

CHECKS & BALANCES

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RESTRICTIONS

Looking at Both Sides of the Wall



**Sofie Raven***Chairwoman of Clio***Kimberly Volbeda***Commissioner of PR
& Publications of Clio*

Dear reader,

Welcome you to this new edition of the *Checks & Balances* magazine. The second semester has begun and that means that we are halfway through the academic year. You will still have to study hard, but (it feels like) the summer vacation is approaching!

Nevertheless, until the summer vacation has started, all of you will be spending a lot of time in the lecture halls, seminar rooms, and libraries. At times, this can seem quite daunting, especially when the weather slowly starts to improve. Whenever this happens, I think back to the “good old” lockdown times when you could sit outside with your laptop and take your class online. But even studying in the sun eventually lost its appeal. Students started skipping classes, failing exams, and taking breaks from studying altogether. At some point baking banana bread or going for a walk was not a satisfying day program anymore, and everyone wanted to be back in the university buildings.

Apparently being stuck in the Harmony Building was not that bad. In this case, a restriction of movement meant that students were able to see their friends and connect with the student community.

This edition of the *Checks & Balances* will show you many cases in which restriction was/is a lot more serious and detrimental to human wellbeing. I hope that this will provide you with many new insights and topics to feel passionate about. Finally, I want to thank the Editorial Staff for all of their efforts in creating this beautiful new edition.

Have fun reading!

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

Sofie Raven*Chair of the Clio Board*

Dearest reader,

Hopefully by the time you have received this magazine, winter's grip has begun to thaw as the smell of spring is slowly being introduced. As we embrace the changing season, I am incredibly proud to announce the arrival of the second edition of Clio's *Checks & Balances* Magazine!

The Editorial Staff of '22-'23 has, again, produced a remarkable edition with the polarizing theme of

RESTRICTIONS: Looking at Both Sides of the Wall

Watching the effort, enthusiasm and passion that has been poured into the developing process of this magazine has been an absolute privilege for me as a board representative.

The theme of ‘restrictions’ was carefully chosen to spark different responses between very different people. Whether it is member states deciding on the implementation of restrictions necessary to curb the spread of COVID-19, or your mother telling you to be home by 7pm — we all feel restricted in one way or another. ‘Looking at both sides of the wall’ is meant to open your mind regarding the dichotomy of how restrictions exist within our society; is it necessary, harmful or can it be both?

As you turn the pages, this edition does not only cover the scope of restrictions experienced in varying degrees but also different committee collaborations and an interview with our very own IRIO lecturer from the RUG.

Before you read this amazing edition, I will leave you with a message: Whether you are a seasoned reader or new to *Checks & Balances* Magazines, it is my sincere hope that within these pages you will find a source of inspiration, reflection and a fresh perspective that will make you question things about our world.

So settle in, turn the page, and enjoy!

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

Kimberly Volbeda*Board Representative*

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How Do We Feel Restricted?

As Long as It Does Not Harm the State ...

Restrictions of Religious Freedom in Totalitarian Regimes

ELENA MIHAYLOVA

As people coming from all parts of the world, with diverse backgrounds, beliefs and different personal stories, it is easy to spot the difference in religion's role in our societies. One can simply compare the Church's impact on some Western communities and the decline of such in post-communist states. Consequently, most people believe it simply goes without saying that communism and religion can't coincide.

In times such as ours, when religious freedom and human rights, in general, have such a special place in our worldview, such reflections come naturally. For this reason, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights protects the right to freely choose and practise your religious beliefs, a document so significant that even though communist states are not perceived to be the most liberal, their constitutions recognise such freedoms.

The Father of Communism, Karl Marx, criticised religion's role, calling it the "opium of the people". By that, he means that people's true happiness can be achieved by eliminating religion as a source of their false bliss. Furthermore, Marx claimed that while faith may demonstrate man's desire for a better life, it also thwarts the realisation of that desire.

In our modern reality, we can look at one of the most prominent examples of a state which radically limits its citizens' religious freedom, namely the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). There has been a ton of talk on the North Korean regime and the imposed restrictions on its people, classifying the country among the worst in the world for religious freedom. Although the North Korean constitution technically pro-

tections the right to practise any religion, it also forbids its use to harm the State. Furthermore, an official report by the state's government states that no matter their religious choice, every citizen has freely decided to put the North Korean ideology of Juche first. No one shall put their devotion to God before their state. Therefore, except for activities overseen by entities formally affiliated with the government, organised religious activity is viewed by North Korea as a possible threat to the regime's authority and social structure.

Those who profess faith, notably Christians, are treated with open hostility in the DPRK. Christians in North Korea cannot join together for worship or share their faith with others. They risk spending up to 15 years in a labour camp if they are found carrying a Bible or a prayer book. Further, Christianity is connected to a world that Pyongyang considers particularly dangerous. However, for an officially atheist state with such a hostile attitude to believers, it is not like there is no religion. Actually, it's quite the opposite – it seems they are totally diverse. Ironically enough, for an ideology denouncing Christianity, the North Korean Juche has much in common with the Bible.

Kim Il-Sung, the first leader of North Korea, was notably inspired by some Christian principles when creating Juche. Firstly, he portrayed himself as God and the father of the Korean nation. He created such a cult around his personality that many North Koreans truly believed he was immortal. This was incorporated even in their language, as North Koreans would call Kim Il-Sung "our god". Kim Il-Sung also created his own Ten Principles and to honour his death in 1994, a new calendar was created in the year 1912, the leader's birth year. Examples of similarities don't end here, but these are the hardest to ignore.

The circumstances in North Korea emphasise that even though religious activities are never entirely outlawed in totalitarian regimes, political elites see religion as conflicting with the development of communism. In the Soviet Union, churches were destroyed or shut down, and religious people were harassed and imprisoned. Even more, atheism was encouraged in the classroom.

But we live in the 21st century. Religious restrictions should be a thing of our past, not present in our future.



No Lone Wolf Can Survive International Politics

Does Membership to International Organisations Keep States Supported or Contained?

CARLA GOLTINGS

In nature, a wolf going solo and becoming a 'lone wolf' is quite common. It can be considered a brave choice, reserved for the truly independent. 'Dispersing' is how wolves find mates and form new packs. Being a 'lone wolf' is a metaphor widely used to characterise confident, single fighters of any realm. What might be an empowering strategy for individuals in society, however, can be challenging for states. When it comes to talks, trade or treaties, it is of enormous benefit to have allies and partners. If states were wolves, international organisations would be their packs. The question is: Is membership to such organisations supporting or confining the state? Can a lone wolf survive international politics?

Wolves are born into their natal pack - essentially their family unit. This family dynamic teaches young wolves to learn survival skills from parents and siblings. Nowadays, states are seldom (re-)born, but in history, we can observe how alliances and partnerships were naturally arising bonds in times of crisis. States, especially in Europe, cooperated and economic ties led to wealthier nations - shared acquired experience and communal interaction strengthened them. They taught one another how to survive international politics - or how to get the most profits out of it - and by having increased interaction and exchanging cultural customs, ultimately a relationship of trust was built.

Security is another aspect important in the state of anarchy of animals and states - one which is built on trust as well. Both World Wars showed how alliances can have a pivotal influence on the dynamics of a conflict. Yet, groupings which originated from the circumstances of the First and Second World War mostly vanished. Situations have changed as states did not feel these partnerships were their true belonging. Where ties extended military cooperation, going independent was more difficult. If you disagree with the leading wolf, it is most certainly wise to leave the pack. Here, one could go as far as portraying Russia as the left-behind leader of its pack, namely the USSR.

For most wolves, the goal is to find a new pack, but being accepted into one depends on many variables. In



order to be accepted, the characteristics of the wolf and what is actually needed in the unit are deemed as defining. Is it a new partner to breed (in other words: someone in charge), a subordinate or is the pack content and complete as it is? Lucky wolves find a new partner and create their own herd.

In an international system with so many pre-existing relations, anyhow, the network is dense.

Bilateral cooperation can be considered as 'sniffing one another'. Is there sympathy? Similarities? Joint interests? However, going a step further and creating a new organisation is not only difficult, as many potential partners are already bound to organisations, but can be obsolete. The purpose of the cooperation is as important as finding suitable members and most traditional territories are already covered. Thus, states may better compromise, subordinate and apply for membership in a pre-existent organisation. Accession potential or neglect are immediately clear when approaching a wolf pack. International organisations take their time to integrate a potential member state and opposing parties can sabotage the enlargement if in their interest - for instance visible for Turkey's stances towards Finland's or Sweden's accession to NATO. Once a state makes the entry, they must comply with the rules of the organisation - one NATO state deeply intervening in conflicts puts all members on the verge of entering war, just like one wolf single handedly attacking a predator brings them all in danger.

