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THE ASSOCIATION OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS LUND

SHIFTING SANDS

THE PERSPECTIVE

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# THE PERSPECTIVE

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## SHIFTING SANDS

*CAPTURING HUMAN EXPERIENCES  
IN A CHANGING WORLD*

## Editors' Note

Dear Reader,

2024 is well and truly upon us. Time slips by like sand through an hourglass and we tread unsteadily on ground shifting beneath our feet. Conflicts and crises slide in and out of focus, slipping through the cracks of our attention, and it is all too tempting to bury our heads.

Billions of people will visit ballot boxes this year as major elections take place in more than 60 countries. Results from Taiwan, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Indonesia have rolled in; the outcomes of elections in India, South Africa, the European Union, Mexico, and the US, among many others, are anxiously awaited.

Shining a spotlight on changing dynamics and human experiences to make the abstract tangible, the Magazine Committee presents SHIFTING SANDS. This edition is a whirlwind tour which will take you from Palestine to Mexico, farmers' protests to gastronationalism, Turkey's deteriorating democracy to Italian foreign policy, before stopping by AI, the Arctic, Algeria, migration, micronations and more.

Unbury your head, shake off the sand, sit back and enjoy.

Sincerely,  
Ffion & Philippa

## President's Address

Dear UPF Members,

It is with immense pleasure that I address you on the occasion of The Perspective magazine publishing its second issue. I offer my heartfelt congratulations to the Magazine Committee for their unwavering dedication and passion. Complex and high-quality content such as that featured in The Perspective provides us with a unique opportunity to share and learn about foreign affairs, encouraging critical thinking and expanding our perspectives. Each contribution reflects the diversity and depth of knowledge within our association.

For my part, I am looking forward to the brighter times and skies that spring will bring. I invite each member to actively participate in upcoming events, notably our Annual Ball, to foster connections and create memorable experiences. I wish you all continued success in your studies and personal journeys.

Best regards,

Claudia Muñoz-Rojas  
President of UPF 2023/2024

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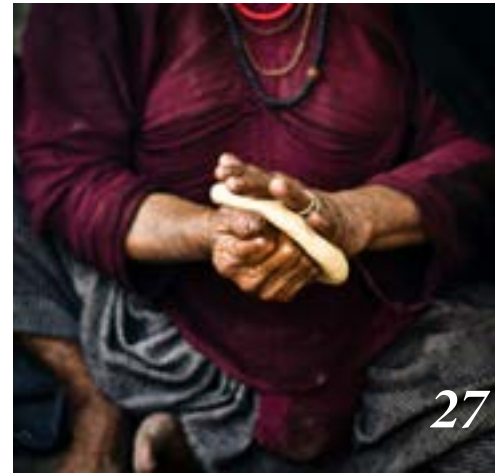
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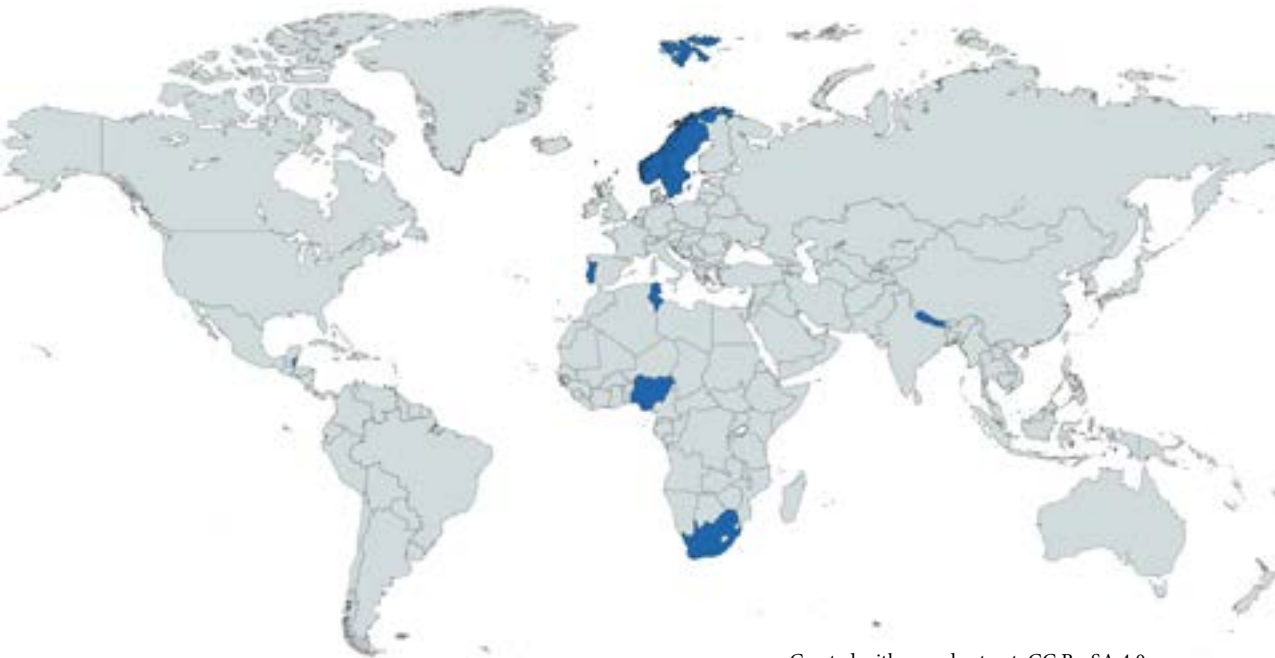
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# Global Report

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



Created with mapchart.net, CC By-SA 4.0.

## Sweden | Frida Månsson & Samuel Lithner

Tesla workers in Sweden have been on strike since October for their right to collective bargaining, infuriating 'the world's best accidental salesman for unions', Elon Musk, and prompting sympathy strikes in other sectors and neighbouring countries. Several Swedish unions have acted in solidarity; Danish and Finnish dockworkers have stopped loading Tesla vehicles bound for Sweden; and Norwegian mechanics have refused to work on Tesla components.



© Paul Steuber | Unsplash

## Tunisia | Amanda Rossling

Ons Jabeur, a Tunisian tennis player consistently ranked among the best in the world, recently became the World Food Programme's newest Goodwill Ambassador. Jabeur has consistently demonstrated her commitment to social causes and making a positive impact beyond the tennis court. She will engage in various projects, including the emergency in Gaza, to raise awareness and funds to combat global food insecurity.



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## Portugal | Mathilde Perrin

Last year, Portugal reached a new national record of 6 consecutive days where it produced more renewable energy than it consumed, running on renewable energy for 149 hours. The excess of electricity, mainly from hydropower and wind, was exported to Spain. Portugal, recognised as a frontrunner in the clean energy transition, aims to generate 85% of its electricity from renewable sources by 2030.



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## Belize | Philippa Scholz

It is estimated that over 36% of Belize is now under conservation. Having well surpassed the 30 by 30 (30% national conservation by 2030) target prematurely, they have been heralded as trailblazers for other nations to follow. It must be acknowledged that this land and ocean preservation is not without its socio-political problems. However, it sets a much-needed precedent of what is possible in short periods to protect biodiversity and prevent climate breakdown.



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**Nigeria** | Franklin Lagat

In recent times, Nigeria has become a major transit hub for illicit wildlife products to Asia. Early this year, the Nigerian government destroyed 2.5 tonnes of confiscated elephant tusks valued at \$11 million. According to Dr. Iziq Adekunle Salako, the Honourable Minister of State for Environment, “Today’s ivory crush is a symbol of Nigeria’s unwavering commitment to wildlife conservation and the protection of our natural heritage.”

**Nepal** | Ffion McEvoy

The US returned four stolen artefacts to Nepal, months after the London Metropolitan Museum of Art agreed to repatriate two stolen sculptures, in what Nepal’s Acting Consul General Bishnu Prasad Gautam has called “a significant step in reclaiming Nepal’s cultural heritage”. Citizen-led initiatives such as the Nepal Heritage Recovery Campaign have been vital to the restitution of some of the thousands of artefacts looted from Nepal.



