sector.

Croatia follows a typical 'sea and sun' tourism model. Coastal areas are promoted as optimal summer vacation destinations. Old towns like Dubrovnik and Split are popular among tourists and are advertised with their beautiful beaches, stone buildings and delicious food. There are innumerable hotels and other accommodations available for visitors to choose from. Restaurants, hotels and other businesses profit primarily from foreign visitors. To keep these alive and afloat, a solution is needed. With rising costs and fewer workers, a dire situation awaits.

The infrastructure is struggling to sustain the amount of tourists entering the country

The Croatian tourist season is very short and doesn't last all year round like in neighbouring mediterranean countries, Italy and Spain, a legacy inherited from Yugoslav times. This makes it a lot harder to find local employees as hotels can't keep open all year round, which makes employment short-term and unstable. The season is kept short, tough laws limit excessive building and the infrastructure is struggling to sustain the amount of tourists entering the country.

Since joining the European Union (EU) in 2013, Croatia has seen more than 250,000 inhabitants emigrate to Western European countries in search of a new life. In the past 30 years the country has lost more than 900,000 inhabitants in total. This number is believed to be much higher, since people can have left the country and still be listed as residents. Many have chosen to go to Germany or Austria since working conditions and living standards are higher than in their home country. On top of losing young educated people to emigration, Croatia is also facing a rapidly declining birth rate. With people leaving the country for good Croatia has been forced to look into importing

foreign labour to support its sizeable tourism industry, since the lack of workers hasn't affected the popularity of Croatia among tourists.

Germany has been home to a large Croatian diaspora ever since the 1960s. The German government also decided to remove all labour restrictions for Croatian workers in 2015. After joining the EU Croats needed permits to work in Germany for the first two years, but after calculations made by the German government these permits were no longer needed.

The government expects approximately 10,000 Croats to migrate to Germany every year and seek job opportunities there. This adds to the pressure that the country is already facing since the majority of the people who are emigrating are young people in the beginning of their careers. But, other European countries offer higher wages, better accommodation and more reasonable working hours.

In 2022, Croatia was short one third of its workforce in the tourism sector. This sector is largely seasonal which makes it hard to find workers, since the long hours and instability are unappealing to many. In recent years, Croatia has been importing workers all the way from Asia, particularly from the Philippines, since workers from neighbouring countries' don't cover the shortfall. Before joining the EU and Schengen, Bosnian workers were recruited for seasonal jobs, but it became much harder after EU rules were activated.

Migrant workers in Croatia's tourism industry face poor living standards and minimal worker's rights. According to the primary legislation governing the employment of foreign workers in Croatia, the Aliens Act, foreign workers are allowed to work without permits for 90 days in seasonal jobs. Tourism is counted as a seasonal job. To keep the labour market stable, seasonal employment of foreign workers can fill a gap that is very much needed during the summer months.

In 2023 the Croatian government also decided to make some changes to Croatian Employment Legislation. Once put in place these changes, which include a new law on maternal and parental benefits and a law on suppressing undeclared work, can hopefully bring more structure into workers' lives during the busiest tourist seasons.

According to the European Commission's projections Croatia could lose almost 7% of its active work population by 2030. The Croatian Employers Association (HUP) has estimated that up to 400,000 foreign workers will be working in Croatia by 2030 so long the GDP grows at its current annual rate, around 2.8%.

Harmonising the education system with labour market needs is also a key possibility to solve the labour shortage issue according to a representative at HUP. The main prerogative of HUP is to recruit local workers through remodelling education and pension systems and adapting smart policies into the labour market. Of course all of these aspects would take years to be put into place.

Croatia is not the only country on the Balkan peninsula that is highly dependent on tourism. Albania and Montenegro are also very much reliant on the income the tourism sector generates. This labour shortage is also felt in neighbouring countries since conditions are similar to the ones in Croatia. However, the tourism industries in Montenegro and Albania haven't faced as drastic a shortage.

With more tourists discovering Croatia and other countries on the Adriatic, a stable tourism industry would add security for the countries' economies. The demographic catastrophe that has affected Croatia in the last decades will also pose a threat for the future. Without long-term planning the tourism industry will face huge problems. Only time will tell what will happen on the sunny Adriatic.



‘Why do you defend them?’ Pinkwashing the Israeli Occupation

Frida Månsson | Interview

ONCE AGAIN, THE LGBTQ+ community seems to have garnered new groups of unexpected supporters. This time around, it has nothing to do with rainbow-colours arbitrarily splashed across company logos alongside peppy messages of love during pride month. Something more sinister is embedded within this purported ‘support’.

Since 7 October 2023, LGBTQ+ rights have been utilised as a rhetorical weapon by actors trying to undermine advocates for the Palestinian cause and calls for a ceasefire. Espousing these rights in this context might seem like a peculiar tactic, but on the contrary, this is an established strategy.

Going by different definitions and varying in its expressions, ‘pinkwashing’ or ‘rainbow washing’ is most commonly used to describe how the legitimate concerns and struggles of LGBTQ+ communities are exploited to distract from or justify actions that may be harmful to other marginalised groups or to deflect criticism from controversial policies or actions. The phenomenon involves the co-opting or weaponization of LGBTQ+ struggles to undermine or criticise support for other causes, such as the Palestinian cause.

Those in power may highlight their support for LGBTQ+ rights to divert attention away from their actions or policies in other areas, such as

human rights abuses or military actions. By emphasising their support for LGBTQ+ rights, they seek to portray themselves as progressive or tolerant while deflecting attention from their less favourable actions.