Equating wolves and states might not be the most compatible analogy. Still, it shows us the following: The life of a lone wolf is not easy and sometimes dangerous. Yet, the health of the wild population depends on dispersion, new mating, starting new packs and spreading to new territories. The searching for new organisations to belong to, therefore, might be the vitalizing characteristic of international politics.



By the Rivers of Babylon ...

How the Tigris and Euphrates House a Potential to Spark Conflict in the Already Susceptible and Troubled Middle East

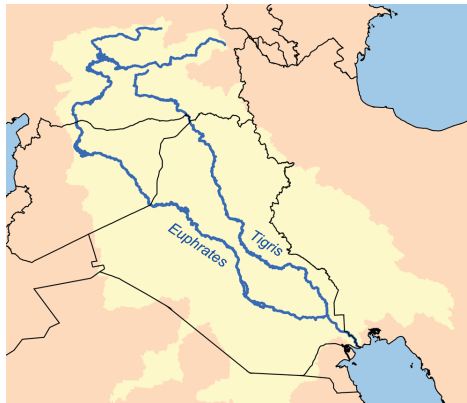
THOMAS HUISMAN

When you look up 'Water Conflict Chronology' on Google, you will find a webpage with a world map on which you can see the location of all water conflicts, in chronological order. In 430 BC for example, the Spartans were accused of poisoning Athens' water supply during the Peloponnesian War. And for centuries up until the Second World War, the defence of the Netherlands has relied on flooding parts of the country. The weaponization of water and water conflicts, a dispute over access to water, prove to be phenomena of all times and places.

Due to its dry climate, the Middle East especially has been prone to water conflicts. Furthermore, the region houses some of the most notable rivers on earth with the Jordan River, Nile, Tigris and Euphrates. These rivers, along with its tributaries, facilitate agriculture and provide water to much of the region - all factors which have provided for the region to be seen as the cradle of civilization. However, concurrently, these two factors have created a tense situation in the Middle East, both within the countries in which these rivers flow, but also between the concerned countries, such as Turkey, Syria and Iraq dealing with Tigris and Euphrates.

The stakes are extremely high. At least since the 1960s, the involved parties have disagreed on how to manage the rivers, and in particular, who has the right to claim what. While Turkey, in which both the Tigris and Euphrates rivers originate, initially claimed absolute sovereignty over the rivers, it has come to agreements with its neighbours which improved cooperation and management of the rivers in the 1990s and 2000s. Despite this cooperation, Turkey has built an extensive network of dams with the aim of providing electricity and water to its lands and to support the economy during this period. With 22 Turkish dams in total on the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, while providing water to its farmers, it has reduced the amount of water reaching Iraq by 60%.

Moreover, there are now additional factors that have the potential to ignite the powder keg that is the state of affairs in Syria and Iraq. Rising temperatures and harsh decline of rainfall are leading to drought in the whole region. These circumstances, which are in part due to climate change, as well as the Turkish dams, have significantly lowered the amount of water flowing



downstream the Tigris and Euphrates. The marshlands in the South of Iraq, fed by these rivers, have already partially dried up, shortly after recovering from Saddam Hussein's systematic destruction. As a result, saline water from the Persian Gulf has entered the swamps which resulted in disastrous effects on farming and life there. Moreover, the relatively scarce amount of water that reaches Iraq must then be divided between all the different groups living there.

The combination of a limited amount of such an essential good, and the precarious security situation which led to the presence of many armed groups in the country, is a disaster waiting to happen, if not addressed properly.

In the Bible, the drying up of the Euphrates is part of the prophecy of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. An event that would mean the end of earth as we know it, seeing the followers of Christ following him to heaven, while non-believers will be destroyed on earth. One might or might not believe in this foretelling, but the Tigris and Euphrates drying up does not seem to be a prospect of the near future. However, what is certain is that a sharp decline in water flowing through these rivers, as a result of both exclusionary measures from Turkey and climate change, could have catastrophic consequences.



Weaponized Rights

Looking Through the Scope to See an Overarching Picture of US Gun Restrictions, or Lack Thereof...

ISABELLA TAYLOR EARHART

The Second Amendment of the United States Constitution, the very words that provided space for an 18-year-old to legally purchase firearms and then murder 19 children, is the bedrock of the United States' utter lack of gun restriction. Its key phrase: "the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed" has undoubtedly become a highly contested aspect of United States politics and culture today. But what exactly does this lack of gun control look like?

The Gun Violence Archive, a non-profit organisation that tracks all instances of gun violence in the US, reported 44,308 deaths due to gun violence and 647 mass shootings in 2022 alone. 2021 has even more grim statistics, with 45,104 gun violence deaths and 690 mass shootings. This year, 2023, as of early February, the Gun Violence Archive has already counted 54 mass shootings.

If horrifying statistics don't paint a grim enough picture, we can look at the small town of Uvalde, Texas and the agony it faced May 24th, 2022. On the day of his 18th birthday, the Uvalde shooter legally purchased two different firearms, both semi-automatic rifles, and more than 2,000 rounds of ammunition, which totaled more than 4,000 USD. Days later he proceeded to enter an elementary school and murder 19 children between the ages of 8 and 11, as well as two teachers. In less than an hour and a half, this sleepy Texas town became known nationwide.

Gun control is something difficult to define in the United States, as the autonomous nature of state laws provide for varying regulations from state to state. While the Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution protects the citizens ability to obtain and own firearms, people are still legally obligated to follow the laws of the state in which they reside.

Looking at California, a state with the strictest gun laws, it is illegal to sell, loan or transfer a

firearm to anyone who is under 21. Whatsmore, when purchasing a firearm in California, proof of residency and a firearm safety certificate are required, as well as a firearm safety device and the completion of a safe handling demonstration. Most importantly, in California, background checks are generally required.

On the other end of the spectrum is Texas, a state with extraordinarily loose gun laws, we can see proof of the way gun culture is not only ingrained in everyday life in the U.S., but promoted. Texas is a key endorser of what is called the "Constitutional Carry," where anyone over 21 can carry a firearm without a licence to do so. The gun can be concealed, or openly carried, meaning it can be worn in a holster or in a position where its presence is in plain sight. Furthermore, in Texas, people 18 and over can buy a handgun in a private sale without obtaining a background check or permit, and without a record of sale being required. These gun laws, or lack thereof, make it extraordinarily easy to obtain a firearm in Texas.

U.S. public opinion seems to vary slightly less than state laws. According to a survey done in 2022 by National Public Radio, an American non-profit media organisation, 59 percent of U.S. adults think it's more important to control gun violence, than protect gun rights. This is a shocking number, as it is the highest recorded percentage in a decade. While there is also a big constituency demanding stricter gun control, the polarisation of U.S. politics makes any possible change hard to enact.

Looking to the future, to say it's unclear, would be an understatement. As there continue to be nationwide protests following many mass shootings, take for example March for our Lives, and a president who wishes to end the gun violence epidemic in the U.S., one thing is certain... all hope isn't completely lost yet.



You Cannot Sit Here.

Exploring Hostile Architecture's Uncomfortable Truth

ANNA ARAGONCILLO BARCELÓ

You cannot sit here.

This statement is not one uttered in the front seats of a metropolitan bus in 1955. No. It's the war declaration that is consciously articulated in the design and implementation of each and every hostile bench. Hostile architecture is the modern arsenal against citizens, a trojan horse that enters your city under the guise of aiding cosmopolitan worries, but whose main objective is to pillage each sliver of hope for a minimally fair existence.

What is hostile architecture, and what exactly makes it hostile? Or, perhaps, what's even more important is not *what* but towards *who* is hostile architecture working against.

On a theoretical level, hostile architecture is a strategy used in urban planning to limit, reconduct or restrict one's behaviour in relation to the urban space. Certain elements in urban planning are placed to be noticed, which, consciously or unconsciously, shapes your demeanour and adjusts the uses that you give to that urban component. Some examples of it include the installation of standing benches to deter rough sleeping of homeless people, anti-skateboarding elements added to handrails which can hurt visually impaired people, or the placement of metal spikes in urban areas where people can shelter from the rain, such as under bridges or two-level carriageways.

Of course, pioneering architect Oscar Newman did not draft on such offensive, almost assaultive, uses and, rather, portrayed it as a defensive urban design strategy that had as its objective to reduce crime rates by crafting an environment that moulded citizens' behaviour towards a more civic demeanour. But there is a world of difference between one's intention and the result. In fact, albeit sad, it is a usual occurrence of an original idea with no malicious ambition getting prevaricated and manipulated in a way that leads to an attack towards the citizens who use the public spaces.