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**South Africa** | Adla Lagström Jebara

After months of continuous Israeli bombardment killed well over 20,000 Palestinians, South Africa took Israel to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for committing genocide against Palestinians in Gaza. The ICJ found South Africa’s allegations to be plausible and issued an interim ruling ordering Israel to take steps to prevent genocide and ensure the provision of humanitarian assistance to civilians in Gaza.

**Norway** | Franklin Lagat

In a great win for the climate movement, the Oslo District Court ruled in favour of environmental groups that had challenged the Norwegian government’s decision to approve three new oil and gas fields in the North Sea. “This is an important victory for current and future generations and the environment,” said Gytis Blaževičius, Head of Young Friends of the Earth Norway, “With this judgement, millions of barrels of oil will remain in the ground”.



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# “We are not free”: A Palestinian Hostage’s Experience

## Adla Lagström Jebara | Interview

Dania Hanatsheh is a 21-year-old university student living in Palestine. Detained in Israeli prisons without trial for ten days, she was released in a prisoner exchange deal between Israel and Hamas brokered by the joint mediation efforts of Qatar, Egypt and the United States.

AS PART OF the exchange deal, Israel released 240 Palestinian prisoners and detainees in exchange for 105 Israeli captives held by Hamas. Three-quarters of the released Palestinians had not been convicted of any crime. Since Israel occupied the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza in 1967, an estimated one million Palestinians have been arrested by Israeli forces, including tens of thousands of children.

Dania was arrested and taken from her home in Ramallah in the occupied West Bank by Israeli soldiers in November of last year. She

was sentenced to six months of administrative detention, a form of arbitrary detention in which a person is held without a formal charge or trial, without having committed an offence, but on the basis that they may commit a crime in the future. This practice allows Israeli authorities to extend a prisoner’s detention without charge or trial, by order of the regional military commander, based on classified evidence undisclosed to the prisoner or their lawyer. Administrative detention and mass arrests are frequently employed by the Israeli authorities in the West Bank in Palestine. At the time of writing, 3484 Palestinians are held under administrative detention in Israeli prisons according to Palestinian human rights organisations.

*This interview was conducted in Arabic, translated to English, and edited for length and clarity.*

### Additional Information for Readers:

There has been a significant surge in unlawful lethal force employed by Israeli forces and increased settler violence against Palestinians in the occupied West Bank. Prior to October of last year, 2023 already marked the deadliest year on record for Palestinians in the West Bank, surpassing the death toll of 2022. By the end of 2023, at least 507 Palestinians were killed in the West Bank, including at least 81 children, making it the deadliest year for Palestinians in the occupied West Bank since the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) started recording casualties in 2005.



### Could you tell me about yourself?

My name is Dania Hanatsheh. I’m 21 years old, and I live in the city of Ramallah, in the occupied West Bank in Palestine. I’m currently a university student at Birzeit University, majoring in accounting. I’m in my final year of university so I’m currently preparing for my upcoming finals.

### When and how were you arrested?

I was arrested on 20 November 2023 at around three thirty in the morning. It was a quiet and rainy night. I live with my family, so we were all suddenly awakened by the presence of the Israeli military in our area. In seconds, they were at our doorstep, banging on our door. Usually, arrests by Israeli soldiers are very violent and aggressive; they often blow up the door of people’s homes. My dad opened the door, they took him outside and started interrogating him, asking who was inside.

The soldiers ordered him to bring all the ID cards of the family. After we gave them the ID cards, the soldiers entered our home. There were many soldiers, around 30 of them, and only one female soldier. They started breaking things in our home; they weren’t looking for anything in particular, just breaking as many things as they could. They entered my room, my sibling’s room, the kitchen and the bathrooms.

Afterwards, they separated us and put us in separate rooms, not allowing us to speak to one another. Then they called on us one by one and gave us our ID cards. But when they called my name, they didn’t return my ID card, and the soldier speaking to me told me that I was going to be arrested. They took me to one of the rooms in our home and started interrogating me. It happened so fast. I was wearing my nightwear, but since it was raining outside, I quickly put on my coat and shoes. At the front door, they handcuffed me and blindfolded me. From that moment on, I

couldn’t see where I was going or who was with me. When I was taken outside by the soldiers, I heard my dad and my brother calling my name from my bedroom window, telling me to be strong. When I answered them, the soldiers started beating me. From that moment until we arrived at the military camp, I was verbally and physically abused by the soldiers. They were shouting at me in Hebrew. When I told them I didn’t speak Hebrew, they switched to shouting and cursing at me in Arabic.

### Did they give you any explanation for your arrest?

No, none. They told me that I knew why I was being arrested. I asked them to tell me why they were arresting me but they didn’t provide any explanation. When the soldiers came to our neighbourhood, I didn’t expect them to arrest me.

### What happened after you were taken from your home? Where did they take you?

After I was handcuffed and blindfolded in my home, I was put in one of the many military jeeps parked outside. I was taken to a military camp near Ofer prison [an Israeli prison located outside the city of Ramallah in the West Bank]. I was put in an area with Israeli soldiers and three other young Palestinians who had been arrested. We weren’t allowed to talk to each other. We remained blindfolded from the time we arrived at the military camp at around four thirty in the morning until noon the next day.

**“I denied every accusation. I had done nothing wrong”**

It was raining heavily that night. We were left on the floor, lying in pools of rainwater, and without any proper covering from the rain or

wind. Around half past one the following day, I was transferred to Ofer prison and placed in a solitary cell until six o'clock that evening. Thereafter, soldiers came and took me to an interrogation room where I was interrogated by an intelligence officer.

The entire time he kept accusing me of things that never happened; he wanted to pin any charge on me. I denied every accusation. I had done nothing wrong. He tried to frighten and coerce me into 'confessing' by threatening me with administrative detention. Based on this interrogation I was put in administrative detention. This meant that the entire case and charge became classified and the evidence was never revealed to me or my lawyer.

*It is very common for Palestinians to be threatened when interrogated by Israeli military or intelligence officials. Were you threatened during your interrogation?*

Yes. I was interrogated by an Israeli intelligence officer without a lawyer present. I did ask for a lawyer, and eventually, I was able to speak to one. I was threatened throughout the entire interrogation. He threatened me with

administrative detention. He said if I didn't 'confess', I would be raped. He said if I didn't 'confess', they would prevent me from studying at university, and that I would remain in Israeli prison for the rest of my life.

*Did you appear before a court?*

After the interrogation, I was transferred to another prison, HaSharon prison, which was like a transition prison. I spent one night there, and it was the worst night of them all. I was beaten and placed in a very small room intended for one person, but they crowded it with five other Palestinian prisoners, some of whom were sick. One had diabetes, another had a heart problem. They didn't receive their medicine, and we were not provided with any food or water. There was even a camera in the bathroom, so we weren't able to use the bathroom. After that night, I was transferred to Damon prison, and two days later I had a court appointment, I was told. I was put in a room equipped with a screen, and someone read the sentence through the screen. I was sentenced to six months of administrative detention. It was over very quickly, it only took a few minutes.

*Did the International Committee of the Red Cross or any international organisation visit the prison to check up on you?*

No, the Red Cross never visited me in prison. Normally, the Red Cross is supposed to visit female prisoners to check on their status, but they never came. There was neglect on their part. The only time I saw them was when I was released when they transferred me and other freed Palestinians on a bus to Ramallah.

***“Either you overcome it, or you let them win over you and break you”***

*How did you feel in prison? How were you able to endure?*

I felt like it was a challenge for me to overcome. Either you overcome it, or you let them win over you and break you. It felt like this wasn't a war on me alone, but on all the prisoners and an entire people, in Gaza, in the West Bank, in Jerusalem, and even in the heartland. I felt like, let them do whatever they want, it won't break

me. We will be okay. The female prisoners who had been imprisoned for many years also made it a bit easier to handle. I thought it would be the other way around but they told me that everything will be okay, that we will eventually be free.