It pits one marginalised group against another and can sow discord within activist communities

By emphasising LGBTQ+ rights in certain contexts, other groups may seek to create



© Rami Gzon | Unsplash

division within progressive movements. This can be particularly effective when attempting to undermine solidarity with causes like the Palestinian struggle, as it pits one marginalised group against another and can sow discord within activist communities. Conservative politicians or groups may use LGBTQ+ rights as a wedge issue to criticise support for other causes they oppose. For example, they might argue that progressive activists are hypocritical for supporting LGBTQ+ rights while also advocating for Palestinian rights, implying that one cause undermines the other.

In the context of Israel and Palestine, the 'pinkwashing' phenomena gained prominence in discussions about Israel's treatment of Palestinians. Critics argue that Israel promotes its relatively progressive stance on LGBTQ+ rights to deflect attention from its treatment of Palestinians, particularly in the occupied territories. By highlighting LGBTQ+ rights, Israel seeks to portray itself as a liberal democracy while downplaying its human rights violations.

LGBTQ+ rights may be used to portray a particular country or entity as modern, progressive, or tolerant, diverting attention

from other, more problematic aspects of their policies or actions. This can be especially relevant in the context of international relations, where countries may seek to improve their image on the global stage.

Scholars have termed this practice 'care-racism' and 'femonationalism'.

In Sweden, this tactic has been used by right wing populists under the guise of feminist-inspired concerns about gender equality and is often mobilised and appropriated for racist and anti-immigration arguments. Scholars have termed this practice 'care-racism' and 'femonationalism'.

To investigate the phenomena further, and get a first hand experience on the matter, The Perspective reached out to Swedish media personality and published author, Fredrik Söderholm. Hosting his own morning radio show, several podcasts, and an upcoming music festival, Söderholm has gained wide recognition in different media spheres.



© Kurt Bauschardt | 'Queers Against Israeli Apartheid' Edmonton Pride Parade 2011



© Fredrik Söderholm

When he first started advocating for the Palestinian cause, he recalls mixed reactions.

"I think initially it was a bit of cheering on and a bit of 'but you're forgetting the other side, you're forgetting 7 October, do you condemn Hamas?'"

Other than a few occasional guests, Söderholm says that criticism has been almost exclusively directed at him online.

"It has been a bit different from time to time. I have a morning radio program called 'Gott Snack' and we've had guests who have been critical in some isolated cases. I don't socialise much with those kinds of people in my private circle, so the criticism mostly comes in DMs and comments."

The comment sections especially can become channels for criticism and hate.

"I get quite a lot of comments, and I don't always have the energy to read them thoroughly; sometimes there are hundreds of them."

Over time however, the amount of criticism he receives has decreased notably.

"It has decreased, and it's very little now in my DMs. Maybe because people who disagree with me have stopped following me, or because the counterarguments that were used in the beginning no longer feel relevant."

When asked if he has any experience with having his support on social media questioned due to his sexuality, he recalls the comments made by another famous Swede.

"What is sometimes said by the Calle Schulman types is, 'why do you defend them, you would have been thrown off a roof if you lived there', for example."

Completing our conversation, Söderholm was asked about his opinion on the phenomenon of using the situation of LGBTQ+ individuals in Palestine as a means to criticise support for Gaza and the Palestinian people.

"I think it's dishonest, unsympathetic, and destructive. It shifts the focus from the main issue or the root of the problem. It's a manipulation technique to shift the focus."

The use of LGBTQ+ struggles as a rhetorical weapon to criticise support for other causes is a complex phenomenon that involves exploitation, distraction, and the manipulation of public perception. It's important to critically examine the motivations behind such tactics and to ensure that the legitimate struggles of marginalised communities are not exploited for political or corporate gain.

Switching Off: Work-Life Balance and The Right to Disconnect

Lizaveta Muravieva | Analysis

Floods of notifications on your phone, feeling tied to work even after working hours, and struggling to maintain a work-life balance? An Ipsos study in the United States found that around 76% of employees check work emails outside of working hours, with half checking them on weekends or vacations. How does the right to disconnect relate to these issues?

The right to disconnect refers to an employee's right to disengage from work and work-related communication outside of working hours. This includes refraining from answering calls as well as monitoring, reading and responding to messages and emails. Surveys suggest that emails are the most common means of contacting workers outside of working hours (58%), followed by work phones (44%), personal phones (33%), and video calling platforms (22%).



The right to disconnect refers to an employee's right to disengage from work and work-related communication outside of working hours

This right first emerged as a legal proposal in France in 2016, initially implemented through agreements between employers and trade unions in companies with at least 50 employees. Since then, the legal enshrinement of this concept across the EU evolved significantly.

In 2017 a right to disconnect was established in Italy for 'smart workers' (those workers who combine working in their offices with working remotely), followed by the enactment of this right in 2018 in Belgium and Spain. This right entails that employees' non-work time will be respected, including days off and holidays. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, four other European countries have introduced or passed legislation on the right to disconnect.

Greece defines the term 'disconnect' as 'completely refraining from carrying out any work-related activities and in particular the right to not communicate online or respond to calls, emails for communication of any other nature'. Luxembourg implemented similar protections for workers' well-being, requiring employers to establish specific procedures and regimes that uphold the right to disconnect when employees use digital tools for work purposes. Portugal allows limited contact with employees during rest periods only in urgent cases. Finally, Slovakia grants teleworkers the right to disconnect, prohibiting employers

from penalising employees who fail to complete work tasks during their designated rest periods.