Hostile architecture is the belief that people who are on the more vulnerable side of the spectrum and might lack resources, who might be elderly, physically impaired or homeless, don't deserve a place to sit while waiting; they don't deserve a place to sleep, they don't deserve a shelter from the rain and the cold. Home-

lessness has been a major problem of big societies throughout history, but the situation seems to have grown bigger in recent decades, with the buoyant rise of capitalism and the astronomical increase in real estate prices. Prices that multiply exponentially in powerhouse cities, such as New York or Amsterdam, which forces their inhabitants to evacuate their family houses and either move to a different city or become homeless.

Shelters are saturated with a constant influx of people who, abandoned by the system and weakened by the financial development, push shelters into a situation where they can no longer serve their purpose. In these situations, the shelters can no longer accommodate the entirety of the homeless people, and they are forced to find alternatives, which, in most cases, means the streets. This increase concerns certain strata of society, for different reasons. People in difficult situations worry due to the increment of hostile architecture, which has unutilized many covered spaces under bridges, which used to give cover for the rain.

Perhaps, the most dangerous element of hostile architecture is the naturality with which so many basic rights are breached. Perhaps it's the way in which the administration does not notice, or decides not to notice, how, an action that has almost no effect in a privileged community, can pose such a peril for more vulnerable communities that rely on those architectural elements to continue with their daily lives.

Delving deeper into the backbone of the problem, we could say that *defensive* urban strategies are a way of undermining the constant struggles that daily life can be just because a certain community finds it uncomfortable. Hostile architecture has grown in popularity due to the pressure that government administrations and civil engineers have received from the more privileged layers of society. People who hold enough authority to make decisions and persuade the direction of these same decisions are the main drivers of hostile architecture. It is the people who have the privilege to do so that pressure the government administrations to take measures to who are uncomfortable with the "ugly" face of reality. The exact same system that grants them the privilege which makes them able to parade their power is the one responsible for snatching away



basic needs from the communities whom they are less "comfortable with". Thus, predominantly black and less wealthy neighbourhoods are more likely to have elements of hostile architecture, as it is where the structural discrimination inherent in the current governmental system comes forth.

Public spaces have a core importance in the development of daily life in society, as they play a substantial role in crafting the environment needed in order to have social relationships. It provides areas where whole communities are created and develops the interwoven social links that play such a key role in identity politics. It is certainly a surprising dichotomy to realise that public spaces are being used as a permanent and disregarded war zone, whereas they should be a safe flourishing social cradle.

What does that say about us? What does it say about the millions and millions of people that are affected by

it on a daily basis and do not have the power to change it or to be heard? What does it say about those that do not even see the problem? The ones that have grown in such deep discriminative social structures that take for granted what it might be for a visually impaired person to live in a world of constant sharp spikes in ledges that make merely existing independently a ceaseless distress.

Hostile architecture is a matter of privilege. It is the power to decide who can and who cannot sit, who can and who cannot lie down to sleep, albeit not in the best conditions.

It is a matter of humanity, or the lack thereof.

Raison d'être Humaine

If We Can Protect Intellectual Property, Why Not Protect the Property of Intellect?

A Plea for the Protection of Art as a Human Right

PAUL JOHANN LINDHORST

"Art is a broad term that refers to various forms of creative expression, such as painting, sculpture, music, literature, and dance. Art can also be found in more everyday objects and activities, such as a well-designed chair or the way someone arranges flowers in a vase. Ultimately, what is considered art is a matter of personal interpretation and can vary widely from one person to another. Some people consider art to be anything that is creative and expresses emotions, ideas, or experiences, while others may have a narrower definition."

This definition is given by Open AI's Chatbot "Chat GPT" on the question of what art is. The same company also trained "Dall E", a bot that can create "artwork" - which is in fact put to the test in the article on the following page.

The technology has rapidly improved over the last few years and - with Open AI's products - has for the first time very prominently shown its astonishing capabilities. It is able to create texts and images that at first sight seem no different from human-created ones. Of course, when looking at the AI's creation more closely, it becomes obvious that its explanations stay very much at the surface and its pictures lack artistic craftsmanship, depth and sometimes even basic aesthetic value. In the end, that is besides the point since machine learning will reduce such weaknesses, thus becoming less and less distinguishable from human creations.

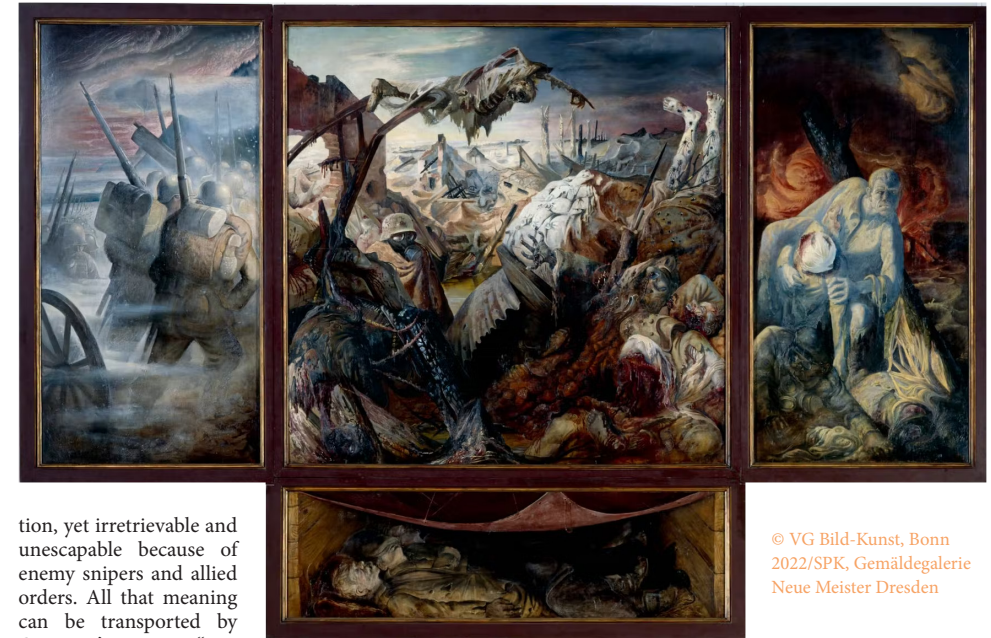
The implications of this are huge. From an economic perspective, this means that companies using AI do not need certain departments and services anymore. They will be able to create a huge number of ads in no time, without having to employ artists and writers who can get sick, want to get paid fairly, and all these annoying things - why would a company still rely on humans when customers on Instagram do not even spot the difference between a human and an AI-created caption or picture? The AI competition is just cheaper, faster and facilitates a practically infinite supply as it can create new designs and texts as long as there is power and an internet connection. Of course, that means thousands of small artists whose livelihoods today depend on orders from regional businesses would face spiralling

down into poverty since they cannot compete in any of these categories and will eventually be driven from the market.

This is, of course, especially true for creators in the digital realm. The point at which sculptors, photographers and painters who create engaging with our physical world will be replaced by AI, is still far away. Furthermore, famous artists that have created a brand will be more or less untouched by this development since they are not competing in the same market as AI. People buy their works not for the same reason and purpose. And this is where we get closer to the overarching question. A question that humanity has asked for millennia and that reaches the peak of its relevance: What is art? Is it a well-crafted creation or an aesthetic experience - or both? Can art be a commodity? What is a conditional for the creation of art - intelligence or emotion?

"Dataists" argue that all intelligence is only an algorithm and that everything can be reduced to a set of data. Human consciousness is nothing more than an algorithm running on bio-electric processing methods to integrate given information into images or stories that others then call "artwork". Since the technology is freed of the limits of biological processing, it can create images integrating an even greater amount of information, an AI is, according to this logic, the better algorithm of the two and thus able to create better "artworks". People who believe art to be an aesthetic experience will eventually have to agree since algorithms will be trained to maximise the aesthetic value of their creations - and thus ultimately succeed the human artist.

Is the human doomed to leave art to the AI? No, art is neither just an aesthetic experience nor just well-made handicraft, we would not consider a nice broom or a beautiful flower art. Art becomes art through what is behind it, through what it means. That is why an AI can never create art. AI does not know "meaning" - though it can tell you convincingly what the term "meaning" means, it will never feel what Otto Dix felt. The agony and fear of having to fight and being wounded in the muddy trenches of the First World War, while shell by shell of artillery fire hits the surface above the bunker that shields you from imminent and painful death. The gut-wrenching smell of your friend's shattered corpse slowly rotting in a puddle just metres from your posi-



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2022/SPK, Gemäldegalerie
Neue Meister Dresden

tion, yet irretrievable and unescapable because of enemy snipers and allied orders. All that meaning can be transported by Otto Dix's painting "Der Krieg" ("The War") and re-felt by its observer. AI can write about it, but only in the sense of connecting words with other words in an infinite data pile, not because of having actually felt it, being that sobbing, mortal piece of misery captured in that terrible scenario. Furthermore, in the process of creating, AI does not feel the paintbrush go over the white canvas surface while still having these paralysing memories of foregone days in the back of one's head, it will just accumulate astronomical amounts of zeros and ones to achieve a certain number of zeros and ones, while not knowing about it and not knowing why.