*In an interview after your release, you mentioned a woman from Gaza who was imprisoned with you. Could you tell me her story as you know it?*

I saw four women from Gaza in prison. They had evacuated from the north to the south through the supposed safe corridor after the Israeli military had dropped leaflets from the sky, ordering them to leave the north. On this safe corridor, the Israeli military had set up a military checkpoint, and they were taken, or rather abducted, from there by Israeli soldiers. One woman had her baby with her when she was fleeing the north. The soldiers threw her baby on the ground, and she was arrested. She doesn't know where her baby is.

Another woman was fleeing the north of Gaza with her three children when she was arrested. Her three sons were taken by a man in Gaza to keep them safe, but she doesn't know where they are or if they are safe. There was also an

Ramallah, a Palestinian City in the Central West Bank © Adla Lagström Jebara



older woman, over 60 years old. The women from Gaza were treated very badly in prison; they were beaten worse than we were. They were not attended to, and they were not given any necessities, as they were told that they didn't need them by the prison guards. Their situation was much worse than ours, much worse.

*If you could share one moment from your experience in prison, what would it be?*

The whole experience was extremely difficult even though it was short. The absolute worst moment for me was when they brought the women from Gaza [to prison]. When we learned that there was an exchange deal, the whole atmosphere in the prison changed. Every night, all the women used to stand by the windows to look outside and see what was happening. Everyone was asking if they could be the next one to be freed tomorrow.

*When were you released and when did you learn about the conditions of your release?*

I was released on 30 November 2023. I learned that I would be released on the same day, and I was released in the sixth batch of the exchange deal. The prison guards never told me that I was going to be released, but I sensed it since other women were released before me. When they first started taking women out of the prison, we didn't know where they were going, whether to solitary confinement or another prison. The prison guards didn't tell us anything. But then, more women were released and so we understood that there was a prisoner exchange deal. Every evening, we all prepared ourselves and waited to be released, even the women who didn't end up being released.

On the final day, the prison guards came and called my name at nine o'clock in the morning. They handcuffed me along with nine other female prisoners and transferred us from

Damon prison to Ofer prison. They put us in a room and informed us that we were going to be released but had to wait. We remained waiting there, handcuffed, from noon until midnight, without water, food, or any updates. At half past midnight, the Red Cross arrived and informed us that we would be released that night. They explained that there was a prisoner exchange deal. About an hour later, the soldiers removed the handcuffs and we boarded the bus that took us to Ramallah.

*How has your experience in prison changed you, if at all?*

Prison did change me. Inside, I truly got to understand the suffering of so many people. I used to think that our lives in the occupied West Bank were the worst, but in prison I learned about people who truly suffered. The most significant change for me was that I started to truly appreciate the value of things. Things that we take for granted are fought for in prison. For a water boiler in prison, prisoners had to go on a strike and faced a lot of violence. For a phone, both female and male prisoners fought for years to be able to call their loved ones. I am thankful that I am able to be with my family and that I am studying. These things are no longer normal to me, I don't take them for granted anymore.

***“there are still arrests taking place, people are still being killed and oppressed”***

*How do you feel today?*

If the prisoner exchange deal had resumed, I would have felt better. I was released while many prisoners remain behind bars. The arrests are even increasing now, and the number of people killed is also increasing. I am a little happy for my freedom from prison, but arrests are still taking place, people are still being killed and oppressed. Even though I was



Cover Image © | John Charles Fenech

released from prison, we are still living under occupation. We are not free.

***“We have never felt safe, and as long as there is an occupation, we are not safe”***

*How do you perceive your safety today?*

It's not just prison that makes me feel unsafe. The normal circumstances here, during and before the war, are unsafe, and everyone is threatened with arrest simply because we are Palestinians. We have never felt safe. As long as there is an occupation, we are not safe. Being arrested does make me feel fear because they still know my name, and my 'sentence' has not been voided. I fear for myself and my family.

*What is your message to the world, and to fellow university students who will be reading this interview?*

I would like to address university students, all over the world. We have significant influence over not only our communities but also the world. If change begins with us, as students and the younger generation, the world would be a better place. The fervour for change should emanate from us. The older generation has fulfilled their roles; now it is our time. If we remain silent and pretend that we do not see, we will not be free and there will be no justice. You should view it from a humanitarian perspective: innocent lives are being lost, entire families are being erased from existence. As young people, we must take action. We cannot wait for others to act.



# Saoirse don Phalaistín (Freedom for Palestine): Ireland's Solidarity with Palestine

Paulina Zajac | Feature

THERE IS OFTEN a deep bond between states with a shared history of oppression. Ireland and Palestine are two states with overlapping, yet distinctly different histories of British involvement. One of them free and independent. The other facing an ongoing genocide.

Irish solidarity with the people of Palestine is something of a natural reaction. With Ireland gaining independence after centuries of struggle back in 1921, the people of Ireland understand colonial oppression, which has left an indelible mark on their collective memory. Echoes of past suppression of culture, language, history and traditions, which kicked into full force around the 1600s, still sound around private and public spaces in Ireland.

*Ireland's steadfast support for Palestine is seen more than ever*

Colonial resentment is not something that is easily mended – it is what keeps resilience and solidarity in play. A parallel lies between Irish sentiments towards the UK and Palestinian sentiments towards Israel. Following the escalation of what is being called the Israel-Hamas War on 7 October 2023, Ireland's steadfast support for Palestine is seen more than ever.

British involvement in Palestine's history can be most notably traced back to the British Mandate for Palestine, which led to

a British-backed large-scale immigration of Jewish people to the territory. In 1923, when the mandate came into force, various occurrences followed – religious conflict, the rise of Zionism, revolts and a lack of political agreement among Arabs and Jews.

The creation of a 'Jewish National Home' through Britain's Balfour Declaration allowed for British control of affairs up until 1947, when the issue was handed over to the UN. Britain enabled the colonisation of a land, populated with Arabs, by Europeans. Britain's interference undoubtedly changed the trajectory of events.

The eventual displacement and murder of Palestinians which followed during the Nakba of 1948, when Israel declared its existence, was an unspeakable tragedy wherein hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were expelled from their land.

*Any rights which Palestinians may have possessed have been stripped away and crushed*

This trajectory continued and up until late 2023 Palestinians were forced to live under occupation, subject to restrictions of movement, arrests and violence. Now, any rights which they may have possessed have been stripped away and crushed, along with Palestinian homes, mosques, and bodies. As of February 2024, the conflict has taken the lives of over 28,000 men, women, and children.

© Ibrahim Guetar | Unsplash



In October 2023, Irish civilians were immediately calling for emergency protests in support of Palestine. These protests have occurred and continue, but are not the first instance of large-scale solidarity. That same month, Ireland allocated an additional €13 million in humanitarian assistance to Palestine, bringing the year's total sum to €29 million.

Tracing further back, Ireland was the first state in the EU to support the establishment of Palestinian statehood in 1980. More recently, Dublin became the first European capital to endorse the BDS (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions) movement back in April 2018, with the City Council cutting all ties with the tech company HP (Hewlett-Packard), for its complicity in Israel's human rights violations against Palestinians.

Despite some division on the matter between Ireland's political parties, Sinn Féin has shown steadfast support for both the BDS movement and the expulsion of the Israeli ambassador to

Ireland. In response to Ursula von der Leyen's recent pro-Israel comments, Irish President Michael D. Higgins clarified that the European Commission President was "not speaking for Ireland", voicing a popularly held opinion throughout the nation.

Irish efforts have fallen short in some respects. The proposed Occupied Territories Bill which passed early voting stages in parliament, has not advanced. The bill would make it an offence for a person to import or sell goods or services originating in an occupied territory, in this case Israeli-occupied Palestine. The government now holds the opinion that the bill would be incompatible with EU law and hence would not be implementable.

Despite the special place Palestine holds in Ireland's political imagination, more action is needed not only by the Irish government, but also by the international community to boost solidarity and tangible support for Palestinians.



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# When Nature Strikes Back: The Cost of Poorly Planned Development

Graciela Moreno Niño | Feature

NEARLY A MILLION affected people, 250,000 destroyed homes, 52 lost lives, and 32 missing people are the devastating outcomes of one of the worst natural disasters Mexico has faced in recent years. In the early hours of 25 October 2023, the cities of Acapulco, Coyuca de Benítez, and another 45 municipalities in the state of Guerrero were battered by Hurricane Otis. Within less than 12 hours, a tropical storm escalated to a category 5 hurricane. This underscores the impacts that climate change continues to inflict around the globe, but who is to blame?