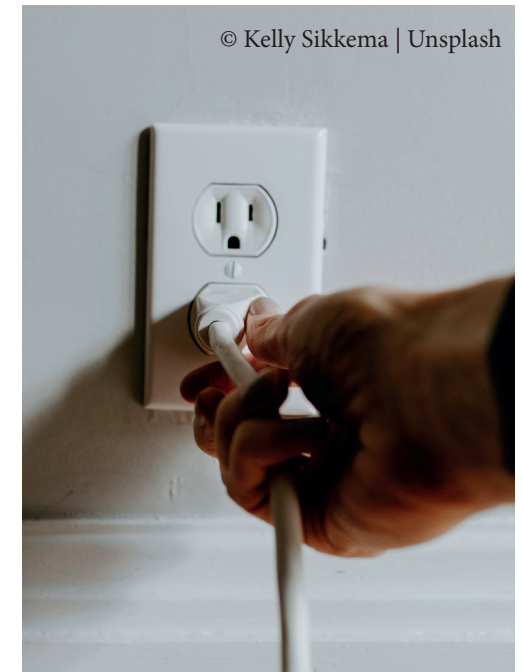
In 2021, Ireland adopted a Code of Practice for employers and employees on the right to disconnect. This Code is not legally binding but it serves as a resource for court proceedings on issues related to working time, work-life balance, as well as health and safety at work. It emphasises the right to maintain clear boundaries between work and leisure time, acknowledging the importance of respecting each other's right to disconnect.

When there is no national legislation in Germany yet, the right to disconnect is implemented as a right at the company level. For instance, Volkswagen, BMW, and Puma have implemented internal policies granting employees this valuable right.

Volkswagen, BMW, and Puma have implemented internal policies granting employees this valuable right

Currently, there is a bill pending in parliament on the right to disconnect in the Netherlands. A similar proposal is also pending in Austria. In Denmark, there is an amending Danish Act on Working Hours which implements the EU Working Time Directive. These amendments will enter into force on 1 July 2024. From this date, employers will be required to implement an "objective, reliable and accessible" system for recording individual employees' daily working hours to ensure compliance with the applicable rules on daily (11-hour rule) and weekly rest periods and maximum weekly working hours (48-hour rule).

In sum, nearly ten European Union Member States have implemented legislation on the right to disconnect as of June 2023. Aside from the European countries, this right is



gaining popularity worldwide. For instance, the Japanese term 'Karoshi', which literally translates to 'overwork death', highlights the dangers of a workaholic culture, giving rise to the concept of the right to disconnect. Over 70% of workers in Japan want to refuse to be contacted during after-working hours.

In February 2024, the Australian government passed legislation to include a new "right to disconnect" in national workplace legislation. The right to disconnect is also gaining legal traction in Latin America. Countries like Brazil, Peru, Colombia, Argentina, Chile, and Mexico have established legal measures upholding this right.

The implementation and interpretation of laws regarding the right to disconnect vary across different countries. In some countries this right may concern, for instance, workers in private companies with more than 20 employees; all employees having smart working contracts or even federal state employees.

Currently, there are no specific legal consequences and/or sanctions for employers who disregard the right to disconnect,

however, it could be seen as a failure to comply with obligations regarding well-being at work. Breaching these regulations could potentially lead to criminal or administrative sanctions such as fines or other penalties, for the employer and/or its representatives.

Turning the right to disconnect from a legal concept into a company policy requires a multifaceted approach. For instance, Mercedes-Benz Group AG automatically deletes work emails received by employees during holidays, ensuring that they are taking full advantage of their time off. Other companies prioritise an educational approach providing training for employees to help set healthy boundaries and to help them use their after-work time effectively. Additionally, some companies stop work email delivery outside of designated working hours. Eurofound, the EU Agency for the improvement of living and working conditions, reported that over 70% of workers in companies with a right to

disconnect policy consider that its impact has been very or somewhat positive.

Over 70% of workers in companies with a right to disconnect policy consider that its impact has been very or somewhat positive

Despite challenges that remain, the movement towards achieving a healthier work-life balance is steadily gaining momentum. As more countries and companies adopt the right to disconnect, focusing on improving work-life balance, reducing stress and increasing productivity, employees around the world may finally be able to truly switch off after work hours, maintain a work-life balance and recharge for a more fulfilling and productive professional life.



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The 'Lavender' Program: How Israel Uses AI to Kill Palestinians En Masse and Enforce its Illegal Military Occupation

Adla Lagström Jebara | Feature



Cover Image © | John Charles Fenech

ISRAEL'S BRUTAL GENOCIDAL onslaught in Gaza, now in its eighth month [at time of writing], is among the most destructive in recent history. So far, Israel has killed over 34,000 Palestinians, including 13,000 children, and injured over 78,000 with thousands still missing under the rubble. Nearly two million people have been forcibly expelled and displaced from their homes. Up to 80% of all civilian infrastructure in Gaza, including homes, hospitals, schools, water and sanitation facilities, have been destroyed or severely damaged by Israeli bombings according to the World Health Organization (WHO).

In the wake of the unfathomable scale of devastation and loss of life within a remarkably short period of time, recently published reports have shed light on the methods behind the Israeli military's unprecedented capacity for killing and destruction.

In April 2024, a report by +972 Magazine revealed that the Israeli military has been using an artificial intelligence (AI) program known as 'Lavender' to facilitate its systematic and unprecedented bombing of Palestinians in Gaza. The report is based on the testimony of six Israeli intelligence officers, who were all actively involved in the Israeli military and had direct experience of using AI to target Palestinians.

The intelligence officers cited in the report submit that the Israeli military has been conducting unlawful mass surveillance on the majority of Gaza's besieged 2.3 million population. This surveillance data is then fed to the AI-program to assign a rating from 1 to 100 to almost every person in Gaza, including children, who comprise nearly half of Gaza's population. This rating allegedly indicates the perceived likelihood of each person being a supposed militant.

Using these artificial ratings, the Israeli military systematically bombs Palestinian homes while families are inside, usually during the nighttime, killing and injuring entire families

and causing widespread destruction in civilian neighbourhoods.

It is worth noting here that assigning ratings to an entire population, including children, whether through AI or any other means, with the ultimate purpose of marking them for death, is inherently genocidal and an egregious violation of their basic human rights.