Meaning is thus inherently human and since creation can only become art if it has meaning, art must be human.

Nevertheless, as the invention of AI itself has meaning and bears - besides its risks - humongous potential for humanity it also needs to exist. That is where restrictions come in. I plead for an unprecedented international convention on art. To give binding legal provisions and enable AI and the human right for art to co-exist in this. Basically, to establish a human right to art. The legislation could entail a legal distinction between "art" and "creation" - "art" as a necessarily human-made digital or physical object with a history of meaning and "creation" as a legal term for non-human-

made ones and ones without a history of meaning. This would clear up the fog encasing the origin of especially digital art. On social media, AI-created content would have to be labelled as such, to make it obvious that in this case there is no individual suffering, long hours of work or tragic life stories behind that creation but merely the push of a button. Otherwise, online spaces and increasingly the real world could be flooded with these ever-cheaper, ever-more aesthetic, but ever more meaningless pictures, poems and paintings, that only contribute to the big tech companies' wallets rather than to human flourishing. Real artists could lose the attention they desperately need, not only to share valuable, authentic and at times divine experiences but to earn a living. The proposed *restrictions* could contribute to a growing appreciation for authentic art and for what it can give us. Furthermore, it would enable the creation of separate spaces to celebrate human art and experience, as well as the mind-blowing technological achievement that AI is and what it can do, each in their own right.

If proper means to enforce these rules are constructed along with an actual broad awareness of what art is and its importance, the future of technology can become one of human civilization thriving rather than one of human disenfranchisement, degeneration and despair - we just have to impose the right *restrictions*.

Challenging AI

Exploring the Strengths and Limitations of Open AI

OPEN AI

The following is a text that the AI software generated for the oil painting titled “The War”. The visual was generated based on the text input.

Over the past few months there has been a craze about the potential of AI and its ability to open new horizons. So, we decided to put it to the test and look at its ability to generate a text about a painting titled “The War” and then develop visuals based on the output generated by ChatGPT. We followed the same process with “Political Restrictions”. This is what AI was able to produce.

Georges Rouault’s “The War” is a powerful and haunting masterpiece that captures the horror and devastation of war in vivid detail. Painted in 1914-1915, at the outbreak of World War I, the painting is a stark reminder of the human cost of armed conflict.

Measuring 1.65 meters by 1.3 meters, the painting is a monumental work that is part of a larger series of works by Rouault known as “Miserere et Guerre,” which translates to “Mercy and War.” The series consists of 58 paintings and prints, each one depicting the horrors of war in a different way.

“The War” is one of the most striking works in the series, with its bold color palette and dramatic imagery. The painting depicts a desolate landscape, with rubble and debris strewn across the ground and billowing smoke rising into the air. In the foreground, a lone soldier is depicted crawling through the wreckage, his uniform torn and tattered and his face twisted in agony.

Rouault’s use of color is particularly effective in conveying the sense of danger and destruction that is present in the painting. Deep shades of red and black dominate

the scene, creating a sense of tension and drama that is palpable. The soldier is surrounded by a sense of chaos and destruction, with shattered buildings and twisted metal adding to the sense of devastation.

The background of the painting is equally powerful, with dark clouds gathering overhead and lightning bolts illuminating the scene. The stormy sky adds to the sense of danger and uncertainty, emphasizing the sense of fear that is so often felt during times of war.

Despite the darkness and despair of the painting, there is also a sense of hope and resilience. The soldier, despite his injuries and the destruction around him, continues to move forward, driven by a sense of duty and determination. This sense of resilience is one of the key themes of Rouault’s work, as he sought to highlight the strength and courage that can be found even in the darkest of times.

“The War” is a deeply emotional and poignant work of art that continues to resonate with viewers to this day. It is a powerful reminder of the human cost of war, and the lasting impact that armed conflict can have on individuals and societies.

Rouault’s use of religious imagery adds another layer of meaning to the painting, highlighting the suffering and sacrifice of those affected by war. The halo surrounding the head of the wounded

soldier is a poignant reminder of the spiritual and moral dimensions of conflict, and the need for compassion and empathy in times of war.

“The War” is also notable for its impact on the development of modern art. Rouault was a member of the Fauvist movement, which sought to break away from traditional artistic conventions and explore new forms of expression. His use of bold colors and dramatic imagery was highly influential on the development of Expressionism and other modern art movements.



The following is a text that the AI software generated for a mixed media artwork titled “Political Restrictions”. The visual was generated based on the text input.

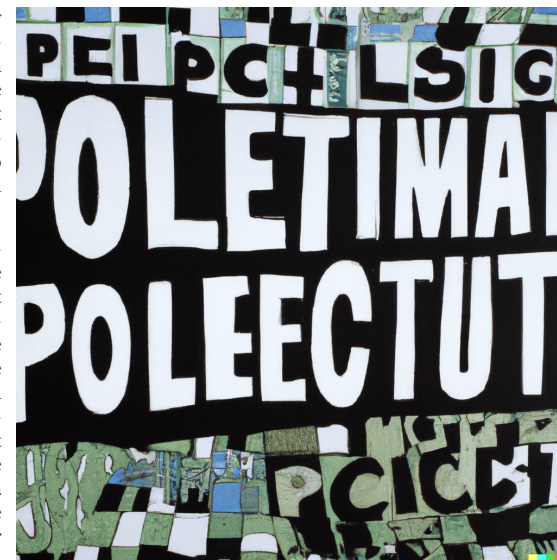
Political Restrictions is a complex and multi-layered mixed media artwork that speaks to the urgent and pervasive issue of political censorship and its impact on society. Created through a combination of collage, painting, and digital manipulation techniques, the artwork features a central figure with their mouth covered by a piece of duct tape, surrounded by a chaotic mix of images and text.

At its core, the artwork highlights the suppression of free speech and the silencing of dissenting voices that often accompanies political restrictions. The central figure with their mouth covered by duct tape is a powerful symbol of this silencing, conveying the sense that those in power are seeking to control the narrative and limit the flow of information. This central image is particularly poignant in light of the many instances of censorship and suppression of speech that have occurred throughout history, from totalitarian regimes to contemporary social media platforms.

Surrounding the central figure are a range of images and text that further emphasize the importance of free speech and the dangers of political censorship. Newspaper clippings, protest signs, and slogans are combined to create a rich, textured surface that draws the viewer in and invites them to explore the details.

Bold, contrasting colors such as black and red convey a sense of urgency and danger, emphasizing the importance of speaking out against oppression.

One of the most interesting aspects of “Political Restrictions” is the way it incorporates a range of different materials and techniques to create a powerful visual statement. The use of collage and painting techniques creates a rich, textured surface that draws the viewer in, while the use of digital manipulation techniques adds a contemporary feel and enhances the overall impact of the artwork.



This combination of techniques also allows the artwork to convey a sense of depth and complexity, highlighting the intricate web of power dynamics and political forces at play in our society. By layering different materials and images, the artwork invites viewers to consider the many different factors that contribute to political restrictions and the suppression of free speech.

Moreover, “Political Restrictions” serves as a commentary on the present moment, where censorship and suppression of free speech are becoming more prevalent than ever before. Social media platforms are increasingly being used to silence voices and control the narrative, while politicians and other leaders are pushing for greater control over the media and other forms of communication. This artwork is a reminder that these trends must be resisted if we are to maintain the open and democratic societies we all aspire to.

At the same time, “Political Restrictions” is a deeply political artwork that challenges viewers to question authority and speak out against oppression. By emphasizing the importance of free speech and the dangers of political censorship, the artwork reminds us that our voices have the power to effect change and that we must never take our rights for granted. It also invites viewers to think more deeply about the power dynamics at play in our society and the ways in which different groups and individuals exert influence over the flow of information.

AI is most certainly a far-reaching tool that expands our capacity in all imaginable fields, from academia to art. However, from both the texts and visuals it becomes evident that its potential is not infinite. At the point of publishing OpenAI’s visual generating software Dall-E is unable to process text. When one compares the text and visuals there is a clear discrepancy thereby highlighting the restrictions of AI in its ability to generate meaningful and accurate results.



I Am What I Wear

Is Boycotting the Solution to the Ethical Crimes Committed By Fast-Fashion?

THOMAS HUISMAN & SOPHIA ANGELOVA

Every vote counts, one can easily deduct that every action counts. Every action makes a difference as well as every in-action. Calls for boycotts and refraining from following certain behaviours or purchasing items are part of everyday politics. Restricting yourself seems to be the signal needed in order to drive bigger organisations to change and act more ethically correct. However, relinquishing is hard. It takes a lot of will-power to change behavioural patterns and more importantly, the question of how much it could change always remains. The topic of boycotting will be discussed on the example of the fashion industry, more precisely the fast fashion industry. An industry that does not only produce affordable and trendy clothes, but also is one of the most polluting and wasteful industries in the world. Moreover, the fast fashion industry exacerbates poor workers' rights in low-income countries where these clothes are often produced.

