CHECKS& BALANCES

DE-EVOLUTION

*One Step Forward,
Two Steps Back?*

Sofie Raven
Chairwoman of Clio

Dear reader,

I am very excited to welcome you to the first edition of the Checks & Balances magazine. It feels as though the academic year has only just started, but the Editorial Staff has already managed to produce a brand-new edition with many interesting topics to discuss.

I can speak for the whole Clio Board when I say that we hope this year will be the first year without COVID-19 interruptions. We are hoping to move forward, get to know many people and enjoy new experiences. However, the Faculty of Arts has recently had me question whether we are making progress or going around in circles as they decided to offer hybrid teaching in the first week after the Christmas vacation. This strongly reminds me of the online teaching that was characteristic of daily student life during the COVID-19 era. Was this decision due to a new problem, namely the energy crisis, or due to the old problem, namely the pandemic? Or did the faculty simply wish to offer students one more week of holiday bliss with their parents?

The international world also seems conflicted between deterioration, improvement and going around in circles. If you have been reading the news, you have undoubtedly noticed Trump's announcement that he is running for a second term in office. China still seems stuck in their anti-COVID-19 policy. The FIFA World Cup are taking place in their continuous four-year cycle. But, this year seems different as the human rights issues have put a damper on the football fan spirit. On the bright side, Biden cancelled (certain) student debts, Ukrainian forces proudly reclaimed the city of Kherson and the French baguette received UNESCO world heritage status.

I hope that this edition of the Checks & Balances will show you many new patterns and insights into the world around us. I want to thank the Editorial Staff for their hard work and dedication that were essential to publishing this edition.

Enjoy reading!

On behalf of the 35th Board of Clio and with much love,

Sofie Raven
Chair of the Clio Board

Erin Deandra Murdiani
Editor in Chief

Dearest reader

Holiday season is finally upon us and with this comes the first edition of Clio's Checks & Balances Magazine. Building this academic year around the hopes of moving beyond the pandemic, we should share thanks for being able to see our loved ones' faces on the daily, to go out till the mornings with our many friends and to continue our travels beyond borders.

I personally have been grateful for the amazing Editorial Staff of '22-'23 for sharing the same passion I have for continuing Checks' legacy as Clio's magazine and for putting their all towards this first edition,

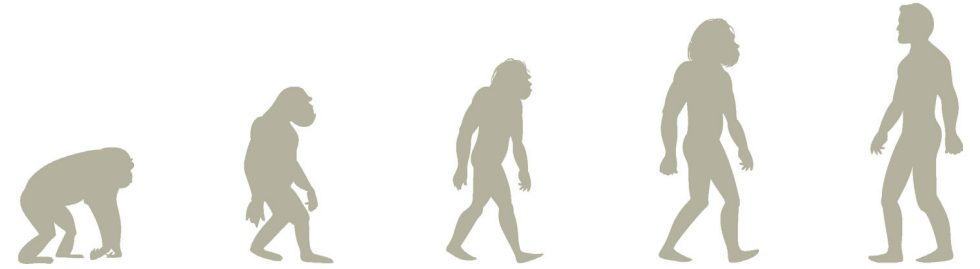### 'DE-EVOLUTION:
One Step forward, Two Steps Back?'

We have given our title many deliberations, but finally settled with our hyphenated artistic touch, De-Evolution. Neither devolution, a descent to a lower or worse state, nor involution, the process of complicating something, captured our idea of humankind's tendency to move in circles, even under the guise of so called 'evolution'.

Understanding that the earth orbits the sun once a year and rotates on its axis once a day, humankind is already, naturally, going around in circles. But we can't seem to grasp the idea that we may be doing so in our everyday society. This edition's articles covers a variety of topics, discussing Europe's descent into classical war, modern day segregation, conservatism's 'return' to politics and many more.

I wholly hope this read gives you insight into things that had never crossed your minds before, and that it sparks mindful thinking. I wish you all a warm happy holiday, whether you are staying in Groningen,spending it with your families or friends, Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year <3

On behalf of the Editorial Staff of '22-'23,

Erin Deandra Murdiadi
Editor-in-Chief

IN THIS ISSUE

"To Stand Still Is to Go Backwards"

Can the Degrowth Movement Successfully Challenge Mainstream Economics on Economic Growth?

THOMAS HUISMAN

We live in an ever-moving and rapidly evolving world where innovations quickly come ensuingly. In the last century, the world has changed at a speed, it seems, like never before, which has hugely changed the lives of an unimaginable number of people. At the start of the industrial revolution, it was mostly Western-European and North-American countries that saw the largest growth in wealth, the biggest improvement in standard of living and growth in GDP. Later, other regions followed suit like East-Asia and Eastern-Europe. Each and every one of these governments set its focus on economic growth to keep up with this pace, which is supported by mainstream economic theory. Economic growth received an almost untouchable status. The Bank of England explains economic growth like this:

> *Essential to the idea of economic growth is GDP standing for gross domestic product. If you add up the value of all goods and all services produced in a country, over a specific period of time; you have the GDP. Or equivalently, if you add up all the incomes earned by people in a country over the course of that period, you receive the GDP too. GDP is one way of measuring the size of a country's economy and judging whether that economy is growing over time. So the citizens of a country with a high GDP are likely to have high incomes and high standards of living and if the GDP goes up a lot, people are likely to be earning and spending more and businesses are likely to be hiring and investing more. On the other hand, if GDP growth is weak or perhaps even falling, companies are likely to be cutting jobs and people earn and spend less, leaving them worse off.*
>
> Adapted from The Bank of England

While this explanation paints a solely positive picture of economic growth, and seemingly rightfully so, there is also some criticism with regards to economic growth as this growth never ends. Many of these criticisms are related to climate change, which has become a mainstream political issue in the last couple of decades. An often heard worry is that we will run out of the resources which are needed for economic growth or that it is not desirable all together to drain nature of so much of its wealth. Moreover, a strong correlation has been observed between economic growth and the rate of carbon dioxide emissions as well as a relation between economic wealth and carbon dioxide emissions worldwide.

Besides this, there have been questions about whether economic growth is actually still benefitting ordinary people. Quite recently, the prime minister of New Zealand, Jacinda Ardern, stated that "economic growth accompanied by worsening social outcomes is not success, it is failure". Furthermore, in 2003, Tony Blair, the former prime minister of the United Kingdom, said that "real progress cannot be measured by money alone. We must ensure that economic growth contributes to our quality of life, rather than degrading it". In many wealthy countries, while the economy has almost constantly been growing, the growth of wages has not kept up with inflation. This has resulted in a stagnation of real wages, which signifies wages in terms of the amount of goods and services that can be bought with it.

With these drawbacks of economic growth in mind, should we finally consider alternative ways to alleviate poverty and approve people's lives while also taking our planet's well-being into account? The degrowth movement and its corresponding theories provide approaches which slip into mainstream political thinking and economics. Within this movement, ideas range from extremes such as completely dismantling global capitalism, or to more conventional methods and ideas such as a sort of post-growth capitalism.

One of the first contributions, which has been one of the origins of the degrowth movement, is the report Limits to Growth from 1972 by MIT researchers commissioned by the Club of Rome, a Swiss think tank. This report concluded that as no changes would be made in our use of resources "the most probable result will be a rather sudden and uncontrollable decline in both population and industrial capacity". While at the time, many responses to the book were sceptical or even derided it, some of the ideas of the report regained popularity after decades of focus on other approaches.

Although the environmental movement has been somewhat successful in convincing national governments and international organisations like the United Nations to adopt their ideas, it overshadowed the more radical and, according to some, only possible solutions to climate change. Ecological-economic decoupling, economic growth without increasing the pressure on the environment by utilising greener technologies in the future, seems the path that IOs and national governments have chosen.

Giorgos Kallis, ecological and political economist and Professor at the Institute of Environmental Science and Technology in Barcelona is one of the leading contemporary scholars that study and advocate for degrowth. In one of his studies in cooperation with other scholars, Research on degrowth he says that there is no evidence that absolute decoupling, reducing environmental impact while economic growth continues, is impossible. Furthermore, he argues that "sufficient decoupling to stay within environmental limits is logically possible, but physically unlikely." With the failure of the Paris Climate Agreement and earlier agreements - or more generally the failure of national governments to act upon climate change - it seems clear that at least for the foreseeable future, absolute decoupling will not be a plausible reality. While degrowth has moved out of the periphery of the political sphere, it still asks for big societal changes when it would ever be implemented. Kallis contends that capitalism in its current form is not compatible with degrowth, as it relies on economic growth for its stability. Only if basic monetary, fiscal, labour and welfare institutions transform, economies would be able to remain stable without growth.