The morning after the hurricane made landfall, media channels started blaming the President of Mexico, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, for not alerting the public about the potential impacts of the tropical storm in his daily morning briefing. It was not until two hours before the hurricane struck that the president confirmed via social media that the storm would turn into a hurricane, expected to arrive hours later than it actually did. However, neither hurricane detection models nor leading experts could predict the hurricane's strength and the circumstances surrounding this phenomenon are still being examined.

*Rash decisions made by politicians contribute to environmental degradation in Mexico and global climate change*

What the current Mexican administration can be held accountable for is its failure to fulfil the country's international obligations regarding environmental protection. Rash decisions made by politicians concerning the major projects introduced at the start of López Obrador's presidential term continue to contribute to environmental degradation in Mexico and global climate change.

Mexico, a megadiverse country consistently ranked among the world's most biodiverse nations, is experiencing a deforestation crisis, pollution, animal displacement, and fragmentation of the largest tropical rainforest

in the Americas after the Amazon, the Maya Forest. At the beginning of his term in 2018, the Mexican president unveiled a project for a tourist train that would connect the main archaeological centres of the Maya culture in Mexico, crossing five states in the southeast, a project that remains unfinished to this day.

The International Tribunal on the Rights of Nature, a body comprised of environmental experts, concluded in its Tenth Local Tribunal for the Rights of Nature that the construction and subsequent operation of the Maya Train has caused and will continue to cause loss of ecological connectivity between conservation areas; disruption of animal migration corridors; extinction of flora and fauna species; depletion and pollution of the Yucatán Peninsula aquifer; destruction of cenotes; deforestation; and loss of forest cover. This contributes to increasing global temperatures, among many other consequences that not only directly affect ecosystems but also threaten the Maya People who have always shown an affectionate relationship of care and protection towards Mother Earth. The Maya Train threatens the land tenure rights of the Maya People, endangers their health due to waste accumulation and water scarcity, and infringes upon the rights of Indigenous peoples recognised by international instruments and the country's domestic law.

*“They are killing the ecosystem, that train isn't even Maya, they didn't ask me permission to use my name”*

As voiced by Raquel Flota Báez, an activist from the Indigenous Maya Council U Yóol Lu'um of Quintana Roo, “They are killing the ecosystem, that train isn't even Maya, they didn't ask me permission to use my name”.

This project has undoubtedly prioritised the positive impact on the country's tourism and economic growth. On its official website,





© Enrique Gayol Flores

the Mexican government states that it will 'strengthen the territorial organisation of the region and boost its tourism industry, generating economic revenue and increasing connectivity in the Yucatan peninsula', leaving aside the devastating consequences that it entails. The climate impact of the Maya Train was not even considered in its planning since the government failed to present an environmental impact report, and all information about the project was subsequently reserved and classified by the federal government as a national security matter. However, activists and international organisations have been able to recover information about some of the environmental damage already caused.

The Mexican NGO 'Carto Crítica' demonstrated through satellite images that, by August 2023, the project covered 10,831 hectares of which 61% had been deforested. Activists from the collective 'Selvame del Tren'

mentioned that one of Mexico's most important biological corridors was fragmented, resulting in 6 jaguars being run over in 8 months as they tried to relocate within their habitat. Tree felling in this region has caused changes in the temperature of caves and cenotes, leading to a decrease in water levels.

### *Mexico is regressing by once again failing to meet its international commitments*

In addition to this project, while global trends are leaning towards renewable energy and zero-emission economies, Mexico is regressing by once again failing to meet its international commitments. The construction of a fuel refinery in Dos Bocas will increase annual CO<sub>2</sub> emissions to 2.16 million tonnes, equivalent to the felling of approximately 183 million trees over the 20 years of operation planned.

The Mexican Petroleum Institute conducted a study in 2008 that deemed these lands in the Municipality of Paraíso, in the State of Tabasco, unsuitable for the construction of a fuel refinery, as they housed a wide range of ecosystems and protected species. The current administration disregarded this and in 2018 presented the project that began the clearing of 220 hectares of jungle and mangroves, destroying the habitat of hundreds of species, including protected species like the blue crab.

"I am increasingly convinced that pseudo-environmentalists are frauds", stated President López Obrador in response to criticism of and social demands against the ecocides produced by his major projects. The president has limited himself to evading and denying any responsibility for the consequences of his impulsive decisions. None of the projects were planned in accordance with the international obligations Mexico has assumed, nor do they take into account studies and opinions from experts in conservation and environmental protection. This adds the Mexican state as one more on the list of those responsible for the increasing occurrence of unpredictable natural disasters of the magnitude of the hurricane that recently struck its own territory.

### *We cannot continue to allow the decisions of our leaders to destroy the life that gives us life*

In a world where the population is becoming increasingly aware of the need to protect the environment and is taking small, positive actions towards this end, we cannot continue to allow the decisions of our leaders to destroy the life that gives us life by prioritising economic growth without considering the consequences this may have. Spilling the blood of thousands of species, infringing upon the rights and well-being of the peoples who are the heart of their culture, destroying the natural heritage that makes them unique, and contributing to the slow but preventable destruction of their territory and population is indefensible.

As expressed by Natalia Greene, a member of the International Rights of Nature Tribunal's Secretariat, "Mexico loses a tremendous potential for conservation. The world loses a sanctuary of life".



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# Statens Spargris? Bondeupproren i Europa

Robin Petersson | Opinion

**B**ONDEUPPROR ÄR INGET nytt fenomen. Under hela den dokumenterade historien har missnöjda bönder och lantbrukare världen över protesterat och demonstrerat. På senare tid har dock missnöjda livsmedelsproducenter bedrivit civil olydnad på en mycket intensiv nivå, vilket har genererat en uppsjö av nyhetsrubriker runt om i världen. Mot slutet av 2023 och i början av 2024 har uppror förekommit i flera europeiska länder, speciellt i Tyskland, Frankrike, Nederländerna och Polen där missnöjet lett till starka reaktioner. Tiotusentals människor från en av samhällets viktigaste sektorer blockerar de mest trafikerade gatorna i Europas miljonstäder och höjer sina röster i reaktion på bestämmelser ovanifrån. Hur kunde det bli så här?

*Den Europeiska unionen har tillsammans med många andra klimataktörer pekat ut den agrara sektorn som en särdeles stor klimatbov*

I dag är klimatkrisen på alla våra läppar. Globala aktörer söker med ljus och lykta efter ett alternativt levnadssätt för att bespara moder natur på den börda som vi människor utgör. Detta har resulterat i att länder runt om i världen gemensamt tagit fram ett antal klimatmål i hopp om att vända den stigande globala medeltemperaturen. Bland dessa länder och aktörer har den Europeiska unionen (EU) särskilt försökt ta sitt ansvar genom att sätta upp inhemska riktlinjer för medlemsländerna att följa. EU-direktiven som syftar till att alla ska kämpa åt samma håll måste på ett eller annat sätt implementeras i

medlemsländerna, i vilken form är dock upp till länderna själva.

Den Europeiska unionen har tillsammans med många andra klimataktörer pekat ut den agrara sektorn som en särdeles stor klimatbov, där extra resurser ska läggas för att minska klimatpåverkan. Därav har EU tagit fram riktade direktiv till sina medlemsländer som uppmanar dem att strypa den klimatpåverkan som deras respektive livsmedelsproduktion har. Dessa direktiv tolkas annorlunda i olika länder beroende på hur det nationella läget ser ut. Det nederländska parlamentets tolkning och verkställande av EUs direktiv resulterade 2019 i ett massivt bondeuppror.