Sophia

Fast fashion can be accredited as one of the most degenerative industries, contributing to the acute environmental problems facing today's society. The fashion industry has an extensive reach on all aspects of the environment and thus produces grave consequences such as climate change, resource depletion and water pollution. These consequences have been exacerbated by the increasing consumer demand for new clothing items and styles. This has resulted in a faster paced production from brands such as H&M and Zara which create 16 and 20 new lines respectively on an annual basis. Between 2000 and 2014, the global manufacturing of clothes has doubled. In order to accommodate the ever-growing demand as well as their own desire for business growth and expansion; fast fashion companies have committed to more efficient methods of production, which allow them to yield greater volumes of output at lower costs of production. But while monetary costs may have diminished, environmental costs have skyrocketed. Firms have begun using materials such as polyester as opposed to natural ones due to its favourable pricing. As such polyester requires recycling and separation, which is a difficult job once it has been incorporated into the clothing items. This is not to assume that traditional methods of production are very environmentally friendly; the pesticides used in cotton

crops seep into the ground leading not only to soil erosion but also water pollution.

I believe that this elucidates how detrimental the fast fashion industry is to the environment, especially when taking the new technologies and methods of production into account, which are not only worse for the environment but are also able to produce larger outputs. It is therefore up to the people to press for changes in the fashion industry by boycotting brands that produce unnecessarily large outputs of clothing. If there is less demand, supply will also fall. If people are unwilling to purchase items that have been produced in a manner that threatens their very existence, firms will be cornered into reevaluating their processes of production. Furthermore, upcycling exists as a very viable solution whereby consumers can commit to purchasing second-hand items which increases the lifespan of clothes and reduces reliance on new production.

Thomas

Although a boycott of the fast fashion industry might seem like an easy and the most sensible step, it is important to remain rational and to think about the negative consequences of such an action. First of all, it might not be possible for everybody to take that step towards more sustainable clothes. More sustainable, high-quality clothing brands are often expensive and consequently, inaccessible to the bulk of people. We cannot deny that fast fashion, in part due to the awful elements of the industry, provides affordable and trendy clothes to people with a tight budget. There is definitely the alternative of second-hand and vintage clothes that have even become popular in the last few years, but this cannot be the solution for everyone, as there is a limited supply of high-quality secondhand garments, which will ultimately result in an increase in prices.

Sophia

Another important factor in fast fashion that we must not forget is the business model upon which it operates is also unsustainable and exploitative. Companies' desire to increase the volume and pace of production is rooted in their ambitions for increasing revenue, which can only be achieved by keeping the costs of production low. A strategy that has often been employed is the use of sweatshops – a scheme wherein firms engage in



unfair and exploitative behaviour towards their employees. Fast-fashion companies often choose to locate their factories in countries such as China, Bangladesh, or India where workers' rights are not protected, thus allowing big corporations to take advantage of the corrupt and defective systems in order to maximise profits. People are forced to work in appalling conditions, often exposed to chemicals that deteriorate their health over time for upwards of 16 hours a day.

By purchasing the products of companies that exploit their workers, we ourselves are complicit in the unethical and abusive system of constant consumerism.

Being aware of the horrendous working conditions we have a responsibility to hold firms accountable and demand a restructuring of their business model that will foster a sustainable and fair supply chain. Collective boycotting will have severe repercussions on fast-fashion firms and their ability to continue production in such a manner. If people refuse to purchase their clothing items, they will have no choice but to introduce fundamental reforms in their business models.

Thomas

Again, I agree that something needs to change and that we cannot continue like we do right now. However, a boycott is not the right solution to the issues that people in the industry face. Besides the industry's impact on the environment, we need to consider that people's livelihoods depend on manufacturing clothes for these

companies. In countries like Bangladesh and India, where the production of clothes is a significant part of the economy, people's lives and independence depend on these jobs. We need to acknowledge and address the poor working conditions of fashion industry workers while also keeping in mind that the current situation might be better than pushing hundreds of thousands if not millions of people out of their jobs, especially in the short term. Considering that women make up the majority of workers in the fashion industry in these countries, they are the ones that will have to resort to jobs with even worse conditions or they will be deprived of an income completely, often having no alternative job opportunities. In comparison to them, it is relatively easy for us to turn our backs on fast fashion in order to help the environment, but if we did, the consequences for many of the workers in the industry will be those of life and death.

It is likely that even after reading this debate on fast fashion the overwhelming majority of readers may continue to agree that the fast fashion business is unsustainable and unethical and requires some fundamental reforms. However, we have attempted to demonstrate that restricting our consumption of fast fashion and deciding to boycott may have other profound consequences. We continue to strongly oppose any form of engagement and consumption of fast fashion products, nevertheless, there are deeper implications that we hope you were able to reflect upon.

Deglobalization

Is the World Economy Becoming More Fragmented?

SOPHIA ANGELOVA

The conclusion of WWII ushered in a new era of economic interdependence which operated within a framework of a rule-based system that was promoted and endorsed by the US. Such developments in the world order brought upon extraordinary levels of economic integration and cooperation on a global scale. Almost five decades later with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and just two years later the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 a new era of globalization had entered the consciousness of people. Scholars and analysts alike had triumphantly proclaimed the emergence of a unipolar world system guided by the logic of openness and free trade. They envisioned a world operating on the American economic model that would subside geographical and historical divisions and promote never before seen levels of interdependence and harmonization across the globe. In the 1990s and early 2000s, globalization was an astounding success whereby markets around the world were rapidly converging, which reshaped relations between culturally and ethnically diverse regions. This phenomenon was propelled by various factors most prominently was the Tiananmen Square protests which transformed China into an economic powerhouse and opened up the country to foreign direct investment. Westward, integration also took place with the creation of the European single market, NAFTA, and the WTO.

However, this utopian reality was rather short-lived, and the multilateral trading system and removal of barriers that had once been championed appears to be in jeopardy today.

The roots of this new era of deglobalization can be traced back to the 2008 financial crisis, which resulted in banks and multinational corporations to begin pulling back and reevaluating their financing policies. In an attempt to protect their domestic industries, markets, and financial institutions, countries around the globe shifted away from open markets in favour of more protectionist measures. Such trends are reflected in various figures that measure global economic performance—according to the World Bank foreign direct investment peaked in

2007 at 5.1% of global GDP. By 2020 it only emulated 1.3% of the global GDP. Global trade as a share of world GDP has also been fundamentally affected whereby it represented 60% of world GDP in 2008 to now representing only 52%. These statistics showcase how the world responded in an inward and protectionist manner to the unprecedented financial crisis. While the financial crisis triggered a new era of protectionism, it is not the sole reason that countries have grown hostile to an interconnected world.

US-China relations play an integral role in the evolving global dynamic. When China became integrated into the international trading system, the West had hoped that it would adopt and conform to Western values; when such hopes did not materialize the West and more specifically the US grew hostile to trade liberalization. Populists such as Trump have fired accusations that globalization hurts the domestic economy and low-skilled workers, something he termed “the greatest job theft in history”. This caused Trump to launch the US-China trade war by imposing tariffs on Chinese products, to which China responded by retaliating thereby driving the mutual antagonism and gradual decoupling of financial flows between the two superpowers.

These trends have been exacerbated by the unprecedented impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, which have disrupted supply chains worldwide, causing shortages in goods and materials, delays in deliveries, and increased costs. Many countries have restricted exports of essential goods, causing further disruptions in the supply chain. The war in Ukraine has also affected supply chains, as it has disrupted trade routes and caused damage to infrastructure. Such upheaval has induced countries across the world to adopt inward-looking policies and restrict trade on the global level in favour of more localized and domestic production.

Over the past decade and a half the world has witnessed bewildering intricate events that have transformed the global dynamic and trade. Such events have compelled countries to erect new restrictions and limits to economic interdependence.



Upholding Integrity

An Objective Exploration of Transgender Rights in the Sports World

ISABELLA TAYLOR EARHART

For many, participating in athletics means hard work, dedication, persistence, passion, and integrity. However, as cultures around the world become more accepting of differing identities, these fundamental attributes of sport become overshadowed by questions of inherently political nature. These questions include the presence of transgender athletes.

The aim of this article is to neither endorse nor reject either side of this debate; it is simply to look at both sides of what seems to be an issue that is gaining more traction in the international arena. But exactly what does this debate boil down to?