While much of the research on degrowth is focused on the situation in wealthy countries, there are implications for countries in the so-called Global South. Here, the intersection between decoloniality and degrowth comes in. Climate change is disproportionately affecting the Global South although most of the global emissions come from wealthy countries. These currently try to lower their emissions through technology relying on resources of the disadvantaged countries once again. The current focus on growth thus perpetuates the core-periphery relations that have existed since the heyday of colonialism. Instead, degrowth advocates to focus on human wellbeing and redistributing wealth more equally among the peoples of the world.

Nonetheless, all of this remains a distant dream. Kallis himself acknowledges that the ideas of degrowth are politically very unlikely, because of established interests and power relations. The world, where the saying 'to stand still is to go backwards' is our philosophy, is likely to remain. The movement does however give us an interesting alternative and something to think about.

Stepping Stone or Stepping Back?

Two Perspectives on Nuclear Energy in Modern Times

ANNA ARAGONCILLO BARCELÓ & CARLA GOLTINGS

Winter is coming - literally and with it darker, shorter and especially colder days. The Russian war against Ukraine brought food shortage, inflation and a lot of heat - not to our flats but the energy discussion. Nuclear energy might be the most vigorously discussed energy source among politicians, scholars and people in general. Therefore, we attempt a balanced discussion for and against nuclear energy.

Anna

The first question regarding nuclear energy is why. Why do we need to worry about nuclear energy and energy usage? The fast pace of human evolution leads to a shocking rise in resource consumption and while this extrinsic need for more energy is currently coal-sustained, it cannot continue to be like this. Ideally, we'd go 100% renewable but, truthfully, current renewable technologies cannot sustain our energy demand.

Nuclear energy is a low-carbon emission energy source that plays a key role as a sustainable alternative to sudden eradication of fossil fuel usage. Nuclear energy is extremely efficient and reliable, which means that, apart from satisfying our energy demand, it won't emit copious amounts of CO2, which'd push us to an inflection point. Scholars agreed that the net emissions of nuclear energy would allow us to maintain both our global economy network and the earth's resilience.

Carla

Instead of why I think about what if. For nuclear energy there is much more to consider than its efficiency. Since security is at the heart of International Relations, nuclear weapon proliferation is the first what if coming to mind. The Treaty of Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons entered into force in 1970, still, with nuclear technologies becoming globally available, there are risks of nuclear products falling into the wrong hands or rather regimes.
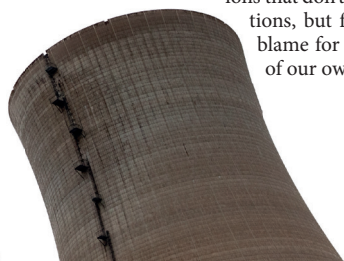
Furthermore, what about the risks of attacks on power plants? In its war against Ukraine, Russia showed immediate effort in taking over both the Chernobyl nuclear exclusion zone and the Zaporizhzhia power station bringing the safety of the biggest power plant in Europe to pressing danger. This might not be the only location at risk from conflict depending on international development.

Anna

Nuclear plants aren't weapons, rather, the alternative (fossil excavations) is much more dangerous and causes huge environmental accidents, such as the Gulf Tragedy. In fact, nuclear energy has some of the most intricate security protocols and contingency plans, which makes them extremely secure.

Despite this, public opinion plummeted in past years, as seen in Germany's nuclear plants' reduction and increase of fossil fuels due to not being able to keep up with energy demands just with renewable energies. Germany's rise of energy price and fossil use personifies an insufficient technology. In contrast, France has one of the most stable energy prices of Europe, and exploited 70% of its electricity from nuclear power in 2022.

People point at nuclear energy as if it were the cause of all problems, giving birth to biased opinions that don't seek for real solutions, but for a scapegoat to blame for the consequences of our own actions.

Nuclear energy describes the energy source found in an atom's core. This is used to produce electricity once the extracted energy undergoes two kinds of atomic reactions in a reactor: nuclear fusion and fission. The latter requires uranium as a fuel causing atoms to split. The energy released from this generates heat which brings the cooling agent water to boil. The steam gets channelled to spin turbines that ultimately generate the electricity.

Carla

Education and science are essential for discussing sources of power. Just because the emissions of coal produced energy are not directly visible does not make them less deadly, exactly. Still, nuclear waste is a highly radioactive and toxic byproduct from reactors which can remain radioactive for tens of thousands of years. Nuclear waste is another burden we are going to give to upcoming generations if not the rest of the earth's history. To scatter nuclear waste across all its producing countries pollutes several places simultaneously. 90,000 tons of highly radioactive waste is stored in the US alone, clearly placing a security threat in terms of possible accidents or attractive targets for any kind of predator. Finding a central depot raises questions of safe transportation as well as the simple question of who wants to store such stockpiles. The world society seems way too divided to find a reasonable option.

Anna

I wouldn't say the main problem here is nuclear waste because, as uncomfortable as it might seem, it's the only kind of waste that can be contained in a safe way.

Properly contained nuclear waste is innocuous, and several developing nuclear technologies to reuse the radiation left in the nuclear waste will ensure maximum efficiency. China's a prime example, recently having shared with France their new nuclear reusing process. Additionally, modern nuclear plants are treated with extreme precaution and, if we take a look at Sweden's nuclear model, we can see that it's the safest energy plant, as it's where the security protocols are the strictest.

Carla

I believe that power plants and deposits are highly secured once they are properly installed but no system is without weaknesses and if nuclear fails, it can fail dramatically and irreversibly - look at Chernobyl or Fukushima only eleven years ago. Compared to the former, the Fukushima disaster did not have direct losses but thousands of evacuation and related deaths. With increasing occurrences of all kinds of natural disasters, such as the floods in Germany or Pakistan, we can hardly find secure placements.

Anna

Of course, every system has a weakness, but nuclear energy is not as dangerous as it might seem. Fukushima was caused by a tsunami, and aggravated by climate change. Past accidents occurred because of a succession of errors, and experts agree that current security protocols make these impossible to occur.

Therefore, we find ourselves in an Arendtian position where we must choose the lesser evil. Nuclear plants are the key to sustainable development, as a bottle water sized amount of uranium would be enough to power a single individual's energy demand throughout their entire lives.

Modern nuclear technology is constantly evolving, with the recent creation of a new nuclear energy model that bases itself on smaller reactors that are cheaper and more efficient to turn on and off. This, added to the reutilisation of nuclear waste, shows how nuclear waste is our only hope for sustainable development.

Carla

The costs of renewables continuously fall due to incremental manufacturing and installation improvements. Nuclear continues to see rising costs despite over half a century of industrial experience and pre-existent infrastructure. Reports from mid-2019 already state that new wind and solar generators are already outdoing every other kind of energy production in terms of costs and growth of generating capacity.

Yes, in comparison to nuclear, solar and wind energy enjoy better development and research, but is that not the goal? We want to go fully renewable as soon as possible so we should not channel our funding elsewhere.

Future, past and ultimately present - energy has and always will be a topic in international politics. Although there are many ways to satisfy the increasing human demand for energy, one thing is certain: We have to overcome fossil fuels to even have a future to talk about as the climate crisis will not wait for humans to find the optimal solution. Nuclear energy is not the only energy source with innovations and flaws at the same time. We should approach the energy dilemma as an evolving process instead of an ultimate end of means. Nuclear energy could be understood as a stepping stone to reach a net zero renewable energy system or a step back reaching to past energy conceptions.

Leaders from the Entertainment Industry

Are They Really Qualified to Run Our Countries?

SOPHIA ANGELOVA

We tend to think of politicians and leaders as highly educated with a firm political background behind them reflecting their expertise in the field. Take Barack Obama for example with the remarkable accomplishment of graduating from Harvard Law School before dedicating himself to public office. Or David Cameron, former British prime minister, who attended Oxford University where he received a degree in Philosophy, Politics, and Law. We have this perception because we would like to think that our leaders, the people whom we entrust to run the country not only have the necessary academic credentials but also a vast array of real-life experience that would qualify them to have such enormous amount of power in their hands. And yet it is more common than you might think that politicians lack any formal knowledge in the sphere of politics, economics domestic and foreign affairs. From Arnold Schwarzenegger to Ronald Reagan, Trump and Zelensky are just few examples of how people from the entertainment industry seem to have dominated the political arena. This however should come as no surprise as both celebrities and politicians alike need certain qualities such as charisma, communication, and interpersonal skills to be successful in their field.