Inom ramen för EUs art- och habitatdirektiv har initiativet Natura 2000 sjösatts i syfte att skydda den biologiska mångfalden i särskilt artrika och ömtåliga områden runt om hela Europa. Speciellt har de enorma mängder kväve som produceras av lantbrukare inriktade på animalieproduktion pekats ut som hotande för dessa områden. I Nederländerna resulterade detta i en rapport från parlamentet där de gick ut med förslaget att köpa loss och lägga ner gårdar som ligger i eller i anslutning till Natura 2000-områden och som anses vara skadliga för miljön och den biologiska mångfalden. Förslaget resulterade i en fredlig demonstration som bestod av att över 2000 lantbrukare i traktorer intog Nederländernas större städer och krävde en revidering av förslaget till följd av att de känt sig ha blivit orättvist utpekade och illa behandlade.

Ett mer aktuellt exempel är de protester som har ägt rum i Frankrike, Tyskland och Polen i mitten av januari 2024. De polska bönderna protesterar av liknande anledningar som de



Bondeprotest i Nederländerna 2019, 'Använd ditt förnuft, behåll bönderna i vårt land.' © Kees Torn | Flickr

nederländska. Den Europeiska unionens 'Green Deal', som Natura 2000 initiativet är en del av, riktar sig till alla nivåer och verksamheter i det europeiska samhället. EUs 'Green Deal' har resulterat i påtryckningar för att lantbrukare måste arbeta mer miljömedvetet. I praktiken innebär detta bland annat införandet av strategier för markanvändningen, minskning av koldioxidutsläpp och, som Natura 2000 hänvisar till, ökad hänsyn gentemot den biologiska mångfalden. Detta må kanske inte låta så farligt vid en första anblick men de polska bönderna protesterar mot det faktum att dessa påtryckningar för med sig stora förändringar i deras sätt att arbeta, vilket ofta dessutom är dyrare.

*EUs 'Green Deal' har blivit droppen som får bägaren att rinna över och bönderna att protestera på gatorna*

När lantbrukarna från början känner ett missnöje med att behöva konkurrera med EUs öppna marknad har denna 'Green Deal' blivit

droppen som får bägaren att rinna över och bönderna att protestera på gatorna. På samma sätt har de franska bönderna reagerat på EUs fria marknad. I början av 2024 iscensatte de stora lantbruksorganisationerna en blockad av Paris med målet att helt blockera vägarna in och ut från staden med hjälp av sina traktorer. Livsmedelsproducenterna menar att dessa påtryckningar och bestämmelser från EU gör att de inte kan konkurrera med produkter som kommer från länder som inte har samma strikta regleringar. De kräver antingen lindrigare föreskrifter för hur de får producera eller en marknad som prioriterar de inhemska livsmedel som har kommit till under de hårda krav som EU har.

Även i Tyskland har lantbrukarnas missnöje känts av. Den tyska regeringen har efter upptäckten av att deras budget för 2024 inte går ihop föreslagit att pengarna som saknas ska tas från jordbrukssektorn. Tillsammans med klimatförändringarna som argument föreslås det nu att den skattereduktion på drivmedel som lantbruket fått åtnjuta ska dras in vilket resulterar i att bensin och diesel ska bli dyrare, ett förslag som inte föll i god jord.

Under en veckas tid i början av det nya året har tusentals tyska bönder trotsat det kalla vädret och ockuperat flera stora städer med Berlin som huvudmål. Även här är protesterna fredliga med det tydliga budskapet att bönderna inte är spargrisar som regeringen kan ta pengar från närhelst de behagar.

## Lantbruk är en av de viktigaste näringarna som finns i ett land

Idag har livsmedelsproducenter en särställning i samhället och även om de inte är så många till antalet så kvarstår det faktum att bönderna har kraften att influera många människor, i synnerhet väljare på landsbygden, en del av samhället som ofta blir utsatt för statlig försummelse. Däremot är lantbruk en av de viktigaste näringarna som finns i ett land. Ta till exempel valfritt lands beredskapsplanering så omnämns livsmedelsproduktionen och lantbruk som samhällsbärande, något vi måste värna om.

Efter att ha analyserat dessa protester runt om i Europa på senare tid så verkar det som det

enda bönderna vill är att bli lämnade i fred. De demonstrerar inte på grund av att de är missnöjda med sitt yrke, utan de protesterar mot förslag och förändringar som de anser kommer att försvåra deras dagliga verksamhet. Här sitter politikerna i en svår situation som de försiktigt måste navigera sig igenom.

När det kommer till den Europeiska unionen har politikerna en enorm press på sig att anpassa Europa till det klimathot som världen går till mötes, samtidigt är EU hem till knappt 450 miljoner människor så missnöjda röster går inte att undvika. Dessutom är det i juni 2024 dags för parlamentsval i unionen och då ska dessa 450 miljoner människor bestämma vilka som ska styra unionens väg framåt för de kommande fem åren. Den senaste tidens lantbruksprotester har börjat användas av politiska ytterkantpartier som vill åka snålskjuts på böndernas missnöje. Det gäller att här komma ihåg att lantbrukarna oftast protesterar endast för att bli hörda och inte utnyttjade, samma upplägg som alla bondeuppror har haft genom hela historien.



Bondeprotest i Berlin, Tyskland © Matthias Berg | Flickr

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# Gastronationalism and the Politics of Food

Elvi Wilson | Feature

**A**N INTRINSIC, YET often overlooked, part of culture is cuisine. Sitting down for a meal is a ritual that transcends cultural boundaries and should ideally bring people together, and yet it often divides us. Gastronationalism can be defined as nationalism and national sentiments towards the cuisine of a nation. A relatively new concept, often attributed to Michaela De Soucey's 2010 paper on the topic, its relevance extends across political talking points, from diplomacy to anti-immigration sentiments.

Gastronationalism found its way into the headlines in 2022 in the wake of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, with the dish in question being borshch. Shortly after the

invasion, UNESCO announced that Ukrainian borshch had been added to the intangible heritage list. Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson, Maria Zakharova, condemned this move shortly after, claiming that it was a form of xenophobia.

With nationalism never really leaving the cultural imagination of Europe, gastronationalism has followed, as countries endeavour to establish a unique identity. This manifests itself in our daily lives through EU geographical indications and quality schemes. These schemes grant intellectual property rights for specific products based on tradition, reputation and qualities linked to the region of production. Among the most well-known

examples of this is Parmesan, which is only allowed to be produced within a designated area. We can tell if a block of Parmesan is real just by looking for the PDO (Protected Designation of Origin) stamp on the packaging. Champagne is similarly registered under this system. Feta's PDO status as Greek caused some controversy, with the case even being brought before the Court of Justice of the European Union.

*Against the backdrop of Israel's brutal ethnic cleansing of the people of Palestine, there is a long-standing dispute surrounding the status of certain foods as national dishes*

Turkey and the South Caucasus have several disputes, albeit not before a court. Armenia and Turkey both claim ownership of Lahmacun, a flatbread topped with meat, with heated debate taking place online over the dish being referred to as 'Armenian pizza' or 'Turkish pizza'. The origins of lavash, dolma and many other dishes have been up for scrutiny in this region as well. Against the backdrop of Israel's brutal ethnic cleansing of the people of Palestine, there is a long-standing dispute surrounding the status of certain foods as national dishes, including hummus, shakshuka and falafel. Israel and Lebanon have even been at odds over who can make the world's biggest dish of hummus in what is known as the 'Hummus Wars'. This, however, is not really about hummus. Meanwhile, the 'Jollof Wars' have been raging between Nigeria, Ghana and other West African countries over the beloved rice-based dish. UNESCO once again ruffled feathers by crowning Senegal the winner in 2023.

Cuisine has even been used by governments as a means to promote countries through gastrodiploamcy. The governments of South



Filipp Romanovski © Unsplash

Korea and Thailand have gone to great lengths in this regard, with kimchi being spotlighted in particular by the former. The Peruvian government has also made efforts to draw attention to their cuisine as a form of branding, while Malaysia has been marketing itself as a 'halal hub'. The Nordic Council has paid attention to the promotion of Nordic cuisine, interestingly less on a country-by-country basis but almost as a collaboration between countries.

*Food sovereignty has become a popular movement across Indigenous communities*

Cuisine is of great importance to indigenous groups as well, with food sovereignty – whereby the communities who produce and consume the food also have control over its quantity, production and distribution – becoming



Sebastian Coman Photography © Unsplash



a popular movement across Indigenous communities in Canada and the US, notably in Alaska. In Alaska, the Iñupiaq people won the right to hunt bowhead whales in 1977, and since then have quadrupled the population of bowhead whales in their conservation efforts.