The Israeli military has been using an artificial intelligence (AI) program known as 'Lavender' to facilitate its systematic and unprecedented bombing of Palestinians in Gaza.

The report garnered international attention, especially following Israel's targeted attacks on three World Central Kitchen aid vehicles in Gaza which killed six foreign aid workers and their Palestinian colleague. White House national security spokesperson John Kirby stated that the United States was investigating the report that the Israeli military is using AI to help identify bombing targets in Gaza. UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres said he was "deeply troubled" by reports that the Israeli military's bombing campaign involved AI as a tool in the identification of targets, emphasising that, "No part of life and death decisions which impact entire families should be delegated to the cold calculation of algorithms".

"No part of life and death decisions which impact entire families should be delegated to the cold calculation of algorithms"

The 'Lavender' program is just one of several AI-driven programs employed by the Israeli military to kill Palestinians at an unprecedented rate. In late 2023, it was revealed that the Israeli military has been using an AI program known as 'the Gospel' (Habsora in Hebrew) to significantly increase the number of bombing targets in Gaza. These targets have included residential apartment buildings, schools, aid organisation offices, mosques, churches, hospitals and medical facilities – in other words, every type of civilian infrastructure. The Israeli military compared this AI-program to a "target factory that operates around the clock".

Such callous language highlights the dehumanising attitudes pervading the Israeli military and the political apparatus that underpins its actions, wherein the lives and dignity of Palestinians are completely disregarded. This is evident not only from the combined toll of over 110,000 killed and injured by Israel in Gaza over the past eight months, but also from Israel's decades-long brutal record of killing, dispossessing, and abusing Palestinians whom it has kept under military occupation for over half a century.

Another program used by Israel alongside 'Lavender' to systematically kill Palestinians en masse in Gaza is 'Where's daddy'. This program allegedly monitors Palestinians marked for death and signals when they have entered their family homes, after which the Israeli military targets these homes with airstrikes while families are present. One of the Israeli officers speaking to +972 Magazine, provided insight into their supposedly sophisticated process. It allegedly involves inputting hundreds of Palestinians' profiles into the system and waiting "to see who you can kill". The officer described it as "broad hunting", where Palestinians slated for death are conveniently selected by a simple copy-and-paste from AI-generated lists.

Moreover, Israeli military officers cited by +972 Magazine, confirmed that Israeli military

intelligence units have prior knowledge of the approximate number of civilians who will be killed before carrying out an attack on them. "Nothing happens by accident", one intelligence source told +972 Magazine, emphasising that, "Everything is intentional".

This chilling admission lays bare the perverse genocidal mentality within the Israeli military and the nature of Israel's actions in deliberately targeting civilians in Gaza, actions which extend far beyond aerial bombardment.

Since Israel launched their ground invasion of Gaza on 27 October 2023, countless reports and witness accounts have emerged detailing appalling atrocities by Israeli soldiers against Palestinian civilians in Gaza. Medical doctors have reported that children were directly targeted by Israeli snipers. UN experts have accused the Israeli military of intentionally firing at Palestinian civilians, including children seeking refuge. Eyewitness testimonies and video evidence have documented Israeli soldiers shooting at civilians, including children.

Even journalists and their families have been targeted by the Israeli military. One example is Al Jazeera's Gaza bureau chief, Wael El Dahdouh. At the end of October 2023, an Israeli airstrike killed his wife, two children and grandson. Later, in December 2023, El Dahdouh himself was injured in an Israeli drone strike that killed his colleague, Samer Abudaqa, while they were reporting. Then, in January 2024, his eldest son, journalist Hamza El Dahdouh, and his colleague Mustafa Thuraya, were killed by an Israeli missile strike on their car, despite being in a supposed safe zone. In the span of eight months, over 100 Palestinian journalists have been killed by Israel.

In the West Bank, which has been under illegal Israeli military occupation along with Gaza and East Jerusalem since 1967, Israel has developed technological infrastructure alongside its existing occupation infrastructure such as



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the apartheid wall, military checkpoints and illegal settlements. Moreover, the occupied Palestinian territories have long been used by Israel as testing grounds for invasive surveillance technologies and weapons, which it subsequently sells to other states.

Occupied Palestinian territories have long been used by Israel as testing grounds for invasive surveillance technologies and weapons, which it subsequently sells to other states

In 2021, the Washington Post revealed that the Israeli military has been deploying facial recognition technology integrated with a vast network of smartphones and cameras installed in Palestinians' neighbourhoods to keep the Palestinians in the occupied West Bank under constant surveillance. The report, based on interviews with former Israeli soldiers, describes how soldiers enforcing the military occupation use an application known as 'Blue Wolf' to capture facial images of Palestinians, which then matches them to a database so massive, it is referred to by soldiers as 'Facebook for Palestinians'. This database, known as 'Wolf Pack', is said to contain profiles of almost every Palestinian in the West Bank, including photographs of Palestinian individuals, their family histories, education and a security rating for each person.



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In 2022, the Israeli military installed remote-controlled robotic guns in densely populated Palestinian neighbourhoods and at Israeli military checkpoints in the occupied West Bank. These robotic guns, designed to fire stun grenades, tear gas projectiles, and sponge-tipped bullets, were part of an experimental program using AI to track and attack Palestinians.

In Hebron, a city in the occupied West Bank that has been subjected to intense illegal Israeli settlement activity, these robotic guns were installed at military checkpoints along with surveillance towers and a large number of cameras. Additionally, the Israeli military installed facial recognition technology to record the biometric data of Palestinians

forced to pass through the checkpoints to move within their city, as documented in a 2023 report by Amnesty International.

This facial recognition technology, known as 'Red Wolf', is one of the latest experimental surveillance tools used against Palestinians, following at least two other known surveillance systems and databases.