It takes more than book-smarts and credentials to win people's hearts. Political figures need to display a likeable and alluring character. As such it requires a lot of strategy, skill and resources to not only become widely known in the public sphere but also present a personality that the ordinary people can identify with. This is why politicians across the globe invest so much in their campaigns; they are seeking to secure the votes of the entrusting citizens. Actors and other celebrities are no strangers to the public domain and just as much rely on public opinion to advance and maintain their careers. Hence, they too understand that magnetism and charm play a crucial role to how they are perceived and their ability to

preserve their status. Thus, it becomes evident that both celebrities and politicians need to display an extroverted and charismatic exterior that would gain them the trust and congeniality of the community. This is precisely what makes celebrities the perfect political candidates.

They are often times inherently more likeable than traditional politicians and are well-versed in influencing the people. Take president Zelensky for example, his comedic background is testimony to his ability to win people over on the basis of his character rather than political expertise when he won the elections in 2019 with an overwhelming 73.22% of the votes. They also tend to have more experience being under the spotlight, than newly emerging political figures who may not have adjusted to being so openly exposed all the time. They have also developed the ability to withstand and overcome criticisms. Trump would be a perfect example of how despite being the centre of countless scandals and controversies he was able to overcome the challenges and continuously attract a vast number of supporters.

Thus, there is no doubt that many of the interpersonal skills of actors and other members of the entertainment industry transcend into that of the political sphere. Despite their inherent charisma and ability to have poignant impact on the public, we must reflect to what extent they can provide coherent and effective leadership. Does their lack of political expertise stunt their ability to strategically evaluate the political climate?

Cuius Regio, Eius Religio

Is Religious Politics Returning in the Western World?

CARLA GOLTINGS

For some people, the religious force behind Western politics seems to be a thing of the past. A past dominated by territorial fights, churches as tax collectors and, in general, conflict solely justified by beliefs. The Peace of Westphalia (1648), origin of the principles of modern International Relations, ended religious fights within Europe. It institutionalised collective freedom of religion within the Western civilization and countered *cuius regio, eius religio*: 'whose realm, their religion'. Modernisation in the twentieth century further brought secularisation and promised science as the arbiter of truth. Politics transformed into a rationally justified field reigned by experts for social, economic and foreign issues. Just recently, the sudden return of populist and radical groups with deep religious beliefs disrupts our modern view of politics and the authority of neutrality. Sudden, indeed? Is religious politics returning in the Western world or did religion actually never retreat from the political sphere?

States are defined by culture and culture is defined by traditions, values and beliefs. Political leaders and governing parties may change more quickly, but culture remains the pillar of a state's society. This pillar is object of modifications - environmental changes which are either slowly developed or rapidly brought. The pillar might be repainted or extended but it can never be moved without bringing down the entire structure. For many states, the foundation of the polity was a common religion and its traces are not entirely painted over: The British monarch King Charles III is the newly introduced head of state for 14 countries of the Commonwealth as of 2022. Further, doesn't the president of the United States claim "I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office on which I am about to enter. So help me God."? Actors stayed attached to religious tradition and some supposedly still receive their partial or full legitimacy from it.

While the Second World War still placed religious ancestry at the core of conflict, world politics seemed to redeem itself from such beliefs. The Cold War brought a turn in the differentiation between states: The dichotomy between East and West, Communist and Capitalist – an ideological differentiation not based on religion. In theory. The US and USSR openly communicated their religious attachment or non-attachment. This disparity of belief was heavily used rhetorically and continued to ever after. Hence, being non-religious fuels ideological conflict just as well as religious attachment.

In contrast, religious radicalization instigates an entirely different field and intensity of conflict. There is a vast difference between religion being the sole influencer of current political action rather than something fueling the underlying culture. Religion surely proves to be a driver of violent extremism but it cannot be singled out as the only cause. Political action is always more than the sum of its parts and religion especially demonstrated its mobilising power in the past. While we cannot condemn standpoints based on religious devotion alone, we can and should criticise choice of means and fact distribution - regardless of the origin of the narrative. 'Alternative facts', hate speech and violence are neither part of the religion in itself nor part of a constructive discourse. Still, discourse is the foundation of peaceful coexistence and as well as we neglect *cuius regio, eius religio* as dictating religious belief, we should do so in dictating strict non-belief and impartiality.

Trust, security, attachment and guidance can all characterise religious belief - and political devotion. Neither of them is without flaws and as we find the origin of many states in religious dynamics, we possibly cannot separate these two spectrums of life. So maybe returning to religion gives actors the certainty needed in who we are and what we stand for - not only in terms of individuals but states.

De-Evolution of Values

The Rise of Right-Wing Parties in Europe

OLIVIA YARA FRANZ

As we have seen in the past years, several countries in Europe have been experiencing a rise of right wing political parties, with on occasion these parties gaining traction or even political control. This is a highly debated topic in the current political arena, as the fine line between freedom of speech and political dogmatism is often blurred. These political ideas have been seen in the past with Mussolini's fascist party, and it's happening again with his legacy Meloni's "Fratelli d'Italia". Other parties have also racked up their respective votes, such as "AFD" in Germany or "Rassemblement National" in France.

The assumption would be that as humanity evolves, so will their way of thinking. However, this thesis gets trampled upon by the political reality of today. Far-right extremist parties depict themselves as anti-immigration, demanding border controls through the antagonisation of migrants, and Euroesceptic, wanting to nationalise exclusive EU competences. Extreme nationalist parties appeal to masses by invoking feelings of familiarity, security and safety in times of uncertainty because of world crises. This is the reason why the economic crisis in 2008 and the COVID-19 pandemic in 2019 caused such an increase in support to right winged parties.

However, the need of certain sectors of the population to find comfort in common aspects like religion, values or language does not explain the discrimination that refugees have received due to these far-right parties. In a society that changes rapidly, and with people and movement becoming easier, migration is a standard practice in our daily lives. These practices and laws create an outlet for the voices of the most polarised sides of the political spectrum to disagree and bolster support. A prime example would be far-right parties who are scared of change and scared of "their" culture getting lost in a multicultural society.

More often than not, a rise in these right wing political parties encourages nationalism on an extreme level. Nationalism, in some societies and situations, is now equivalent to conservatism. It might feel like a safety net for some people in a world that is rapidly changing, but in reality, it could be argued that it's nothing more than an exercise of power. Nationalist natives antagonise immigrants because, throughout history, European countries have oppressed developing countries.

What is this phenomenon supposed to mean for the current and future generations, if we claim to have evolved politically and culturally yet our values are those of the 18th century? Migration has come to hold a pivotal role in world economy and social life, and we must not follow out-dated mentalities that relinquish in racism and discrimination to "protect" a dogmatic set of values.

Seeing Xi Again

Is China's Leadership Going in Circles?

ERIN DEANDRA MURDIADI

Students are once again at the doorsteps of their government. Masses of Chinese university students studying abroad have placed flyers and posters at their university campuses, protesting against the inhumane zero covid policies, calling for action against their own government's decisions. This may not be out of the ordinary to most considering that much of the world's political change has sprouted from youth movements, but in the People's Republic of China any form of government criticism or political rebellion is illegal and hence always monitored.

This is not the first time that students have sparked passive protests with the exact same bold statements of 'Not my President!' and 'Goodbye Xi Jinping' with intentions of bringing Xi out of power. Just a couple years back, these were the exact same statements used in 2018 to protest against the overruling of the constitution's two-term limit on its presidency since the 1990s and when Xi had defied tradition of presenting his chosen successor. All these actions conducted by Xi since over the past four years ago had already foreshadowed his move into absolute party control, slowly but surely.

It seems as though there have been many counts of protest against the Chinese Communist Party. From the Tiananmen Square Protest, to the same 'Not my president!' posters being posted just four years ago, and again this year, it seems as though the population have been going around in circles trying to fight for the same thing but are still not making any progress. Progress towards a system where the people's wants and needs are ever so slightly taken into account.

Such recent calls for action come after the annual 20th Chinese Communist Party National Congress in mid-October where Xi had secured yet another term as China's leader, his third five-year term in leadership. The event had placed the rumours of the Two Establishes of the Chinese government, 'To establish the status of Comrade Xi Jinping as the core of the Party's Central Committee and of the whole Party' and 'To establish the guiding role of Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for the New Era', into official documents. All in all, this places Xi Jinping in a dictator-like position with the whole nation proceeding accordingly to however Xi may please.