### *Pope Francis came under fire from the far-right for serving pork-free lasagne to people in poverty*

While cuisine is used as a celebration of communities, it can also be used as a weapon of exclusion. By defining what ‘we’ do as a nation, the people who do not partake in the nation’s cultural practices may be excluded or ‘othered’. In his 2022 book, Fabio Parasecoli defines and gastronativism, as ‘the ideological use of food to advance ideas about who belongs to a community and who does not’. This is a term distinct from gastrationalism, and is often

weaponised in order to exclude people from communities. This phenomenon can be seen in Parasecoli’s native Italy especially, where Pope Francis came under fire from the far-right for serving pork-free lasagne to people in poverty. Denmark and France are also seeing debates around pork, and the obligation of schools to serve it.

In 2019, Gemma O’Doherty, an Irish far-right conspiracy theorist and proponent of the ‘Great Replacement Theory’ posted a cringe-inducing video of her harassing a member of staff in a halal butcher in Dublin. She demanded why they did not sell pork, because, in her eyes, “pork is one of our national foods in Ireland”. In the video, she can be heard shouting, “No pork, need not apply”, harking back to the ‘Irish need not apply’ expression linked to the employment discrimination historically faced by Irish immigrants in the UK and USA.

Gastronativism has taken a violent turn in India, with ‘cow vigilante’ groups enforcing laws banning the slaughter of cows and beef

consumption, which applies to the majority of Indian states. This vigilantism has resulted in violence and even lynchings, with the majority of victims being Muslim.

### *In Europe, the idea that food should not be adapted to be pork-free also excludes and ‘others’ religious minorities*

One factor that all of these examples have in common is a demonisation of and bigotry towards Muslims and their culinary traditions and requirements. In Europe, the idea that food should not be adapted to be pork-free also excludes and ‘others’ religious minorities

including Jewish, Muslim and certain Orthodox Christian communities due to their dietary requirements.

Gastrationalism is a useful medium through which we can understand the current cultural climate. Trivial as it may seem, the politics of food affects national identity across the globe, impacting everything from government policy to the everyday person just trying to find an item on a menu that fits their dietary requirements. Despite the deep divisions it creates, gastrationalism also shows the human appreciation for food. In fact, the struggle for ownership of a dish across borders shows that people often have a lot more in common with their neighbours than they might like to believe.





# Misrule of Law: The Kavala Case and Turkey's Deteriorating Democracy

Marco Rizzi | Analysis

THE EVENING OF 25 April 2022 marked a defining moment in the ongoing saga of Turkey's slide towards authoritarianism. The verdict against Osman Kavala, a renowned civil society activist and philanthropist, alongside seven co-defendants, was pronounced in Istanbul and marked a critical juncture in the country's democratic decline, which has been accelerating since 2013. Kavala, already wrongfully detained for over four years according to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), was sentenced to spend the remainder of his life behind bars. His seven co-defendants, previously fugitive civil society activists, were handed a minimum of 18 years in prison. The suddenness and severity of this decision, delivered without waiting for the appeal process, sent shockwaves through observers, despite its predictable nature.

*Gezi Park became a symbol of opposition to the government's curbing of public spaces for dissenting voices*

At the heart of this prolonged legal battle lies the Gezi Park protests of 2013 – a movement initially sparked by local discontent over plans for a shopping centre in Istanbul's central area devoid of green spaces. As the protests escalated, sparked by the forceful reaction of security forces, Gezi Park became a symbol of opposition to the government's curbing of public spaces for dissenting voices, escalating into a nationwide outcry for democratic rights. However, the protests took a tragic turn, resulting in the loss of lives amidst the

authorities' harsh crackdown. Following the Gezi Park events, the government stepped up repression, further undermining Turkey's democratic progress and its aspirations toward European integration.

In December 2019, soon after the absolution of the Gezi Park defendants, Kavala faced rearrest, accused of being the main financial backer and organiser of the riots. This arrest was linked to allegations of involvement in the July 2016 attempted coup, with pro-government media likening him to a 'Turkish Soros' due to his association with the Open Society Foundation. Despite the ECHR's review, which found no substantial evidence against him and demanded his immediate release, Kavala was never granted freedom.

In a puzzling turn of events, Kavala was twice released only to be immediately rearrested without new evidence. Subsequently, in April 2022, an Istanbul court sentenced him to aggravated life imprisonment over the Gezi Park protests, disregarding the ECHR's ruling that there was insufficient evidence for his detention or conviction. Alongside him, seven co-defendants, judged to be equally innocent by the ECHR, all received 18-year sentences.

A landmark decision by the Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights in July last year reiterated its stance against Turkey, highlighting that essentially nothing had changed since its earlier assessment of the case. The persistent refusal of Ankara to comply with two ECHR rulings demanding Kavala's release has strained its relations with the Council of Europe and called into question

the legitimacy of the Court and its rulings, placing the country at odds with the 45 other Member States.

*Concerns emerged over the government's increasingly tight control over the judiciary*

The 2022 verdict, sentencing Kavala to aggravated life imprisonment – a sentence replacing the abolished death penalty in 2004 – underscores the deepening problems with the rule of law in Turkey. The arrest sparked widespread condemnation from opposition groups and human rights organisations, seen as a deliberate and cynical detention. Thirty lawyers' associations called for the resignation of the Council of Judges and Prosecutors following an expedited investigation into judges in the Gezi Park case, triggered by

President Erdoğan's harsh criticism of Kavala's acquittal. However, amidst this complexity, concerns emerged over the government's increasingly tight control over the judiciary.

The European Court of Human Rights' judgement in Strasbourg on 2 February 2022 escalated the diplomatic impasse, raising the possibility of Turkey's suspension from the Council of Europe, of which it is a founding member. The Committee of Ministers, the Council of Europe's decision-making body, highlighted Turkey's refusal to release Kavala immediately as a clear non-compliance with the Court's final ruling on his rights. The ECHR concluded that Kavala's detention was a silencing tactic against a human rights defender and possibly a violation of his right to liberty and security, alongside an alleged breach of the European Convention on Human Rights.





'Gezi park protests. Events of June 15, 2013' © Mstyslav Chernov | Wikipedia Commons

### *Kavala's prolonged detention without a formal sentence remains a grave concern*

President Tayyip Erdoğan's statements dismissing the Council of Europe's authority for not recognising Turkish courts exacerbate this conflict between national and international legal systems. There are three critical aspects to consider in this escalating situation. Firstly, Kavala's prolonged detention without a formal sentence remains a grave concern, reflecting broader fears of silencing dissenting voices in Turkey's shift toward a one-party regime, especially following the 2017 constitutional referendum. Secondly, Turkey's alleged violation of not only the European Convention on Human Rights but also its own Constitution by disregarding ECHR decisions poses a fundamental challenge to the country's legal framework. Thirdly, the response of Turkey's Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Council of Europe's decision suggests an attempt to circumvent ECHR rulings through new legal proceedings.

Despite Turkey's economic and geopolitical significance, its actions contrary to ECHR rulings cast doubt on its commitment to upholding the rule of law. The Kavala case highlights not only the legal strategies employed to repress opposition during transitions to autocratic regimes but also the systemic challenges to freedom of expression. Within autocratic contexts, the application of criminal law norms, especially charges related to attempts to destabilise the government, has increasingly targeted individuals unaffiliated with the 2016 coup attempt.

### *Autocratic regimes adapt criminal law to their needs, reducing judicial bodies to instruments of arbitrariness*

Autocratic regimes adapt criminal law to their needs, reducing judicial bodies, subject to political influence, to instruments of arbitrariness. Consequently, the essence of justice, procedural integrity, and fairness become detached from the legal process,

reducing the lower judiciary to a tool of autocratic control.