Even in East Jerusalem, the Israeli police have expanded their extensive surveillance in the Old City and surrounding neighbourhoods, using a growing network of cameras and a facial recognition system known as 'Mabat 2000' to keep Palestinians under constant surveillance.



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Israel's development of technology is inseparable from its occupation of Palestine. Not only are Palestinians subjected to these technologies for testing purposes, but these technological developments play a crucial role in perpetuating and reinforcing the illegal military occupation of their lands, and violating their rights on a daily basis.

While technological advancements and AI hold great potential to improve lives and build a sustainable future, Israel has demonstrated how AI and mass surveillance can also be used to facilitate genocide and streamline horrific scales of death and destruction. This situation calls for an urgent need for robust international treaties that prohibit the use and development of AI technology linked

to human data by militaries. Such treaties must aim to protect human rights and prevent mass atrocities against civilian populations, not only in Palestine but also in any other region in the world.

The fundamental problem remains, however, in the complete absence of consequences and accountability Israel has faced for its prolonged illegal military occupation of Palestine, as well as its current genocidal onslaught on Gaza. As long as Israel continues to evade accountability and not be held responsible for its actions against the Palestinian people, the inhumane treatment and violations of their human rights will persist and are likely to worsen over time.

Occupation on the Street: The Shoeshiners of La Paz

Luc Appold | Travel

IN THE STREETS OF Andes Metropole La Paz, Bolivia, there exists a fascinating and underreported occupation: shoeshining. For shoeshiners, also known as 'Lustracalzados', occupation has two meanings. It is their occupation to clean up to 100 pairs of shoes on a daily basis (it is important to note that in Bolivia, it is customary only to enter a house only with clean shoes). Likewise, they each 'occupy' approximately 1.5 square metres of space in the city of La Paz with their 'caja' (shoeshiner box) and 'bancito' (small bench) for their profession.

Shoeshiners are a diverse group of people but certain patterns can be observed. For example, there are parents who support their families as shoeshiners. Some of them came to La Paz as minors to work as shoeshiners and have remained in this profession. Others only started shining shoes later.

There are seniors among the shoeshiners who are no longer able to work in their old profession because they are physically unable to do heavy physical work but, at the same time, receive too little pension and support from their environment to avoid having to work. The NGO Vamos Juntos has observed that their proportion has been increasing for years.

There are also young shoeshiners, although there are almost no minors working as shoeshiners during school hours. During the vacations, children from more rural areas often come to earn money as shoeshiners. In the 1990s, the proportion of underage shoeshiners was still over 50%. Nowadays over 50% of shoeshiners are between 35 and 49 years old. The profession of shoeshining is carried out by many men, although the proportion of women has been rising steadily for years.

La Paz shoeshiners are organised into unions, which claim the right to shine shoes in specific locations. These unions are further organised into an umbrella union representing all shoeshiners in La Paz (FUNDELPAZ,

Federación única de los lustracalzados de La Paz). There is also the shoeshiners' foundation, Fundación Nuevo Día.

The Nuevo Día has an inconspicuous building in the city centre. Shoeshiners can change in this building so that they can drive into the city as 'civilians' and only put on a balaclava for work. Shoeshiners can also get a full meal with soup for 5 bolivianos (around 7.7 kr) and make joint decisions on contentious topics. For example, all shoeshiners agreed in 2018/2019 to charge 2 bolivianos instead of 1.5 bolivianos for shining shoes.

The unions are organised democratically and are led by an elected president and their deputies

Being part of a union entails paying dues and participating in activities like football matches or union anniversaries. Regular meetings serve as a central meeting point for members to discuss important matters and make decisions. The unions are organised democratically and are led by an elected president and their deputies. There are also positions such as the Secretariat for Sports, which organises soccer and futsal training units.

By paying fees to the city, shoeshiners secure their right to work. Shoeshiners who are not part of a union and do not pay the city are referred to as ambulantes and are sometimes chased away by union members. Particularly at main shoeshining spots like Plaza San Francisco, unions designate individuals to chase away ambulantes.

There are shoeshiners who work with fixed chairs instead of shoe-shining boxes, the so-called silloneros. Historically, there have been conflicts between shoeshiners with shoe-shining boxes (cajas) and the silloneros. Due to rural-urban migration starting in the 1980s and the closure of tin and silver mines,

more people came to the city and began working informally as shoeshiners. Since the established silloneros did not welcome that the new shoeshiners charged less money, they sometimes resorted to violence. To protect themselves, shoeshiners began wearing balaclavas (pasamontañas) to avoid being recognized by the silloneros.

These days, shoeshiners cite various reasons for wearing balaclavas. They serve to protect against the fumes of shoe polish, air pollution and the sun. Additionally, balaclavas serve to obscure one's identity. Wearing balaclavas has led to the prejudice that shoeshiners are criminals, as they hide their faces. This has meant that, even in 2024, some children, siblings, or spouses are unaware that their family member works as a shoeshiner, fearing discrimination.

Like with other prejudices, this can be explained by certain social circumstances and realities of life. Among shoeshiners, there are individuals who have problems with alcohol and other drugs (especially clefa, a glue used to repair shoes), and some engage in petty crime. The informal work of a shoeshiner has low barriers to entry. A shoeshiner can acquire a caja and cleaning materials relatively inexpensively. Therefore, this type of work can also be pursued by individuals struggling with drug addiction or experiencing homelessness. Another part of the explanation is that many shoeshiners used to clean at the Plaza Pérez Velasco. As this was a place known for high crime, shoeshiners were quickly associated with it.