"The Party has set Comrade Xi Jinping's core position on the CPC Central Committee and in the Party as a whole, and set Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era as the guiding ideology," states the Communique of the Seventh Plenary Session of the 19th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China.

With a relatively functional one-party political system allowing for leadership changes at a maximum of every 10 years since the 1990s, it is valid that citizens are unhappy with the sudden shift of laws that deny their hopes for a change in leadership. Disapproval was materialised by the 'Bridge Man' protest where a brave man strung banners across a bridge in Beijing, accusing Xi of being a dictator. He was swiftly detained but before his banner was pictured and spread around the globe. Since then similar signs and messages have appeared on several university campuses in the US, UK, Europe, Australia and even our own, as covered just last month by Ukrant.

In a Western political system it is already difficult to create change but this is even more so in China due to the extreme regulation of public opinion. The passive forms of protest, like posters at universities, are unlikely to create change. This public outburst is progress for the citizens to finally, once again, raise their voices against the government but it is clear that the CCP are unwilling to make a change, even more so with recent developments. Unless a large-scale demonstration is organised, one like the Tiananmen Square protest, it does not seem like Xi's control over China will end any time soon.

Bulgaria's Political Crisis

Corruption, Protests and Parliamentary Deadlock

SOPHIA ANGELOVA

Bulgaria is situated in south-eastern Europe and is the poorest and most corrupt member of the EU. Such tendencies can be ascribed to the extremely volatile political climate. In the timeframe of 18 months Bulgaria has held four parliamentary elections with the most recent ones taking place on October 2nd, 2022, which yielded virtually no results and no hope to reconcile the country's future.

Bulgaria's political turmoil was marked by the outbreak of protests in July of 2020, which were the result of chronic grievances regarding widespread corruption particularly associated with three-time prime minister Boyko Borisov who has become an epitome of Bulgarian politics.

Three-time PM Brisov has been the face of many controversies over the years. His image has been tarnished by accusations of corruption and affiliations with oligarchs. In March 2022, Borisov was detained after European prosecutors opened an investigation regarding fraud and abuse of EU funds in the country. This, however, has not been his first scandal. Borisov has had to leave public office in 2013, 2017 and most recently in 2020 after widespread social unrest regarding his fraudulent and corrupt endeavours. His resignation from office triggered three sets of elections with the first two yielding no results and leading the country into a political stalemate pushing the country to operate under an interim government.

Following the third elections in November 2021 Kiril Petkov, a Harvard educated economist was elected PM. Petkov is the leader of centrist, anti-corruption party "We Continue the Change" which emerged amid the relentless protests taking place between 2020-21. His party displayed many prospects for reshaping Bulgaria into a proactive member of the EU. Petkov aimed to set Bulgaria on a westwardly trajectory with his pro-EU pro-NATO agenda. To form a ruling majority however, Petkov's party entered into coalition with centre-right "Democratic Bulgaria" the leftist pro-Russian "Bulgarian Socialist Party" and nationalist party "There is such a People". Alas, Petkov's ambitions to fully integrate Bulgaria into the West and sever its ties to Russia remained simply aspirations. The incongruous alliance soon began to crack as they were confronted by disagreements over Bulgaria's political direction. The consequence was an entirely ineffective government whose collapse was ignited by Slavi Trifonov, leader of "There is Such a People" announcement that he will be leaving

the coalition. This subsequently triggered a vote of no confidence thereby dismantling the government which had managed to stay in power for a mere 8 months.

The elections in October of 2022 can be characterized as rather ominous and bleak. The growing voter apathy and indifference is reflected in the low voter turnout with a participation rate of 33%. Borisov's party, GERB has once again won with 24.5% of the vote despite all allegations against him, which begs the question: Why do people continue to elect him after being implicated in so many scandals? It appears that GERB is well-engrained in Bulgarian society, which means that they still have a lot of influence and control thereby giving them access to resources. What is more, the worsening economic condition and inflationary spiral have triggered a lot of uncertainty. Coupled with the political crisis, Bulgarians are seeking a sense of familiarity and stability, which they find in Borisov. Nevertheless, the race is far from over because the PM-elect is yet to form a coalition, which is proving to be a difficult task as other parties refuse to form a coalition with him.

For now, it appears that Bulgaria will not be escaping its political crisis any time soon. The severe economic hardships faced by the Balkan country contribute to the public's dissatisfaction and the unwillingness of anyone to lead the country. It appears that Bulgaria has adapted to a new "normal", characterized by instability and partisan deadlock while political disillusionment is growing ever more troublesome thereby creating a never-ending loop.

The End Justifies the Means?

Ethical Dichotomy in Saudi Arabia

ANNA ARAGONCILLO BARCELÓ

"The end justifies the means"

I am sure everybody must've heard this famous phrase attributed to Machiavelli's work "The Prince", where moral relativism is explained through Middle Age approaches. Although innovative in its time, looking at it from a contemporary perspective, it's clear that it's an outdated motto. However, that does not mean that it's not common practice in modern politics. Quite fitting of his title, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman embodies this thought in his latest behaviours.

Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince, Mohammed bin Salman, has started an innovative campaign called Vision 2030, where he strives to modernise and rebrand Saudi Arabia. The latest addition to that project is The Line City, an edge-cutting project to build a 170 km long linear smart city that spans all the desert and allows its citizens to live with the most advanced technology.

Technology is what currently drives the world, and innovation seems to be the goal for modern societies, so hearing that Saudi Arabia has decided to revamp and give its citizens access to innovative technology should make us happy. However, the consequences of the developments in Saudi Arabia are not all positive but rather reflect the commonly misunderstood difference between technological innovation and evolution.

The construction of the Line put the Crown Prince under the spotlight because it forced the eviction of approximately 20,000 people of the Howaitat tribe. The Howaitat tribe were promised a place to live, but after they refused to abandon their homes, the authorities resorted to violence. Abdul Rahim al-Huwaiti, a member of the Howaitat tribe, was assassinated by Saudi authorities, which gained considerable coverage in the news. This is because he tried to inform social media of the inhumane treatment his tribe received.

The tribe members' situation by the hands of the administration serves as a reflection of the powerlessness of marginal communities in dominant societies' discourse. It also represents the price of innovation, and in Saudi Arabia the price of innovation is paid by blood.

People talk about a futuristic city that challenges the traditional model, made with renew-

able energy and recycled materials, with high speed rails and top-notch security surveillance. They like to talk about their goal as if the existence of that perfect ending were enough to justify the cost. But they do not like to talk about the cost, nor the mass evictions of local tribes that are "in the middle" of the Line construction blueprint, or the extra-judicial assassinations that have occurred due to insubordination to these mass evictions. They also don't talk about the destruction of world heritage sites or the indirect pollution that the construction will entail.
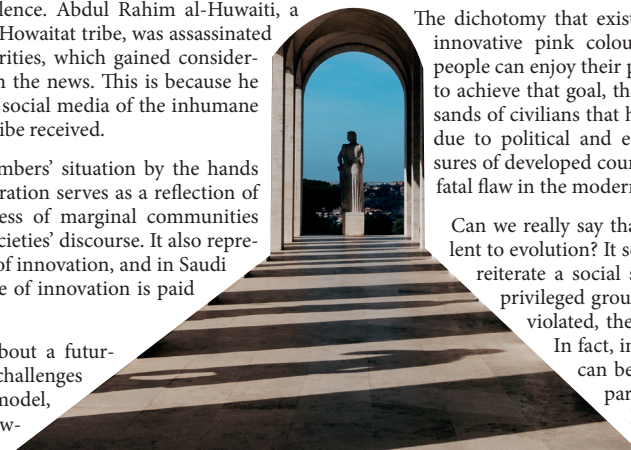
In today's society there are many things that people don't like to talk about, especially when regarding human rights topics. But why don't we talk about it? Because it's not pretty? Because it's too far away? Because it doesn't concern us? But, in the end, it does. Precisely because of the violations recurrently occurring in the Middle East, it concerns us.

Human rights violations are not exclusive to developing countries with a questionable democratic system. They are also found in core countries of the European Union, where, for the sake of the ends, we resort to machiavellian means. EU countries violate HR on many occasions, for instance, the Spanish government decriminalised pushbacks, which enable the Spanish police to return illegal immigrants to the nearest country without worrying about their different nationalities. This is clearly a violation of human rights and pushes marginalised groups in dire situations to dangerous environments without any means to go back to their native country.