This ambiguity within autocratic legal systems creates a complex dilemma in supranational organisations contexts: the law serves as a tool to meet minimal European requirements, yet courts exhibit a massive degree of autonomy, especially in cases like Gezi Park. However, the Constitutional Court's dismissal of the unconstitutionality of Kavala's lengthy detention contrasts with the ECHR's call for his immediate release, signifying a formal, partial adherence to European observations. Yet, his subsequent arrest and conviction undermine both European supervision and Turkey's recently adopted judicial reform strategy, intended to bolster human rights and the rule of law.

These legal battles echo the struggles within civil society against repression. The cases of Gezi Park and Kavala highlight the challenges faced by democratic forces in autocratic contexts, particularly the harassment faced by human rights defenders. The ECHR's examination revealed a correlation between President Erdoğan's public statements regarding Kavala and the actions taken against him, suggesting a wider crackdown on human

rights defenders with potentially chilling effects on future activism.

In this context, the ECHR's ruling against Kavala brought to light the substantial lack of evidence supporting his imprisonment, exposing a systemic breakdown of legal processes and the rule of law in Turkey. It underscored the pivotal role of genuine human rights defenders within civil society and the pressing need for a resilient institutional framework to counter autocratic tendencies.

Looking ahead, there is an urgent call for a structured EU program to fortify human rights organisations, ensuring their resilience against repression. Additionally, the Council of Europe must intensify its oversight, pressurising Turkey into complying with the Court's rulings.

The Kavala case stands as a sobering reminder of the fragile state of democratic institutions in the face of authoritarian tendencies. Its implications resonate not only within Turkey but also across Europe, emphasising the indispensable role of civil society in safeguarding democratic values and human rights.



'2013 Taksim Gezi Park protests, a view from Taksim Gezi Park on 4th June 2013' © WikiPicture | Wikipedia Commons

# Looking Southwards: The Mattei Plan and Italy's New Strategy in Africa

Edoardo Campanile | Analysis



ON 10 JANUARY 2024, the Italian Parliament approved the Mattei Plan, a long-term foreign policy strategy to improve relations between Italy and African nations. The name recalls Enrico Mattei, the late president of the National Hydrocarbon Agency (Ente Nazionale Idrocarburi), Italy's largest company in the energy sector. Mattei sought to build more equitable relations between Italy and its trading partners in Africa before dying under mysterious circumstances in 1962. Allegedly aiming to emulate his work, the Mattei Plan is part of what Italian Prime Minister, Giorgia Meloni, calls the resumption of a “non-predatory” approach to the African continent.

Stepping back to comprehend the reasons behind the Italian government's pursuit of such a project, several factors become apparent. After several years of substantial disengagement throughout the early 2000s and between 2013 and 2018, a renewed interest characterised the Italian outlook on the African continent. This interest stemmed not only from a willingness to invest beyond North Africa, where Italy has long maintained a strong presence but also from the perceived necessity of engaging more with African states to handle the flows of migrants reaching Italian and European coasts.

## *Italian interests in Africa are tightly tied to economic incentives and migration*

If in those five years the trade exchange between Italy and sub-Saharan states was limited to the energy and construction industries, in 2022, the list included several other sectors such as agriculture, fishing and livestock, but also pharmaceuticals, technology, engineering, manufacturing, and machinery, among others, amounting to an overall exchange of approximately €68 billion. Today, Italian interests in Africa are still tightly tied to economic incentives and issues related to migration. However, the Russian invasion

of Ukraine in February 2022 fostered new concerns related to energy security, prompting Italy and many other European countries to look for alternative energy sources from their massive southern neighbour.

The Mattei Plan proposes, on the one hand, to promote political, economic, social, and cultural development and, on the other hand, to strengthen stability and security all over the African continent for the benefit of the long-term relationship between Italy and African states. Moreover, special attention is devoted to reinforcing Italian national security, especially by addressing themes such as energetic supply, climatic resilience, food security, and the prevention of the principal causes behind irregular migration. But how does the plan suggest these goals might be achieved? The keywords are cooperation and investment promotion, mainly in education and innovation, health, environmental protection, digitalisation, entrepreneurship, tourism, and management of migration flows.

## *The Mattei Plan promotes a long-term vision*

Presumably, next to the goal of promoting economic and social development on the African continent, the Italian government has three main aims. First, to stabilise energy supplies from Africa. Second, to fight illegal migration and manage legal migration. Third, to become a paramount player in the relations between African countries and European institutions, thus strengthening Italy's position within the European Union. The Mattei Plan promotes a long-term vision and demonstrates the intense effort the Meloni government is putting into reinvigorating and relaunching Italian foreign policy, weakened by years of substantial slowdown, especially in the years marked by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Undoubtedly, the road to full implementation of the plan is winding, both for structural reasons and for motivations intrinsic to it.

Like any actor interested in engaging with sub-Saharan African countries, Italy has to face the challenge of weak states. The region displays a widespread fragility of governments and institutions, and the presence of militias and armed groups constitutes an obstacle to effective policies.

Alongside this lies the infrastructural challenge. Today, Africa lacks many roads, ports, and airports necessary to ensure the functioning of a complete logistic apparatus. China is heavily committed to constructing such infrastructures, together with the European Union, which launched the Global Gateway in 2021, a €150 billion package to sustain African development. Still, the situation is not optimal in this respect.

Finally, a structural change is necessary in the production system, especially in agriculture and mining. Several studies highlight that the commodity economy, based on the trade of raw materials, is insufficient. This approach is increasingly unappealing to African populations, who perceive it as a form of exploitation or barely disguised neocolonialism. According to many, African nations should be allowed to extract and process their own raw materials.

### *The list of goals and ambitions is rather generic*



© Presidency of the Italian Republic

For its part, the plan raises several questions. Firstly, the Italian government did not consult the main actors involved in the country's international cooperation sector, who had no choice but to take note of the decisions of the establishment. The creation of a 'control hub' deeply centred around the government of Giorgia Meloni risks marginalising crucial actors, such as the Development Cooperation Agency (Agenzia per la Cooperazione allo Sviluppo), created in 2014 to integrate the strengths of all the relevant public and private actors involved in foreign policy initiatives. Moreover, the list of goals and ambitions is rather generic, and we still do not know which African countries will decide to adhere to the plan. The overall strategy is enterprising but also challenging to put into practice.

Several observers wonder to what extent the Italian government truly wants to carry out all the program's initiatives and to what extent the Mattei Plan is nothing more than a way to block immigration to Italy as much as possible, camouflaged under talks of cooperation and development. In any case, curiosity about what will happen in the coming months and years is palpable in Italy and the other countries involved in Africa. The success of the Mattei Plan would certainly benefit Giorgia Meloni and her party, Brothers of Italy (Fratelli d'Italia), but also potentially the relationship between Italy and African states.



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Research seminar with **Lina Eklund** (LU) and **Pinar Dinc** (LU)

**25 April:** *Islam, Modern Science, Pseudoscience* (13:15-14:30, at CMES and on Zoom)  
Research seminar with **Stefano Bigliardi** (Al Akhawayn University)

**13 May:** *Conditioning Spaces of Memory* (13:15-16:00, at CMES)  
Roundtable with **Robert Vosloo** (Stellenbosch University), **Henry Mbaya** (Stellenbosch University), **Lisa Strömbom** (LU) and **Torsten Janson** (LU)

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

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# Look before you Leap: The Pathway to Ethical AI

Lizaveta Muravieva | Feature

PROMISING YET PERTURBING, artificial intelligence (AI) is one of the most dynamic areas of digital technology development. Increasingly prevalent in fields from manufacturing to medicine, farming to finance, and even law, due to its ability to reason, plan and learn from vast quantities of data, AI is used in search engines, self-driving vehicles, medical diagnostics, fraud detection, surveillance and much more.

The EU AI Act incorporates the definition of AI as 'a machine-based system that [...] infers, from the input it receives, how to generate outputs such as predictions, content, recommendations, or decisions'. A diverse range of technologies are encompassed by the term AI, but it is typically the idea of complex data-driven algorithms and machine learning that concerns and enthrals. Despite efforts to embed key principles such as transparency in AI, rapid technological advancements give rise to numerous issues related to privacy, biases, fake news and discrimination, as well as financial and legal threats.