Those who are caught drunk while wearing the union uniform must pay a fine and may be expelled from the union

Within the unions, there is an absolute ban on alcohol. Those who are caught drunk



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while wearing the union uniform must pay a fine and may be expelled from the union. Nonetheless, there are also a few union members who struggle with alcohol addiction. For this reason, shoeshiners do not wear the union uniform when they drink alcohol. A specific term that arises in this context is 'en guerra' (being at war). En guerra refers to a certain drinking behavior in which the

alcohol-addicted person abstains for a period of several weeks and then drinks extensively for several weeks or even months.

Many shoeshiners speak Aymara, an Indigenous language from the Andean highlands, and maintain a strong connection to their hometowns (pueblos). Especially before the 2009 constitutional reform by the



© Wikimedia Commons | Evo Morales [Previous] President of Bolivia shining shoes

first Indigenous President of Bolivia, Evo Morales, Indigenous people were heavily discriminated against. Since 2009, Bolivia has been recognized as a plurinational state, acknowledging a total of 37 official languages, including 36 Indigenous languages plus Spanish.

Perhaps for this reason, at least some shoeshiners have expressed support for the former president Evo Morales. In a conversation with a shoeshiner, he said that Evo ensured respect for the 'Campesinos' (people from the countryside). Thanks to Morales, he can live his culture with pride. Furthermore, Evo Morales connected his neighbourhood on the outskirts of El Alto, a neighbouring city of La Paz, to basic service facilities.

Luis Arce is the current president of Bolivia and a member of Evo Morales's own party Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS). Following the 2019 elections, there were riots and allegations of electoral fraud having been committed by Evo Morales. This resulted in Evo Morales being forced to flee the country

and an early election held in October 2020, which Luis Arce won. In the upcoming 2025 elections, Evo Morales will most likely run against his party colleague Luis Arce, among other candidates. A clear favourite among the shoeshiners for a presidential candidate is not yet evident.

The political climate also has very concrete influences on the shoeshiners in La Paz who face a unique challenge due to the city's role as the seat of the Bolivian government. Demonstrations, like those in 2019, often occur in the city, sometimes involving the use of small amounts of TNT. These demonstrations cause potential shoeshining clients to avoid the streets, significantly impacting the shoeshiners' earnings since shoeshiners depend on people being out on the streets. This means that shoeshiners earn almost no money when demonstrators occupy the streets.

Shoeshining in La Paz can provide a means of sustenance, particularly if one has a prime location and favourable weather conditions.

On exceptionally good days, earnings can reach up to 200 Bolivianos (approximately 310 kr), while on average days, it ranges between 80-150 Bolivianos (125-230 kr). However, in peripheral areas or less frequented spots, earnings can plummet to below 30 Bolivianos (45 kr), making it insufficient to adequately support a family. Many shoeshiners supplement their income by taking on additional jobs, such as construction work, washing cars or selling small items like sweets, keychains, or shoeshining kits.

At one point, people were only allowed to leave the house based on the last number of their ID

The COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting lockdowns led to fewer office workers going to their offices for work. Fewer people needing polished shoes presents a challenge for shoeshiners. The Bolivian government took some very drastic measures to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. At one point, people were only allowed to leave the house based on the last number of their ID: end numbers 1 and 2 were allowed to go outside on Mondays, 3 and 4 on Tuesdays, up to 9 and 0 on Fridays. Nobody was allowed to leave the house on the weekend. In a country like Bolivia, where it is estimated that 80% of the working population was in informal employment in 2020, such an extensive lockdown was incredibly financially painful.

Many shoeshiners depend on their daily earnings to support themselves and their families. A single mother who worked as a shoeshiner said in a conversation in 2020 that she eats less because there is not enough money for food. Responding to this urgent situation, some NGOs started distributing food. One such organisation is the NGO Vamos Juntos, which reserves this measure only for absolute emergencies and has only resorted to it once

before in its 20-year existence.

COVID-19 was particularly challenging for families, as children couldn't attend school and relied on digital devices. However, these were not sufficiently available in many households, especially among shoeshiners. This disadvantaged poorer children, as they couldn't access education.

While the situation has improved post-pandemic, many are concerned about the impact of economic instability. Another trend affecting shoeshiners is that more people are wearing sneakers. Although shoeshiners have come up with the solution of using a soapy foam to clean sneakers, demand is still decreasing. Many seek other part-time jobs, such as in construction. The future of this particular profession is uncertain, and it remains to be seen how the shoeshining craft can be preserved.



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Taxis in the Pearl of the Antilles

Adrian Vafaei | Opinion

If you've ever seen or read about Cuba, then it's likely you've stumbled upon the strange phenomenon regarding Havana and its traffic, specifically its cars. Here in this sunny Caribbean paradise, newer models of cars are a rare sight with the majority of automobiles being classic cars. With their white-walled wheels and vibrant colours, they give the impression that Havana is stuck in the 1960s, almost a time capsule.

Shifting attention from the cars to the owners, there are those who use their museum-on-wheels daily as a taxi service. A long time ago, I remember watching a video on the taxi drivers of Havana and how their wages were higher than that of a doctor. While my teenage brain saw this as a fascinating demonstration of the failures of communism, today, I see this as just one variable among thousands involved in private enterprises and the Cuban state. First though, a little backstory.

The Cuban revolution took place during the 50s and was spearheaded by socialist visions of a Cuba free from Western influence. The leader of the resistance to the elected president turned military dictator, Fulgencio Batista, was none other than Fidel Castro, who eventually became the leader of the country in 1959 and led it through perhaps its most distressing episode, the Cuban missile crisis. Following the crisis, the country received aid and benefits from its strongest ally, the Soviet Union, and Castro began a series of reforms aimed at changing the nation from a capitalist free market economy to a communist centrally planned one.

Nationalisation of oil and other resources, centralisation of the press, and cementing Castro as the prime minister and later president transformed the country. Overnight, the private sector was disbanded. With aid

from the Soviets, the economy managed to stay afloat, however, sanctions from the West always put the economy at unease.