On the surface, it seems like the main question posed is simply whether or not transgender athletes should be allowed to compete with the athletes of the gender they have transitioned to become, and if so, should there be regulations to ensure competitive fairness? But, digging deeper, one can see that the debate is slightly more complex. Integrity is a key characteristic of athletics, but when it comes to the presence of transgender athletes, integrity is called into question. What is more important? Inclusiveness or an equal playing field?

Speaking solely from the perspective of biology, the male sex usually has physical advantages when it comes to athleticism and sport. When males go through puberty, the increase in testosterone allows them to have longer limbs, stronger bones, as well as greater muscle mass, aerobic capacity and strength.

To counter this point, many studies have shown that transgender women who have taken testosterone suppressors can end up with the same level of testosterone as cisgendered women. While this does not negate the fact that biological men tend to have bigger hands and feet, as well as more muscle mass and lung capacity, the physical advantages that testosterone offers, can be more or less reversed in transgender female athletes.

In 2015, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) released controversial guidelines for transgender athletes in com-

petitions. These guidelines included limits of testosterone levels and medical testing which athletes have reported was extensive and violating. These things are now considered unnecessary by the IOC who updated their guidelines in 2021. The new guidelines, which are called the IOC Framework on Fairness, Inclusion and Non-Discrimination on the Basis of Gender Identity and Sex Variations, consists of 10 main principles.

The first principal to note is inclusion. It states “everyone, regardless of their gender identity, expression and/or sex variations should be able to participate in a sport safely and without prejudice.” This opens the doors for inclusiveness in the Olympics. Further down the list is a principle of “primacy of health and bodily autonomy.” This principle ensures that transgender athletes are not subjected to gynaecological examinations or “similar forms of invasive physical examinations” that are designed to ascertain and regulate an athlete’s sex or gender.

This new framework has been considered by many as instrumental and groundbreaking in the push for LGBTQ+ rights, especially on an international level. Yet, what is important to take into account is that the IOC does not regulate or govern sport apart from the olympic games themselves, so while these principles may be very progressive, they do not have the jurisdiction to extend to all levels and types of athletic competition.

The IOC’s 2021 framework left room for growth and development. The guidelines explicitly stated that shall an eligibility restriction arise, it must be backed by extensive concrete scientific evidence and reasoning, all of which must be peer reviewed. The reason for this is primarily because there are still so many unanswered questions when it comes to the transitioning process of transgender athletes, what in a person’s body gives an athletic advantage, and what would be the most inclusive, yet fair, way to settle this debate.

Hopefully, as society and sport develop, these questions will continue to be answered and athletics on all levels and in all places will be a place of integrity.



Ultimately, Women Should Not Have Sex

How Prohibition, Rules and Laws Around the World Regulate Women and Their Bodies

CARLA GOLTINGS

Sex sells - Sex, drugs and rock'n'roll - Sex on the beach, it seems like the world became less prude compared to the 1950s if you look at advertising, music videos or even the cocktail menu of your favourite bar. In the humanities, literature, music, art and even architecture are considered expressions of societal values. They are created by a small number of members of society to distinctively represent and manifest society's collective identity. These fields indicate important societal structures since they stem from values, many of which extend from one nation to another. Globalisation further promised the expansion of economical and political ties which ultimately lead to cultural convergence. What seemed to be the pathway to a world society with open borders, universal norms and supranational authorities (cosmopolitanism) eventually led to opposite movements: Border closure, cultural particularism and national sovereignty (communitarianism). Cosmopolitans might have pushed for too much too fast which brought us to a dichotomy: What society ought to be and what it actually is. Put another way, the openness that is preached versus the regulation actually practised. A matter of society likely at the core of disputes of this nature is sex. One would think that one of the most private acts of life, which is deemed extremely personal, should be up to oneself. Quite contrastingly, if we look around the world, we can see that sex is often anything but up to oneself. Not only family, friends and other members of society perceive and judge this part of human life, but verdicts are made through the judicial systems - the ultimate judge of our current world. In a world marked by patriarchal structures, it is easy to see that there is a group which is especially restricted:

Women.

There are laws on most aspects of life and they generally are of a restricting nature. One of such laws is Article 411 of the Indonesian criminal code. In December 2022, the Indonesian government launched a provision which received overwhelming attention. The law codified in Article 411 criminalises premarital sex. Indonesians who engage in sexual activity outside marriage are considered to breach law. The violation can evoke a penalty of up to one year in prison. That this law is not to go into effect until January 2026 is only a small relief. This provision does not only have legal but social con-

sequences. Nevertheless, the general societal sentiment towards premarital sex seems to be in line with this outlawing. In fact, by claiming to be a true reflection of Indonesian norms and values, this provision can be regarded as a step towards further decolonisation since it opposes notions imposed by Dutch legal legacy.

History and present show us, however, that being in line with societal thought does not ultimately make a decision morally right. Viewed from another angle, this provision can be revealed as an act overriding privacy rights. It can furthermore be exposed as especially hurting women, despite appearing neutral. It may trigger the heightening of discriminatory social norms on women by encouraging early marriage, reinforcing notions of virginity and increasing restrictions. Sex workers, a profession mainly practised by women, would lose their financial independence as

well as livelihood overall. The discouraging influence on individuals to access healthcare services, in particular family planning and sexual health services, can only be predicted under the corresponding fear of prosecution. Furthermore, legal support will only become further out of reach for those who are vulnerable. Those, who are victim to sexual assault, will fear to proceed against it because the chance

of them being held responsible instead seems more likely than before.

If the most drastic outcome of sex occurs, which is a pregnancy, most men are off the hook since the pregnancy is addressable to them to a lesser extent. A pregnant woman, however, will be held responsible both socially and legally. There is no neutral quality of this provision.

Reproduction, biologically speaking, is the ultimate goal of intercourse. Throughout time, reproduction and sex got detached to a certain degree. Pleasure, fun and intimacy superseded the objective of reproduction. Cultural and societal developments towards a more career oriented lifestyle, higher living standards and extended life expectancy led to changes of beliefs and wishes. A survey from 2021 revealed that 44% of childless adults under fifty stated that they were not planning on having children. This is an increase of seven points compared to 2018. 56% of the surveyed people stated that they simply did not want to have children. Not having children is their active choice. This attitude is in line with many developments currently occurring in the world. In the end, however, having children is an extremely personal choice and literally a lifetime decision.

On the 26th of September 2022, world contraception day, the United Nations proclaimed that "Human rights law stipulates that women must be free to decide when to be pregnant, how many children to have, and how to space pregnancies. The full enjoyment of sexual and reproductive health rights is indispensable to women's and girls' ability to exercise all other human rights and for the achievement of gender equality. Laws and policies that deny women and girls their sexual and reproductive health rights are inherently discrim-

inatory." When looking back at the previous years, the (legal) setbacks in terms of accessing contraception are disturbing. Ideological grounds combined with effects of the COVID-19 pandemic specifically affected people in vulnerable positions, in particular historically discriminated people, such as girls, Black women or migrants.

States that campaign with their mindset of equality and freedom are not remotely excluded from this. Germany for instance had a so-called advertising ban for abortions secured in Article 219a of its criminal code. It entailed that gynaecologists and sexual health centres were prohibited to give information on abortions on their websites. Practitioners were to face legal consequences if they indicated that they offered terminations. With the new coalition, Germany repealed the law in 2022. And still, the Catholic Church found it unfortunate. The party of previous chancellor Angela Merkel, the 'Christian Democratic Union', as well as the right-wing 'Alternative for Germany' voiced their criticism. The United States went in the other direction in 2022. The U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*, thus ruling that there is no constitutional right to abortion. Many see it as an abandonment of its duty to protect fundamental rights which makes this decision the first time in history where the Supreme Court has taken away a fundamental right. As of early 2023, twelve US-

states enforce a near-total ban on abortion, six additional states made abortion unavailable or more strictly restrained than previously possible. This forces people to travel hundreds and thousands of miles in order to access abortion care. The alternative, which in many cases can hardly be called an alternative, is to carry a pregnancy against their will.

In their essence, laws are rules or orders that are advisable or obligatory to observe. But what if a law restricts

you in a way more severe than prohibiting you from consuming alcohol at an earlier age? What if a law interferes with things most private about your life? Laws are supposed to ensure the equal treatment of all citizens but clearly fail to uphold that promise. Furthermore, the legal system is there to protect you. It does the opposite for women. Women are restricted in many aspects and are rather threatened than protected when it comes to laws ruling sex and contraception. How can women overcome that? Ultimately, women should not have sex. According to law, that would resolve many problems.



What if a law interferes with things most private about your life? Laws are supposed to ensure the equal treatment of all citizens but clearly fail to uphold that promise.

The Mirror of Colourism: Oppressor, Oppressed?

Delving into lightening creams' vestiges of colonialism in ethnic communities

ANNA ARAGONCILLO BARCELÓ



it is no surprise that in non-regulated countries the toxicity levels escalate incredibly.