The dichotomy that exists between the end, an innovative pink coloured world where rich people can enjoy their privilege, and the means to achieve that goal, the assassination of thousands of civilians that have been put in danger due to political and economic indirect pressures of developed countries, demonstrates the fatal flaw in the modern political world.

Can we really say that innovation is equivalent to evolution? It seems that, as long as we reiterate a social structure where underprivileged groups can have their rights violated, then we will never evolve. In fact, instead of an evolution it can be argued we are actively participating in a de-evolution.

Will There Be War?

Is the Bedrock for Good Foreign Policy Endangered?

About the potentials of a generation destined for something great or repetition of mistakes

JOHANN PAUL LINDHORST

We could be the first in three generations to be drafted to fight a war on European soil again. Our fellow students in Ukraine and Russia face this reality today. With the Russian invasion in February, the modern land war is back in Europe. Could this de-evolution indicate a new trend for all Europeans?

Over the last month, enough has been written about how policymakers in Europe were wrong in judging the situation between Ukraine and Russia and comforting themselves with the illusion of "eternal peace" after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Therefore, the focus of this article should lie on dynamics potentially relevant to us as we will shape the future of Europe either as diplomatic officials, policymakers et cetera - or as soldiers.

Is our generation the most peaceful one yet or are we maybe more likely to get sucked into a rush of war enthusiasm than our parents and grandparents?

On the one hand most of us grew up in multicultural societies going to school with children from different religions, nationalities or skin colour and are therefore less likely to be afraid of the constructed otherness of different people. Many of us were educated by our grandparents and their generation - who lived through the horrors of the Second World War - about the reality of a modern industrialised war. Furthermore, was the cruelty in the Middle Eastern conflicts of the 2000s and 2010s more vividly and easily accessible over the internet and, I guess, not few of us got our interest in international politics through the newsfeeds and stories of the horrible events in Syria, Afghanistan et cetera.

Thus, our generation is arguably the least likely to be illuded into thinking war would be a great adventure where one can become a national hero and where unimaginable cruelty is just a rare coincidence. Empirical evidence supports this, as a survey conducted in 2015 shows many European societies as the most "post-heroic" in the world. In the Netherlands, only fifteen percent of the population was willing to fight for their country.

But, to now conclude that we are totally immune against the poisonous promises of belligerent leaders and too smart to fall into the same traps young Europeans fell into on the brink of WWI, would be very much short-sighted and naïve.

Questions of who we are and where we belong have always been central to political discourse in modern democracies. And naturally so, since they determine our decisions outside the rational - which means most decisions we take. But the recent toxicity and destructiveness of the debate in the classic press and especially on social media is unprecedented. Furthermore, combined with an increasing social divergence mainly between urban and rural areas, it could develop into a security threat, which would put our generation in a similar position as the one before the Second World War.

In Western Europe we find a young generation that is better educated than any before, that also grew up in an era of peace and economic prosperity during the first two decades of this century. A clear moral compass and a strong bedrock of confidence are results of this upbringing and - I may assume - that is prevalent in many of us. Now add technology: The advances of communication technology led to the omnipresence of information on basically every topic one can think of – on the internet. As mentioned before, atrocities and injustices were broadcasted and discussed in unprecedented scope and detail. The combination of the comparatively graphic experience of cruelty and the confidence in oneself creates that urge to make change happen, individually and collectively. That enthusiasm manifests itself in, among others, Europe's huge Climate Youth- and LGBTQ movements of the late 2010s and early 2020s. Tragically, while this is happening, the societal and political basis for real change is being undermined.

As more of public debate is located on social media, the ability to find a consensus becomes gravely endangered. In democracies that means effective political action is in danger. Thus, rival actors - among others Putin's Russia – are contributing significantly to this dynamic. By facilitating massive disinformation campaigns on social media and other channels, for example by using bots to boost destructive and false statements in the algorithms of Facebook, Twitter, and co, the basic consensus on which democratic debate necessarily is based is eroded. When this bedrock of debate is destroyed and the population is polarized, no discussion, no matter the topic, can come to a conclusion and will just leave its participants angry, hurt and still convinced of their prior opinion. In short: constructive and enlightening debate is dead. Additionally, by supporting extreme parties and organizations on both sides of the political spectrum there comes a political gridlock, and thus a slow but increasing paralyzation of government in European countries is created. A prominent and sad example of that development towards bad governmentality is Italy. Although it was never famous for political stability, the first Berlusconi government in the early 2000s lasted around four years, while only one of the eight governments since 2011 lasted over two years.

The fact that there is this young enthusiasm for acting and making the world a better place bears huge chances for Europe and the world - but the dangers that come with it are also remarkable.

This enthusiasm is not going to last forever, neither on the individual level nor on the collective. So, if years of effort and trying to convince one's fellow citizens, politicians, and economic decision-makers become apparent as having no chance of success, that wave of enthusiasm is going to turn into something very scary. If national parliaments remain gridlocked in ideological disputes and civil debate degenerate into mud fights, no political progress will be made and democracies will be weak. At that point, enthusiasm will gradually turn into frustration. Psychological research tells us how frustrated humans either turn into passivity or externalise their frustration through aggression. This dynamic powers a vicious circle in which the passive people zoom out of the political debate, which only leaves the aggressive ones. And since aggressiveness as a political principle has a name let's call it that name: fascism.

The last time fascism was a dominant force in European politics democracies fell, countries were invaded and the most unimaginable crime in the history of humankind was committed – the Holocaust.

Of course, this is only the worst of many possible scenarios and since history is not deterministic this shall not be a kind of pseudo-prediction but more a trigger to keep us – as the future of IR - aware of the (possible) dynamics we will face in our career.

Furthermore, the rise of fascism was made possible by many different factors, economic as well as the psychological ones laid down in this article. In times of talking about deglobalization and degrowth, I would therefore like us – as the future of IR - to stay mindful of the fact that only if the global economy becomes a zero-sum game ruthless means like war and imperial ambition could become worthwhile things to think about.

Finally, I would like to advocate for listening to each other, as hard as it may be, to always believe and not let nihilism get hold of us.

Diary of Alex Schuster

Ginger, German and Passionate about International Law

ANNA ARAGONCILLO BARCELÓ

Alex Shuster is RUG's latest addition to the law department. Ginger, German and passionate about International Law, after travelling Europe, he has now returned to Groningen as a teacher rather than a student. His curriculum is impressive: former swimming instructor, a Bachelor's in International and European Law in Groningen, an Erasmus in the UK, a masters in Belgium, straight to work at the European Parliament and back to Groningen with us.

How would you describe your experience at Groningen University?

Groningen is an amazing student city, such a great international social environment with so many opportunities in size and academic support. The overall vibe is quite cool and although it's in the middle of nowhere, I definitely think that the size and academic support is great. I don't think it's comparable to other places, as my experience in other universities was stained by COVID.

Coming here as an adult and a teacher is quite different. It's harder to get to know people, and it's only in social moments when being in the middle of nowhere is a bit of a bummer.

In general, I'd say that life in the Netherlands is easy, it gives you a more than decent standard of life that you wouldn't be able to have in other places.

I do kind of feel like a circle of life has been completed, and it has certainly influenced me (the whole coming back to the roots) but I know for sure that I'm not planning on settling here in Groningen.

How do you feel about being a seminar teacher?

I like the role that I get to have in the whole process of individual-building and all of the discussions in which we are able to engage in such international

classrooms such as the ones we have in IRIO.

I enjoy how rewarding the teaching process is, even the tiniest contributions to a student's learning makes me happy. However, it's hard to have many classes one after the other because you end up in a constant state of alert. It can be very frustrating when, as a teacher, you try your best but the student is still struggling. Honestly seeing students fail is heartbreaking and really makes teachers reflect about themselves.

Do you have any recommendations to those students that might be thinking of studying Law?

I love law, it makes you understand things, certain decisions that have been taken, even if you don't agree with it. The critical assessing skills that come from learning law are very life-applicable, and I would definitely recommend doing Law! Coming from an IR background, interdisciplinarity is extremely helpful and law studies enable multiple perspectives on the same matter.

How would you describe your experience as a Schuman Trainee?