With the fall of the Soviet Union in the 90s, Cuba faced a new frontier. The island nation was now alone. The country had to employ desperate measures to survive such as the implementation of ration cards and, crucially, the opening of private licences to small independent businesses such as family-owned restaurants, private employment and of course, the focal point of this article, taxis.

*Wanna buy a car?
The State owns them.
Perhaps a sandwich? The
State sets the price.*

During this time, food became a scarce resource. The daily caloric intake of the average Cuban fell by a quarter. Suddenly, that 1958 Cadillac with its radiant light blue colour wasn't your biggest concern. Your biggest concern was deciding whether to eat lunch or dinner. Wanna buy a car? The State owns them. Perhaps a sandwich? The State sets the price. You're a surgeon and want a raise? Not unless the State deems it necessary. However, if you want to take a taxi from the outskirts to downtown Havana, well good luck because you're paying whatever the taxi driver deems appropriate!

With the economy in freefall, the tourism sector spearheaded by independent taxi drivers managed to salvage the country. Tourists were more than inclined to pay tips to taxis which significantly raised their monthly salary. The Cuban state legalised the use of US dollars, making those tips from American tourists

worth a lot more than the usual Cuban pesos. With relations between Cuba and the West improving, the lifting of sanctions by the EU during the 2000s and a change in leadership to Raúl Castro, things were looking good for private business owners. Reforms included the abolishment of the equal-pay system, opening of the borders and drastic simplifications to the colossal bureaucracy.

The economy was stimulated and today those privately owned businesses have become far more widespread, existing not exclusively in the service and tourism sector but also in production and manufacturing. Together, they helped transform the country into a more modern communist state such as Vietnam or China, a socialist nation with free-market undertones.

*With state-owned stores
nearly always empty, the
free market ones held many
items not found elsewhere*

However, this new system came with its issues. Cubans started noticing a distinct inequality emerging. With state-owned stores nearly always empty, the free market ones held many items not found elsewhere, at a significantly higher price. The same applied for restaurants charging significantly more and paying their employees a higher wage than those working for state-owned restaurants. Many Cubans feared that these prices would only increase, causing a growing economic divide among the citizenry.



The Trump administration and a fall in US tourism have set the stage for another crisis

A worst case scenario would be an open conflict between government and private occupations, creating an even bigger wealth gap within the country. Today, animosity has reawoken; the Trump administration and a fall in US tourism

have set the stage for another crisis. Although the privatisation of businesses is expanding in Cuba, the general administration of the country is set on the Cuban model and it's not looking likely to change itself anytime soon.

The doctors whose wages are lower than those of workers in the service industry are a reminder of the complete monopoly the Cuban state holds. Whether the solution to Cuba's problems is a complete overhaul of the

Cuban model with a greater private sector enabling more opportunities for citizens to afford rising prices or, conversely, the complete destruction of the private sector, going back to ground zero with all occupations being government mandated, is hotly contested. With Raúl Castro now in power, things look to be leaning towards the first option.

Taxi drivers in Cuba enjoy privileges not found in other occupations on the island, explaining their significantly higher wages relative to

doctors, engineers and other government paid jobs. Whether working as a taxi driver is sustainable enough for the future remains unclear with animosities rising between Cuba and the West. However, one thing remains certain: the taxis biggest (paying) customers will always be tourists. Disrupt the tourists and you'll disrupt the taxis. Disrupt the taxis and you'll disrupt the private sector as a whole. So next time you're in Havana, make sure to give your cabbie a nice tip.



Reflections on Reality in Iraq

Santeri Rönty | Travel

Before embarking on my journey, I went through travel advice from a handful of European countries, and all of them conveyed the same message: under no circumstances should one travel to Iraq. The warning was naturally accompanied by a map of the country painted in red. I would be lying if I said that I was not even slightly nervous when leaving my home in Cairo to catch a flight to Kuwait, and then crossing the land border to southern Iraq.

Despite what foreign governments had to say about it, the statistics were on my side as Iraq through the past few years has seen a renaissance of tourism – a sector that has been off-limits for decades, except in the autonomous region of Iraqi Kurdistan, which has been open to tourists for years. In the beginning it was hard to believe that the country would be open enough to grant tourist visas, so around a month before my departure I walked into the Iraqi embassy in Giza where I was told that there is no need to obtain a visa before crossing the border, I would be granted one on arrival. And upon crossing the border from Kuwait, the visa processing took less than five minutes.

The central government of the country does not rule all territories, and certain governorates are being controlled by militias

But a trip to Iraq is not without its risks. The central government of the country does not rule all territories, and certain governorates are being controlled by militias with different ideological or religious backgrounds. Most of

these militias, however, are not especially hostile towards foreigners, and for instance while passing through the various checkpoints when travelling overland between the governorates, none of the militias paid much attention to me as a foreigner. In fact, most of them were just surprised to see a European passport. Perhaps the lack of central governance in the country is the main reason why most governments advise against travelling to the country.

The travel advice provided by most governments does not acknowledge the full picture and tends to generalise regional risks to cover the whole country

After having spoken to many locals in Karbala and Najaf, it seemed to me that the regions that to this day face terrorist attacks and security issues are the northern governorates of Duhok, Kirkuk, Nineveh and the governorate of Diyala bordering Iran in the East. The travel advice provided by most governments does not acknowledge the full picture and tends to generalise regional risks to cover the whole country – Iraq is not a war zone and there is no need to warn against all travel in the country.

In my experience, however, was is the case in many countries in the Middle East, the most dangerous aspect is the traffic. Taking the most popular means of transport between the cities, a shared taxi, will take on speeds up to 220 kilometres per hour. My first experience taking a shared taxi was between Basra and Al-Hilla, a distance of 450 kilometres, and the trip



took around two and a half hours, excluding the pauses along the way.