Precisely, the regions that have less controls and regulations regarding toxicity levels are the ones that top the production and distribution of these whitening creams. Thousands of lightening products are sold on a daily basis in many parts of Africa, Asia and the Middle East, where they are considered very normalised and available everywhere. However, the main reason why most people in these regions buy whitening creams is because there's a generational perception of what beauty looks like, and the desire to fit into that model. In this sense, lightening creams can be considered as a byproduct of colourism, born from a cradle of social darwinism and the desire to conform to a certain standard. This is what modern-day colourism is built upon: a form of discrimination of a person depending on the colour of their skin, usually by members of their community or close environment. In other words, it's the notion that a fairer skin tone is more desirable or acceptable than darker skin.

Perhaps, one of the most peculiar traits of modern colourism is how it's carried out by the members of the same community. Colourism is a notion that began as a tangible tool for oppression towards people of colour during colonialism, but it has transcended first generations and been transformed into a part of modern culture in BIPOC communities. By doing so, emergent generations have come to internalise a western ideal of beauty as the most desirable.

Thousands of lightening creams are advertised on a daily basis in many postcolonial countries, which has transformed it in a buoyant economy with growing importance in the financial market system. However, it has never been about lightening creams themselves, but about what they represent: a vestige of a colonial past. A reminder that the beauty standards that dictate certain ethnic societies were set by colonisers centuries ago, but are being perpetuated by the own members of the community. There is a piece of colonialism in every lightening cream and, as hard as it might be, it will not be until all vestiges have been erased and rewritten with a community's own story that the ongoing conflict will stop.

Isopropylcatechol, hydroquinone, p-Dihydroxybenzene, magnesium ascorbyl phosphate and mercurous chloride. These unpronounceable names are the five most used active ingredients in lightening skin creams. The first four might not sound familiar, but the latter one is definitely present in most people's vocabulary: mercury. It was used in the past erroneously to cure syphilis, which had devastating effects in their users' health. Its use led to violent headaches, hand tremors, memory loss, liver and kidney issues and, eventually, death.

Seeing this varied assortment of ailments, it is certainly quite surprising to come to know that it is still nowadays one of the main active ingredients of many skin lightening creams. As their name indicates, these are creams and lotions intended for topical use that promise to give a lighter and fairer complexion to the skin, usually through bleaching processes that involve depigmentation through a reduction in melanin.

Although these cosmetic products are sold everywhere in the world, they are illegal in the European Union, and are regulated in the US so that the amount of mercury does not exceed 1ppm. However, up to 41% of the bleaching creams sold in Minnesota in 2011 had mercury levels that notably exceeded this quantity, according to the MDH. If the US – who in theory has strict regulations – cannot control the mercury levels,

Press Restrictions in the Birthplace of Democracy

Media Freedom in Greece

ELENA MIHAYLOVA

On behalf of all Clio members, we would like to say that everyone is extremely excited for the 14th of April and the travel destination of this academic year – Athens. Let's escape the Dutch rain and all exam worries and enjoy the warmth of Greece together!

Big thanks to the Clio Travel Committee for organising such an exciting journey ahead of us!

It's hard to believe that there is anyone who has visited the Hellenic Republic and hasn't fallen in love with the warm and talkative Greek people, the pleasant Mediterranean climate, the heavenly beaches, the taste of gyros, and the cheerful music coming from the tavern on the seashore.

But doesn't one need to know more about a place before going there?

Greece is a country with a rich history and traditions, situated in Southeast Europe, and undoubtedly one of the oldest countries in the world. Still, due to its reputation as, more or less, an origin of Western civilization and a crucial component of its political, cultural, and economic past, Greece is often attributed with the status of a Western European country.

Despite the country's significance, Greece still encounters some severe issues. One of the more critical ones is the state of media freedom and the treatment of journalists in recent years.

In theory, under Article 14, the Greek constitution promises freedom of speech. That entails its practices to be defended and maintained by the government. Certain laws and regulations are precisely created to keep the media sector in check. However, NGOs like the Greek Helsinki Monitor claim that the government doesn't always abide by these rules.

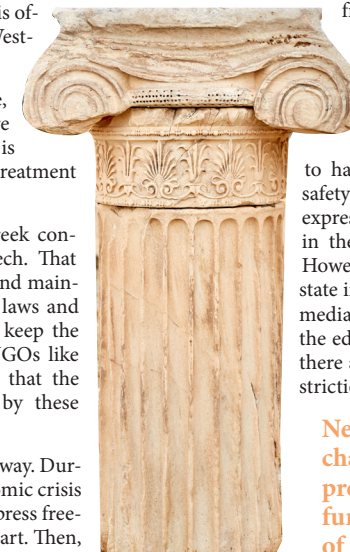
The situation hasn't always been this way. During the country's financial and economic crisis between 2010 and 2015, the state of press freedom in Greece started to crumble apart. Then,

the problem developed further following the Covid-19 Pandemic. According to Press Without Borders' ranking of the best to worst 180 countries for media freedom worldwide, where Greece was holding 35th position in 2009, the situation became worse with the state now holding the 108th position.

At its core, the problem covers the attacks and other forms of maltreatment that journalists experience, mainly when investigating protests, migration-related crises or Covid-19 issues. Many examples follow. In 2020, journalist Dimitra Kroustalli left her position at the daily newspaper To Vima, alleging "suffocating pressure" from the prime minister's office in response to a piece of her about the government's ineffective Covid-19 case monitoring. Then, on the 9th of April 2021, veteran crime journalist Giorgos Karaivaz was murdered near his home in Athens. Interestingly enough, the reporter was looking into the ongoing mafia conflict in the Greek capital at the time. However, as no arrests had been made concerning the killing, many started claiming to be spied upon, a problem that was utterly covered up. Others feared that the legislation governing protests would limit their capacity to report accurately. For this reason, the European Commission and Reporters Without Borders voiced their concern about limitations on media freedom in Greece, including withholding public funding from satirical publications, claims of government censorship, and harassment of journalists by police during protests.

It is crucial to uphold specific standards of freedom of speech, to have reliable media and provide the safety of journalists so they can freely express their personal opinion, especially in the realm of International Relations. However, there is a difference between a state imposing certain necessary limits on media and exercising complete control of the editing process. Sadly, as we all know, there are far worse examples of media restrictions than Greece.

Nevertheless, it is critical to change this tendency since press freedom is one of the fundamental characteristics of democratic rule.





From Boring Internship to Becoming a TV-Star

A Chat About Student Life in Eastern Europe and Central Asia with Tom Wagenmakers.

PAUL JOHANN LINDHORST

Tom Wagenmakers, some might know him as an IRIO lecturer for IP and PS, he is furthermore an expert on Eastern Europe and has worked and studied in places like Russia and Mongolia. C&B sat down with him to talk about his experiences there and what we can take away from it today.

Welcome! How did you decide to make Eastern Europe your area of specialisation?

That's a good question and very relevant for students. I think it makes sense to start thinking about these things as soon as possible, but most important is you choose something you like. For me, I started studying here at RUG in 2014, that was when Crimea got annexed, and I think that framed the way I thought already as it was constantly on the news. And when the language choices had to be made, I said: Let's do Russian. And when I got more interested in Russian, Ukrainian and Belorussian affairs and culture, I wrote my papers about Russia as well. Very important in that regard was the Clio-Trip as well, where we went to Georgia. I went with some people who spoke Russian, while I spoke like 5 words, but I was fascinated by the architecture which was so very different – very communist - and by the fact that I could interact and understand the people there. That really set it off for me.

Then followed a minor in Moscow, what were your highlights from that time?

One really special thing was the education in Moscow, where I took a class in EU-Russia relations. Just the full-blown Russian propaganda viewpoint. I never had that before, and it opened up my eyes to how the Russian elites see EU-Russia relations. Even back in 2016, they taught about destroying the western order and how countries joining the EU were colonies. And I knew that was all bullshit, but it was an eye-opener to me that there are very different perspectives and that we need to take them into consideration (if we want to understand IR).

And second of all, Russia is just a crazy country. Weird things happening here, very weird parties as well. (*laughs*) One time we were having a party in a village

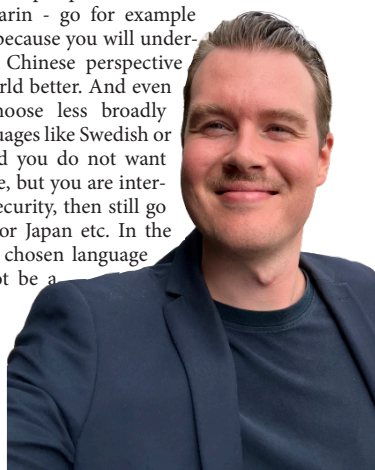
full of Dachas - holiday homes many Russians have - while all the other Dachas were having one as well - that was really ridiculous to me.