It was absolutely great, after my masters I did an official traineeship of the European Parliament in the unit that takes care of legislative procedures, so whenever the Commission makes a proposal, this unit supervises and gives advice on the whole process.
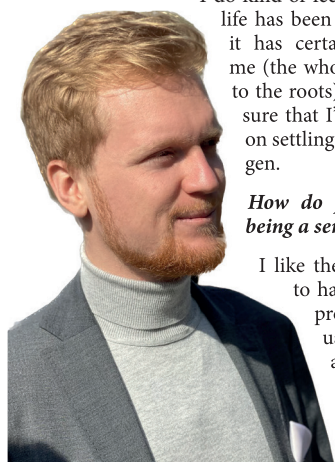
It gave me amazing practical insight, which is very valuable after finishing theoretical studies. And Law is one of those fields where theory and practice are not that far away except with stakeholder's interests, which can be hard to manage.

In fact, a politician's dream is a lawyer's nightmare.

What do you think are students' main feelings towards EU Law? How much feedback do lecturers and seminar teachers receive?

At first, they all believe that it's messed up and very hard, which I think is true in the beginning because the basics and the rationale are the most important parts of EU law. From then on, it all gets easier to a certain extent. I agree that sometimes it can seem like it doesn't make sense but I promise there's light at the end of the tunnel.

I don't think the feedback is enough, we need it to improve ourselves, especially as new teachers and I want my teaching skills to engage in constant relearning and rebuilding processes.

Life after Checks and Balances

What Comes After IR?

ISABELLA TAYLOR EARHART

Albert Sien is a 2008 IRIO graduate who was an active member in Clio and one of the first-ever Editors-in-Chief of Checks & Balances.

Tell us a little about yourself and what led you to study IRIO at Groningen?

I was born in Amersfoort and grew up in Harderwijk. I've always considered myself quite internationally oriented - I'm just generally interested in what's happening in the world - so I think it was always my natural trend to do something international. The Netherlands is a beautiful country, but it's small. After a while I wanted to see more of the world. I stumbled upon the International Relations program and I thought it was generic. It's a little bit of everything and a lot of nothing. You're not studying to be a specialist; you're more of a generalist. You scratch the surface of a lot of global topics, which I thought was interesting.

What about now? What are you doing and how did you get there? Also, can you share if studying IRIO influenced that process?

It's funny, you think you know exactly what you're going to do, you take a prescribed variety of courses, you realise that theory of international relations is absolutely not interesting, it's super dry, and that economics is more interesting than you thought. Still, as I said, you finish your Bachelor's as a generalist. I didn't really know what specialisation I was going to take until my masters. There was this course, Geopolitics of Energy, that I took during my Master's study and I wrote my thesis on that topic. I was gravitating towards the energy sector, more or less, but at the time it was very oil and gas focused and I knew I didn't want to work for an oil company, that felt just too "old world." Luckily, back then, renewables were taking off and that quickly became a topic of interest to me.

Throughout my career, my IR background has always helped me as it provided me with a sort of "helicopter view." When I was studying IR, I had to be able to zoom in and out, to look at what's happening in the big picture and also specific to the issue at hand. I do that now in my work - I have to think strategically about the big picture and also manage the day-to-day stuff.
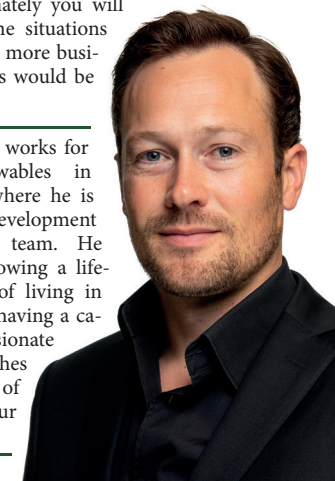
You talked a lot about how IR is a broad field of study, and how you've narrowed down to a specialisation. Do you have any advice for students on how and when to specialise?

The beauty of IR is that you scratch the surface of a lot of topics, some super interesting, and some boring as hell, but you've got to do them. In general, you learn to understand complicated topics quickly and whether you are interested in them or not you will always have this broad concept that can be tied to a specific incident or issue. There's no perfect time to specialise, per se, you should simply follow your intrinsic curiosity and motivation. That's where it starts. Find the topics that really excite you in college, and then start to dig a little deeper: what kind of companies or organisations are working with those kinds of topics and are there any positions available? You learn quickly that those positions aren't always exactly what you expected, but you just have to get started and learn from the experience.

Are there pitfalls students should be aware of when studying such a broad topic? Does this broad course of study, rather than specialisation, leave us ill-prepared as we enter the workforce?

Looking at my own journey, I think there are certain tools and things that I just didn't know. For example, when you are studying IR you rarely work with Excel nor do you do much financial modelling. You also don't write a lot of business proposals. There is a business element that is sort of missing. They say please read this big bible on communism and realism and whatever, and after you've fallen asleep in the library five times, you'll finally pass an exam. A little bit of statistical or data analysis is missing in IR. It's not for everybody, but I think ultimately you will run into some situations where having more business-like tools would be very useful.

Albert now works for RWE Renewables in Texas, U.S. where he is heading the development optimisation team. He is happy following a life-long dream of living in the U.S. and having a career he's passionate about. He wishes us all the best of luck with our studies!

Evolution of Clio

Pictures about the Past, Present and Future

MANO CHAUVIN - ON BEHALF OF THE PHOTO & MULTIMEDIA COMMITTEE

Checks & Balances

2004-2005

In the year 2004, it was the first time the Checks and Balances committee was installed. Before this, a similar committee was around already, however, this was under the name 'Storio'. Checks and Balances has thus come a long way and has improved every year! Who knew 2004 was as old as black and white pictures?

2022-2023

Clio Logo

DID YOU KNOW, Clio had another logo?? Neither did we! However if you did, applause. Over the years, the Clio logo has evolved from a 90s theme into a more clean and professional look. Which one do you prefer?

Board

Even though the board picture looks more professional right now, the old board looks way more fun on this one! They look like they know how to have a good time and our board looks like they know how to write a corporate email.

2001-2002

2022-2023

2022

Introduction Camp

2012

To wrap it up, a comparison of two intro camp pictures that are 10 years apart. As we can see, Clio's community is still as close as all those years ago. Time and time again, we prove to be a loving and bounded group.

We can't wait to see what this year holds.

Double Standards

How the Media has been covering Ukrainian Refugees More than Refugees from the Middle East

JULIA BOGDANOW

Media – a channel of communication, a facilitator of interaction, and a source of information across distances. Along with all these important features, media also plays a seminal role in framing. The persistent refugee crisis is one of the news items that has been framed to a great extent. Refugees are given only limited opportunities to speak directly about their experiences and sufferings. On top of that, the language used in mass media plays an important role when it comes to the shaping of individuals' perceptions of refugees from different regions.

In that manner, the media is able to either "criminalise" the image of refugees or help to reduce the conflict between them and citizens of the host country. The criminalisation of the image of refugees can lead to hate crimes and hostilities against them, making it difficult for the newly arrived people to integrate and adapt. Whereas, media as a helping tool can provide a peaceful, informative and empowering environment for refugees and citizens of the host country.

More recently, Western media has shown double standards when it comes to the portrayal of the Ukrainian refugee crisis. Ever since the beginning of the war between Russia and Ukraine on the 24th of February 2022, the media in Europe and the US has mainly reported the Ukrainian refugee crisis and even less so from other regions, notably the Middle East. To illustrate this, the NBC News correspondent Kelly Cobiella based in London, has said the following: "Just to put it bluntly, these are not refugees from Syria, these are refugees from neighbouring Ukraine. That, quite frankly, is part of it. These are Christians, they are white, they're... um... 'very similar to the people that live in Poland'." Along those lines another correspondent from CBS News, Charlie D'Agata, made a biased and discriminatory comparison between refugees coming from Europe and from non-European countries. She said that Ukraine was not a place like Iraq or Afghanistan but "relatively civilised, relatively European." Thus, there can be a lot of orientalist approaches synthesised from this in which European and US journalists discriminate against non-European refugees, simultaneously reporting on the refugees from Ukraine. At the same time, there are also French and British journalists that discriminate against Ukrainian refugees claiming that they are having it better since they come by European looking cars and they watch Netflix and use

Instagram concluding that war does not bear poor and remote populations anymore.