A guest in an Iraqi's house will never be left without attention or food.

Iraqis are easily some of the most generous and hospitable people I have met: most of them would not allow me to pay for food I ordered from their restaurants, and it's easy to find yourself fighting with the locals about who gets to pay the bill after the dinner. A guest in an Iraqi's house will never be left without attention or food.

After having lived in Egypt for over half a year, I had become used to being stared at when walking in the street or using public transport. In Iraq, however, especially in Najaf and Karbala, not a single soul paid attention to my presence. And when I opened my mouth to speak in Egyptian Arabic dialect, most people would right away assume I was either Lebanese or Syrian – and all of them were shocked when I said I was in fact from Finland.

I am not merely writing this piece to share my experience from my independent travels to Iraq, but to reflect some of the realities that the country is facing, which seem to be drastically different from the pictures painted by western media. The realities include the aftermath of the American invasion of Iraq in 2003, and its consequences on the internal safety situation of Iraq, a subject which may change on a daily basis.

While in the country, I took the liberty to conduct a few spontaneous interviews with locals, especially those of the older generation. Everyone I talked to were surprised to hear that Western governments advise against all travel in Iraq, and some were even convinced that they are doing so to limit access to hearing about Iraqis' experiences from the wars and instability they have been suffering from for

such a long period of time. That is exactly why I felt more compelled to hear their stories.

One of them has been stuck in my mind to this day. Shaker, a 75-year-old man from Karbala in central Iraq, used his words to paint me a picture of how the American invasion touched every single Iraqi, and how the trauma from the destruction and suffering has left a mark on the Iraqi identity. Everyone lost family and friends. It destroyed dreams, aspirations, lives. Indeed, the American invasion ensured the

creation of internal and regional resistance which gained support. The creation of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria was a direct consequence of the presence of American troops in Iraq and Syria, and the deterioration of the government rule in the two countries.

After 2014, around 40 percent of Iraqi territory was under the control of ISIS. This, again, justified the presence of US troops, which still remain in the country. Contrary to the dominant narrative in the West, according to

which actors themselves within the region are the main cause for instability in Iraq, almost every person I talked to repeated the exact same thing: the instability in Iraq is a direct consequence of the American presence in the country as nearly all terrorist attacks in the country target American troops.

In 2024, the Iraqi government began negotiations to end the American troops' presence in Iraq, but the war in Gaza is not making the situation easy. Iraq has directly been able to stay out of the conflict, making it one of the more internally stable countries in the region.

Being occupied by foreign powers for over two decades has left Iraqis with no other reality

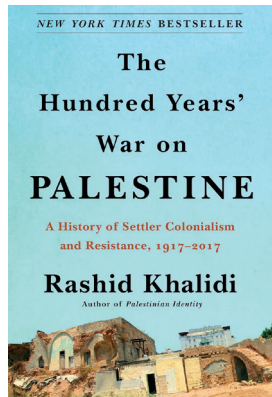
The current escalation between Israel and Iran has caused a slight surge in the activity of Iranian-affiliated groups, which gives the international coalition a reason to not leave Iraqi territory. This begs the question about whether or not the international coalition leaving Iraq would make it more vulnerable to internal struggle. Either way, being occupied by foreign powers for over two decades has left Iraqis with no other reality than to only imagine what the country would be like without such an occupation.

In the end, as suggested by numerous locals that I talked to in Iraq, the American troops seem to be a root cause for the internal weakness and instability in the country. Many also pointed out that in case the troops of the international coalition were to withdraw, the regional movements of resistance would not have anything to resist. Out of all the amazing things I encountered in Iraq, being able to access these perspectives was definitely the biggest highlight of my trip.



Reading Recommendations

While watching the news, it is all too easy to feel overwhelmed or believe we lack enough knowledge to formulate an educated opinion on current affairs. Headlines are skim-read on phones, magazines are absentmindedly flicked through and opinions are formulated on topics based on what we learn by word of mouth. Although all intrinsic to today's media landscape, sometimes it is nice to delve deeper. The following are book read and recommended by the Magazine Committee that members have found useful when doing just that.



The Hundred Years' War on Palestine – Adla Lagström Jebara

This compelling and insightful book by Palestinian-American historian and professor, Rashid Khalidi, thoroughly examines the impact of Zionist settler colonialism in Palestine and the Palestinian struggle against it over the course of a century. The book is divided into six main chapters, each dedicated to a pivotal historical period that has shaped modern Palestinian history, starting with the year 1917 and the Balfour Declaration. This book challenges the conventional Western narrative on Palestine and is a must-read for anyone seeking a deeper insight into the modern history of Palestine.

Same River Twice – Putin's War Against Women by Sofi Oksanen – Mathilde Perrin

This essay written by the Finnish writer Sofi Oksanen denounces Russian colonialism and sexual violence committed against women in Ukraine. Sofi Oksanen illustrates her words with a wealth of documentation and through the story, inter alia, of her own grandmother, an Estonian citizen, tortured and raped by men from the Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti (Committee for State Security of the Soviet Union) shortly after Estonia was annexed by the USSR in 1944. This book sheds light on the atrocities committed during war time by the Russian army.



The Cracked Bridge Over the Bosphorus Strait by Can Dündar – Anonymous

A journey through the tumults of Turkish history since the founding of the Republic in 1923, Dündar leads his readers into a labyrinth of political intrigues, coups and societal conflicts that have shaped Turkey. Sharply focused on the complex relationships between power and society, religion and secularism, Dündar's book doesn't shy away from controversial topics and reads like a thriller, full of unexpected twists and gripping revelations. *The Cracked Bridge Over the Bosphorus Strait*, currently available in German, is not only a captivating book but also an important contribution to the understanding of Turkey's complex history and society.

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