What is your most valued experience from your time in Mongolia?

Mongolia is easy. I was there for an internship, which was boring, but nevertheless, a very important take-away was getting to know that working at an NGO was not what I wanted. But there was also a very fun experience. I got to play a US exchange student getting catfished by a Mongolian in a Mongolian TV series called "Girls". At the time it was like a joke to me, but when people got to know that, it ended up with me on a live TV interview here in the Netherlands. That was so random.

What are the advantages for IR students of going to countries like Georgia instead of more typical ones like the US?

The different perspectives that you get. Especially when choosing a language like Russian: Go on an exchange to a Russian-speaking country! You understand the language and so, that is at least how it was for me, it will help you to understand the Russian perspective. Same for Mandarin - go for example to China because you will understand the Chinese perspective on the world better. And even if you choose less broadly used languages like Swedish or Italian and you do not want to go there, but you are interested in security, then still go to China or Japan etc. In the end, your chosen language should not be a barrier.



The Restrictions Faced Post-Earthquake

A Syrian Refugee Perspective

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL GRONINGEN- REFUGEE COMMITTEE

Many are left reeling from the recent earthquake that occurred in Turkey, especially the Syrians who have taken asylum there. Since 2011, there has been a civil war in Syria, forcing over 7 million people to flee their homes. Many of these refugees, who fled the turmoil and violence in their own country and immigrated to Turkey, now find themselves back in an environment with uncertainty and no safety. While the earthquake was a terrible incident in itself, the restrictions that were put in place as a result have made things considerably harder for them.

One of the biggest restrictions that these refugees are dealing with is the inability to move around freely. Many of them are confined to temporary shelters and are unable to leave or commute to work. They now feel stuck and helpless, unable to better their circumstances or provide for their family. After the devastating effects of the earthquake, holders of the protection status are supposedly able to move to all provinces except Istanbul, provided that they already had housing at the destination. But more regulations have been imposed and proposed, with little clarification for the people who are subject to them. Such increase in complex bureaucracy only leaves the people who are seeking safety in a more precarious situation.

Another important concern now is access to aid. There is limited support for Syrian refugees as a result of the majority of humanitarian agencies being preoccupied with supporting earthquake victims from the host country. A lot of the facilities they depend on, such as hospitals and schools, have been destroyed or damaged by the earthquake. As a result, there is a lack of sufficient food, water, and medical supplies, forcing refugees to rely solely on their meager resources and the generosity of strangers.

Moreover, this recent natural disaster will essentially contribute to a continuous stream of refugees seeking asylum within the EU. The Common European Asylum System (CEAS) was established with the goal of providing asylum seekers with uniform and equitable treatment throughout the EU. However despite this, the CEAS has been the subject of

criticism with respect to its treatment of Syrian refugees in particular.

The first major issue is a lack of solidarity among EU member states, which has resulted in an uneven distribution of refugees, with certain countries, such as Greece and Italy, bearing a disproportionate share of the burden. As a result, living conditions in refugee camps have become unsanitary, overcrowded, and inhumane.

Another area of concern is also the inconsistency of asylum procedures and standards among EU member states, contributing to variations in the protection and treatment of Syrian refugees. On top of this, the asylum process can be lengthy and complicated, exacerbating the uncertainty and hardships that refugees face.

Additionally, the CEAS has been faulted for its reliance on external border controls, which can restrict Syrian refugees from obtaining protection and lead to violations of their fundamental human rights. This is especially troubling given that many Syrian refugees are forced to embark on perilous journeys to reach the EU only to be turned away or returned to dangerous environments. It is critical that the CEAS address issues of insufficient solidarity among member states, ensure consistent asylum procedures and standards, and provide greater protection to Syrian refugees. Accomplishing these changes will necessitate the cooperation and coordination of EU member states to ensure that the CEAS offers just and equitable treatment of Syrian refugees throughout the EU.

That said Syrian refugees are adamant about overcoming these obstacles. Even under these difficult conditions, they are making a lot of effort to help one another and rebuild their communities. By recognizing the restrictions and challenges they face and working to address them, we can help ensure that they have a brighter future ahead.





Your Future Has No Limits

Explore Your Career Options

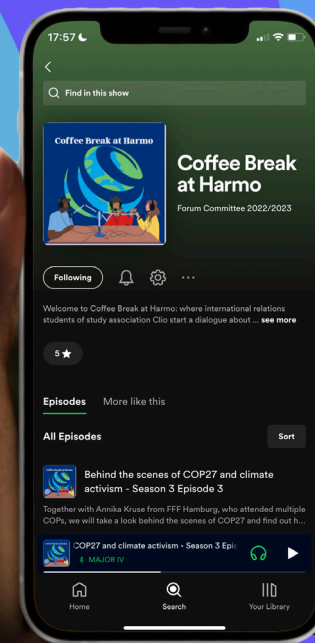
CAREER COMMITTEE

The Career Committee aims at supporting Clio members with discovering their future paths and getting a better perspective of their opportunities after their studies! The Career Platform showcases available internships and interviews with students and alumni. The two main events, Career Day and Career Trip, provide students with networking possibilities and insights on possible jobs.



Clio's podcast COFFEE BREAK AT HARMO

Join Clio's Forum Committee in an exploration of International Relations from all kinds of perspectives: researchers, activists, and people affiliated with the University of Groningen or working within the field of IR who share their unique opinion and expertise on a different topic in each podcast episode.



Check out our episodes so far on:

- The Russo-Ukrainian war
- Student activism and the conflict in the Palestinian areas
- COP27 and climate activism





About Us

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.

In our second print edition, we discussed the scope of restrictions, how they can harm but also aid. Thus, we could not help but ask ourselves:

How do we feel restricted?



Erin Deandra Murdiadi

Editor in Chief



Being a woman from Indonesia, I feel restricted by my race, my gender, my ethnicity, and my nationality. This restriction feels especially prevalent living in a Western country where people's cultural backgrounds and experiences tend to be very different from my own.

Elena Mihaylova

Secretary



In this world of many restrictions, I feel most restricted by my inability to fully communicate my thoughts, mostly out of fear of being misunderstood. Hopefully, someday I will escape this trap, learning to freely express myself and share my own truth.

Sophia Angelova

Layout Editor



I feel restricted in my ability to fully experience all cultures that our world has to offer. I think that speaking as many languages as possible opens up a lot of possibilities and allows you to fully immerse yourself in a world previously unfamiliar to you.

Carla Goltings

Layout Editor



The patriarchal structure of our society is definitely limiting me - in terms of certain attributions and access to areas of social and professional life. Especially the fact that expectations differ tremendously according to gender identity challenges me in every aspect of my life, both consciously and unconsciously.

Paul Johann Lindhorst

Public Relations



The failure of past generations of leaders to setting our societies on a path of cooperation on topics such as social justice, climate change and international security, makes me feel like our generation is restricted.

Koen Moerman

Public Relations



In a world divided by territory and separated by great distances, I feel somewhat restricted in connecting with my fellow humans. I am happy to see that the process of globalization increasingly counters this by creating a 'smaller' world.

Thomas Huisman

Treasurer & Acquisition



Sometimes, I feel like my own mind restricts me. I am very aware of everything that could go wrong, especially in new situations. However, often, these doom scenarios do not come true at all. Though, unfortunately, I think that this inclination restricts me from time to time.

Kimberly Volbeda

Board Representative



I find that the pressure of having to know exactly what you want to be in life is restricting. Oscar Wilde said "If you want to be a grocer, or a general, or a politician, or a judge, you will invariably become it; that is your punishment." This has helped me immensely in appreciating everything by realizing that life is beautiful and I do have the time.

Anna Aragoncillo Barceló

Reporter



I find that what restricts me the most are other people's expectations of me, as I sometimes feel that my decisions are not mine and everything that I am and ever will be is what other people want me to be. This is increasingly frustrating because the same expectations that choke me are the ones that help me recognize what I don't want.

Isabella Taylor Earhart

Reporter



I find that time can be very restricting. I am often left wanting more time with someone or more time to do something. But, this restriction has a silver lining, as a lack of time has taught me the importance of living in the moment.

Contact Information

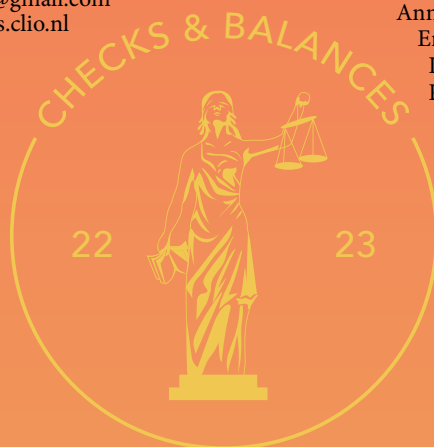
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