From the above, it becomes evident that Western media very often conveys racism by portraying the Ukrainian refugees as civilised, whereas the refugees from the Middle East are very often stigmatised as uncivilised. Furthermore, it is not really about the solidarity that the media is showing towards the Ukrainian refugee crisis, it is rather about the Western media's double standards on skin colour, ethnic identity, religion, and culture against non-European refugees. From the comments by the journalists above, it can be exfiltrated that the lives of refugees only really matter when they are white Christians. This suggests that one's religious identity and skin colour can be one's gateway to win the Western media's "empathy." Moreover, the use of language plays a primary role when it comes to the aggravation of the conflict between refugees and citizens of the host country. Hence, words such as "illegals", "uneducated", "dependent", "unemployed" and "threat" create a negative stereotype against non-European refugees.

In the end, journalism should be a medium of empowerment and should report equally about people regardless of their race, religion, gender, and nationality, as the media is a tool to shape people's attitudes. Thus, journalists need to stop using negative stereotypes and racist discourses towards Middle Eastern refugees, while reporting on Ukrainian refugees.

White Saviorism in Humanitarian Help

Modern Day Colonialism Under the Pretext of Saving the World

OLIVIA YARA FRANZ

The concept and execution of humanitarian aid programs and organisations are some of the most crucial aspects of the lives of struggling individuals all over the world, but not always in the way we might assume. It can be argued that humanitarian aid invests in infrastructure, health, education, and social sectors of impoverished countries or groups. While, in many ways, relieving struggle is usually the intention, these goals are not always achieved. The reason for this is complex and multifaceted.

First, by "assisting" those in need, humanitarian aid organisations tend to impose their own values and thinking of how a country and society should be. This is inherently problematic, because more often than not these organisations are European, North American or generally composed of Western ideals. This leads to cultural imperialism, a transformation process where communities start to lose ties to their history and culture in favour of another. Aid organisations tend to do what they think needs to be done, without soliciting the input of those they are attempting to assist. This isn't always intentional; sometimes it's as simple as the humanitarian aid workers having very little knowledge of the culture, history and society of those they are helping. Humanitarian aid often takes place without involving the local communities and more often without their consent to help them thus creating a power imbalance between the donor country and the receiving country.

Humanitarian aid, as an umbrella concept, has many different forms, but as the world globalises there is a certain type of this kind of assistance that is becoming more popular, especially with young adults and teens. It is known as voluntourism.

Voluntourism is the process by which privileged western individuals travel to developing countries as tourists, yet while doing volunteering activities in an attempt to "improve a community". On the one hand, it might seem as an innocent act meant to help communities in dire situations, but the structural problems that lay in those actions have detrimental effects on

the native population. However, oftentimes this aid is nothing but a temporary fix. It establishes that the society at hand must rely on foreign aid, creating a cycle of dependency.

Voluntourism, as a process itself, is deeply related to the practice of white saviorism, which describes a phenomenon where a white person, from a position of self-perceived superiority, attempts to "rescue" BIPOC (Black Indigenous People of Colour). We constantly see examples of contemporary white saviorism in voluntourism, as it is typically advertised in social media by these so-called volunteers who use their platforms to normalise, glorify, promote, and reinforce the idea that struggling and developing communities can not improve their ways of life without the help of white westerners. It is unequivocal that racism and xenophobia are clearly embedded in the concept of voluntourism.

It is essential to understand that while voluntourism by definition may be a form of humanitarian "aid", its process is generally accompanied by detrimental changes to the community at hand and it should not be compared to large NGOs and nonprofits working to make lasting change.

To improve their work, aid organisations, and in general those wishing to support struggling or developing nations, need to start seeing those they are helping as equal partners, not as inferior to them. The system of humanitarian aid, and the concept of voluntourism, needs to be reformed. The approach to help must come from a place of wanting to improve the given nation or society on its own conditions.

Prevalence of Racial Discrimination and Segregation in the Modern Day

A World of Difference

ELENA MIHAYLOVA

Our world may not be as developed as we have thought. Maybe although we live in times of advanced technologies, fascinating scientific discoveries, and global movements for acceptance and equality, we are still far from the accepting society we claim to be.

Let's take the topic of diversity as a pure example of de-evolution.

We, as students living in such an internationalised and diversified environment, are the first to see the beauty of making friends from various backgrounds and experiencing new cultures, cuisines, languages and traditions daily. What better way to broaden your horizons than this? After all, we have advanced far from the colonial mentality of putting certain individuals on a pedestal and making others seem inferior simply based on racial or ethnic background.

But have we really managed to do that? Or is this just a list of facts that seem appropriate to represent our reality but are yet to be truly achieved?

People are not born racist and xenophobic, rather, they are conditioned to think like that. Many children do not even comprehend why all people look, behave or speak differently. Actually, there are factors beyond our own personality that would influence our attitude toward others. Firstly, our knowledge of historical events is a significant factor in forming our worldview, referring to the colonial past of some counties. Then, there are those aspects that are so deeply rooted in our identity that we do not even consider as a factor during our growing up and developing into productive human beings. In particular, we are influenced by the information taught to us by the people we are surrounded by – our parents and friends, teachers at school, and our specific nation's mentality. But no matter what the actual reason is, discrimination on a racial and ethnic basis is still very much present in our everyday life.

Even a remarkably tolerant nation like the Dutch could act unfairly. Many international students want to study at a university in the Netherlands and even, afterwards, start a life here because of how international-based it is, notably in recent years. However, one should remember that the Dutch community is not that diverse. Near 80% of the Dutch population is white, and these are predominantly native Dutch people.

This presents us with a multitude of problems, for instance, it leads to a certain level of segregation in the population's living basis in the educational system. Thus, "black" and "white" schools still exist in the Netherlands, as terms are based on the predominant ethnic formation of schools here. The interesting part is that those definitions do not even refer to race but to the presence of certain minority groups in the schools, as "white" are the native Dutch and "black" - immigrants of Moroccan, Turkish, Surinamese and Antillean origin, some of them – ex-colonies of the Netherlands.

Additionally, there is a problem that almost every international student here faces, which is discrimination when looking for accommodation. Housing segregation is getting particularly serious in the aspect of people being denied places to live because it is offered "only to Dutch", more so to only white Western Europeans. It is even more severe considering it is not only the preference for own nationals, but for people from the Western world. Those not part of that image are discriminated against because of being themselves. Being born somewhere and belonging to a certain ethnicity/race - a vital part of one's personality that cannot be changed.

We can, of course, also look at the classic example of the United States. We like to think that something has changed after the Black Lives Matter Movement, particularly the many protests following George Floyd's death in 2020. More and more people, who are not part of targeted minorities themselves, acknowledge that everybody has to hear the voice of the unheard so that the cursed circle of discrimination would end. However, despite the diversity of American society, segregation seems like a never disappearing phenomenon. It is even getting increasingly worse.

From the statistics introduced by the Other and Belonging Institute at the University of California, Berkeley, it could be identified that 80% of major U.S. metropolitan areas were more segregated in 2019 than 30 years before. The urban area is not all-white, all-black, or all-Hispanic. Instead, various races congregate in different neighbourhoods, creating a social and economic split. One typical white person, for instance, would also live in a predominantly white community – one where at least some 3/4 of the inhabitants are white

as well. On the contrary, those who do not represent the traditional notion of white Americans are often denied ordinary things such as a safe environment, good education, decent grocery stores and transportation.

So, even though the problem of housing segregation is different in those countries, it is evident that despite living in a developed society, race and ethnicity continue to determine the opportunities people are given in life.

Then what is to be changed? Because despite people being more accepting of differences than ever, there is still a long way to go. One should wonder why, in modern times, our presumably evolved society would care more about someone's skin colour rather than their interpersonal qualities. In a perfect reality, no group should be prioritised before another. As human beings, we are entitled to the right to equality in all aspects of our essence. Besides, nobody is better than others because of their belongingness to a particular societal group, especially one based on things that are part of our identity, and we cannot change even if we want to.

However, the real and deadliest problem hides cowardly behind our hypocritical approach to diversity. Because rather than acting to solve a controversial situation, we tend to only talk. To highlight how oppressed "the different" are and how nothing ever changes but never to introduce a possible solution to the problem ourselves. Giving the role of the gay best friend to a black guy is not a good-enough solution to the diversity problem in cinema anymore. Having a relatively representative group of BIPOC in government or the workplace purely for the sake of representation but not for their talents does not show us as a society moving beyond racism.

What have we learned from the Black Lives Matter Movement? It may take time for many people in our not-so-perfect reality to outlive their superficial prejudices. Nonetheless, it's non-negotiable that we must all work towards it. In that case, we may achieve the end goal of not only appreciating people of all colours but people as people - different human beings with contrasting personality traits.

Connections Through Blue Light

Are Social Media Platforms and the Habits They Bring Detrimental to Human Relationships?

ISABELLA TAYLOR EARHART

"Why don't you want social media?" I asked my 12-year-old cousin who had recently been given her first cell phone. She was ecstatic at the freedom and re-sponsibility that came with the device, but surprisingly quiet when I posed questions about ways in which she could use her new-found freedom to connect with not only current school friends, but people she knew from her old city hours away. Her reply to my question was swift and didn't bear a sliver of doubt. "I might want it when I'm older, but I don't right now." I asked her if her peers respected that decision. She said people didn't really understand, but her friends texted her and con-nected with her anyway, so it didn't matter.

This quick conversation led me to think about the 19, 20, 21+ year-olds I know and our relationships both to social media and face-to-face interactions. Has social media allowed for a more interconnected world? Un-doubtedly, especially throughout the pandemic. But has it simultaneously led to an near-inability to con-nect and maintain face-to-face human relationships? This happens to be the question of the hour.

Social media use is an inherently difficult thing to examine and quantify. This is due to a multitude of reasons, if not solely for cultural differences in social media use around countries all over the world. A 2014 study entitled: Connection Overload? A Cross Cultural Study of the Consequences of Social Media Connec-tion aims to examine how social media affects human connectedness - specifically examining habits people built with social media - all over the world, by looking at not one, but three countries: the United States, Ire-land, and Korea. This examination of different cultures provides us with a greater insight to social media use and human connection on a global level, thus allowing us to make some internationally encompassing conclu-sions and statements to answer the question posed.

According to the study, there is a growing percentage of the world that could be classified as the "always con-nected" - the term for the modern day phenomenon that describes those who are always within reach via cell phone or other form of technology. This group can be understood as people who are perpetually distract-ed from the activities at hand and who are interrupted at all hours, simply because they carry this distraction with them at all times. Members of this group are prone to a new phenomenon called 'connection overload.' This overload occurs when social media, and its near

constant maintenance and updating, causes someone to have an almost ceaseless internal demand for its use, thus having a detrimental effect on someone's life.

Contrary to what it may sound like, the study made an important point that regular use of social media is not always damaging, in large part due to the key role it plays in supporting one's career and facilitating one's schedule. As globalisation increases, the role of social media is ever increasing and evermore useful, espe-cially in fields of international relations, business, and communication. Once an individual's ability to control their social media use vanishes, the point of social me-dia becoming detrimental is reached. This is the key to understanding our relationship to social media and face-to-face interaction. Proven by this study, an in-dividual's habits and degree of self-control are what dictates their level of "always connectedness." This study brings us to the conclusion that humans, on an international level, are not necessarily losing their ability to connect face-to-face, but as more and more of us fall under the category of an "al-ways connected", the possibility of sliding down this slippery slope grows.

In yet another study, conducted by the American Journal of Preventive Medicine, 1,787 adults aged 19 - 32 were surveyed for their use of social media. The purpose of this inquiry was to determine if there is a corre-lation between social media use and social isolation. The study came to an unequivo-cal conclusion that there exists a solid lin-ear connection between increased so-cial media use and an increase in one's perceived social isolation. Where this study fails to provide details is the reason for this correlation. Wheth-er the participants feel more so-cially isolated due to the time they spend on social media, or if they spend increased amounts of time on social media as a way to allevi-ate some of this feeling. While this isn't directly the question at hand, it is indisputable that social isolation can lead to a reluc-

tance to interact and form connections with others, thus leading to a degenerating ability to connect.

After reading many contradicting studies and sourc-es, it appears that the verdict is still out on whether or not social media actually makes us more or less able to form in-person human connections. This is partly due to the fact that social media, and the digital wave currently rolling over us, extends to all aspects of our lives, thus making it nearly impossible to quanti-fy.Moreover, social media consumption of any given group changes when looking at almost every so-cio-economic factor, which even further com-plicates our ability to measure its impact.

Zeynep Tufekci, a writer for The Atlantic, makes a good point: more often than not, when we walk around and see people with their heads tilted down facing their phones, they are interacting with another human. Whether it be replying to a text message, sending a snap, reading a tweet, or an email, she believes human interaction isn't stifled by social media. Simply, our definition of human interaction changes. We aren't facing some-one and looking into their eyes, but that doesn't mean we aren't in some way still creating a bond with a person.

To extend on this point, we can look at the words of Lara Otte, a licensed clinical psychologist and author for Psychology Today. She claims, if social media is used the right way, it has "great potential to inspire and connect people." She argues that as social media chang-es and evolves with us, we will have and use more plat-forms that do provide real human connections, as this new wave of technology and human connectedness is modern evolution.

As technology advances, maybe it's time we reassess what connection means and start asking different ques-tions. Does digital connectedness impair our ability to form and maintain human relationships? Maybe; it certainly isn't part of universal human history that we preferred to communicate through a screen and felt the incessant need to post pictures of our lives. But, it's possibly more accurate to say, instead of humans taking two steps backwards from the communication skills we as a species have developed, maybe we are simply en-tering a new wave of human connection that is vastly different from the past.

About Us

CHECKS & BALANCES
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Checks & Balances is a student-run magazine with a focus on current events, politics, economics, human rights, technology, conflict and security, among other internationally oriented topics. Our goal is to open our readers' eyes to what is happening around the world, and to provide new viewpoints on important global topics. We publish three print editions throughout our academic year, as well as updating our website every Monday and Friday. We hope you enjoy our articles as much as we have enjoyed cooking, dancing, drinking and writing together to bring you our finished product! Stay tuned for more articles and insights!

With love, the Checks & Balances family!

Sophia Angelova
Layout Editor

Hi everyone! I am Sophia and currently in my second year. Originally I come from Bulgaria but I lived in Germany for 8 years. I have always had a passion for writing and am very grateful for the opportunity to contribute to Checks&Balances. I hope you guys enjoy the issue and the page designs!

Carla Goltings
Layout Editor

I am a second year IRIO student from North-Germany. As a member of the creative team, I am happy to not only share journalistic pieces on political topics, in my case in the areas of identity, feminism and community, but help to make our articles look wonderful in printed form.

Erin Deandra Murdiadi
Editor in Chief

I'm Erin, Editor-in-Chief of the '22-'23 Checks Editorial Staff, and currently a third year student. I'm from Indonesia but I've been moving around my whole life. As Editor-in-Chief I coordinate our team to publish our print edition as well as our online articles and ensure everything runs smoothly. I wish you fruitful reading and hope you look forward to our upcoming issues.

Elena Mihaylova
Secretary

Hi! I'm Elena, a first year IRIO student from Bulgaria. In the sphere of writing, I love the research part of journalism, especially in the field of human rights and equality, and learning about how people from different backgrounds perceive the world.

Paul Johann Lindhorst
Public Relations

Hi! My name is Johann from Germany and I am happy to be one of the PRs at "Checks & Balances" magazine. I love photo- and videography as well as writing about politics and technology. Furthermore, going out with friends, driving and traveling are my hobbies. Enjoy the first edition of 2022/23!

Olivia Yara Franz
Public Relations

I am Olivia and I am a first year student from Germany. Besides writing articles, I love reading books and doing sports! My coffee addiction leads me to hanging out in cafés often. Enjoy reading the first print edition!

Thomas Huisman
Treasurer & Acquisition

Hello everyone! My name is Thomas, second year, and I am the only Dutch member of Checks & Balances this year. I am the treasurer and acquisitioner of the committee, which means that I am responsible for acquiring additional funds for the committee and for keeping an eye on the finances.

Kimberly Volbeda
Board Representative

Hey everyone! My name is Kim and I am the Board Representative of the "Checks & Balances" Editorial Staff. As a Board member, my responsibility in the committee is to ensure the organization and planning of the events and publications is in accordance with the association itself! But also, more importantly, for the good vibes ;)

Anna Aragoncillo Barceló
Reporter

I'm Anna, a first-year reporter from Mallorca! As a reporter, I make sure to conduct any interviews for Checks & Balances, from which I love the whole process of writing, reading and editing. I'm very much looking forward to this year and I hope you enjoy our print editions!

Isabella Taylor Earhart
Reporter

I'm Izzy, or Is, and I am a first year from the United States! Aside from journalism, which holds a special place in my heart due to its ability to connect us all in powerful ways, I love travelling, hanging out with friends, and just about any activity outdoors!