## *The AI assumed that male applicants were preferable for these positions*

In recent years many large companies, including Deloitte and LinkedIn, have adopted AI tools for hiring staff. The case of Amazon's sexist recruitment algorithm illustrates the pitfalls of these tools. In 2014, Amazon developed an AI-powered hiring tool, trained on resumes submitted over a 10-year period. The technology identified potential candidates for technical positions and rated

their resumes based on suitability from one to five stars. Due to the fact that women had not previously held technical positions, the AI assumed that male applicants were preferable for these positions, so it automatically gave women's resumes a lower rating. Beyond gender discrimination, it is crucial to consider the issue of racial discrimination. This bias is evident in incidences of AI-powered facial recognition technology wrongly identifying individuals during investigations. Several facial recognition systems have been found to be between 10 and 100 times more likely to misidentify black individuals compared to white. Thus, the ethical implications of decisions made by autonomous systems have become urgent matters.

These issues have led to the development of AI ethics, a framework of moral principles and methods designed to guide the responsible development and appropriate use of AI technology. One method for addressing the ethical considerations of AI involves incorporating ethics education into AI practices. This entails imparting clear moral reasoning, fostering responsible decision-making, and promoting ethical conduct among individuals involved in building, using, or interacting with AI systems. In accordance with opinions expressed by experts engaged in the field of AI, this ethics education for AI may be best conducted by an AI ethics committee, a central, cross-disciplinary body within a company, academic institution, government agency or other entity. This committee is responsible for identifying, maintaining and mitigating the ethical risks of AI products developed or purchased by this entity.

Recently, numerous global companies have





been incorporating AI ethics committees into their practices. These AI ethics committees play a vital role in identifying ethical risks, suggesting necessary modifications, and conducting subsequent reviews after the recommended changes have been implemented. Microsoft has established an AI and Ethics in Engineering and Research Committee which provides guidance on ethical AI development. SAP, a tech company specialising in software solutions, has become the first tech company to form both an external AI Ethics Advisory Panel and an internal AI Ethics Steering Committee. Multinational tech company, IBM, has an AI Ethics Board composed of experts from various disciplines who provide guidance on AI-related decisions. To enhance the effectiveness of AI ethics committees, it is advisable to include experts from diverse disciplines, such as ethics, technology, law, and social sciences.

### *AI ethics committees actively contribute to building and maintaining public trust in AI technologies*

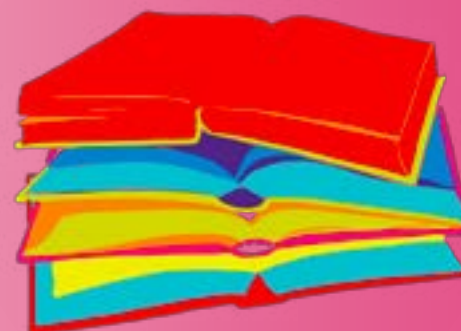
In a broad sense, the fundamental objective of AI ethics committees lies in the formulation

and communication of ethical guidelines for the development and deployment of AI technologies. These guidelines outline key principles such as fairness, transparency, privacy and accountability. In order to effectively fulfil their role, it is crucial for AI ethics committees to acknowledge the dynamic nature of AI and the essential requirement to stay updated on the latest developments. AI ethics committees actively contribute to building and maintaining public trust in AI technologies. Enhancing public awareness and understanding of AI-related technologies is among their key objectives; AI ethics committees play a crucial role in educating the public about AI technologies, their applications, and the associated ethical considerations.

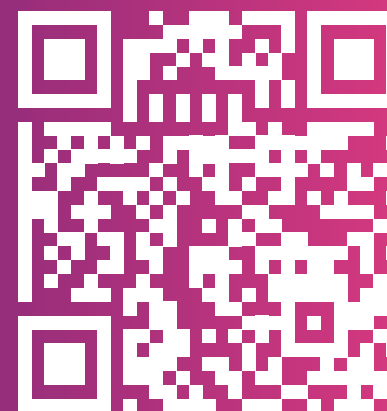
As society continues its journey into an AI-driven future, it is vital to prioritise ethical considerations when dealing with AI. Establishing an AI ethics committee within any business, institution and government agency emerges as an effective strategy to ensure AI safety and the responsible use of this technology. Prioritising ethical standards not only mitigates potential risks but also promotes the development of trust, transparency, and accountability in activities related to AI.

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# On Thin Ice: Changing Geopolitics in the Arctic

Ida Gribajcevic | Analysis



© Annie Spratt | Unsplash

THE ARCTIC IS home to over 4 million people and several endangered species. It is also home to one of the world's most unique yet fragile ecosystems, and a region of the world where temperatures are rising record fast. By 2035 the Arctic could face summers without ice, incurring extremely detrimental effects on human and wildlife populations. Sometimes referred to as the 'common heritage of all mankind' the Arctic is facing melting permafrost and rising geopolitical tensions. Climate change and rapidly melting ice have opened up possibilities for the Arctic countries to develop shipping routes and extract resources. The region is rich in oil, gas and mineral resources and also impacted by geopolitical turbulence which raises concerns about the future and stability of the Arctic region.

The Arctic Council, the intergovernmental forum for Arctic governance, is made up of the eight Arctic countries: the US, Russia, Canada, Denmark (Greenland), Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Iceland. The Council's primary objective is to promote cooperation between the countries and protection of the environment. The countries of the Council have signed and agreed on multiple actions to protect the Arctic, but very few of these have actually materialised. The Council also handles territorial disputes between the Arctic countries and is impacted by world events in their decision-making.

In 2022, as a response to Russia's invasion in Ukraine, the Council decided to suspend cooperation with Russia in the Arctic. This didn't slow down Russia's plans in the Arctic which led to a stronger Sino-Russian cooperation in the region. China has been seeking to expand its Arctic activities in the form of new shipping routes and natural gas extraction. Following the imposition of sanctions from the US and the European Union and the clear implication that Russia won't be an equal partner, China has stepped in to fill this place, expanding its cooperation with Russia all the way to the High North.

According to a survey conducted by the

US Geological Survey the Arctic holds an estimated 13% of the world's undiscovered oil resources and up to 30% of its undiscovered natural gas resources. The Arctic was once a region free of geopolitical tensions. As ice melts and its plentiful resources and strategically significant maritime routes open up, interest in this region is swelling. The Arctic coastal states have agreed to cooperate on issues related to environmental protection and resource development. Agreements regarding cooperation on maritime research and science have also been signed within the Arctic Council. But a lot is happening behind the scenes. Despite these agreements, several Arctic countries are engaging in fuel extraction activities and militarization of the region which could have detrimental effects on the population and the environment. Military preparedness has been increasing and large military exercises, called Arctic Challenges, have taken place with NATO and the Arctic countries.

*Drilling in the Arctic could not only make the ice melt faster, but damage wildlife populations and endanger the way of life of Indigenous Peoples*

Norway, Europe's largest oil producer, has been exploring the Arctic for oil and gas for over a decade. In January 2024, the country handed out 62 offshore oil and gas exploration licences to fossil fuel companies, already outstripping the 47 licences awarded in 2023. As has been the case since 2016, a number of these licences have been granted in the Barents Sea, which is located in the Arctic. This has sparked numerous protests and debates in the country related to the climate crisis and human rights. Drilling in the Arctic could not only make the ice melt faster, but damage wildlife populations and endanger the way of life of Indigenous Peoples. In addition to Norway, Russia has

also been operating in the Arctic in search for resources for the past decade. Even the US has allowed oil companies to drill for oil in Alaska and along its coast ever since the controversial Willow project was put in place in 2023.

*The United States has an extensive coastline in the Arctic with a continental shelf and is the only Arctic country yet to ratify UNCLOS*

The UN Convention of the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) asserts that coastal states have the right to exploration and extraction of resources 200 nautical miles off their coast. The United States, an Arctic state due to the location of Alaska, has yet to ratify the convention. UNCLOS is the longest-standing treaty in the history of the United Nations. It is of great significance, especially in the Arctic, since it determines maritime boundaries, claims to continental shelves, and sovereign rights and protection of the environment. The other Arctic countries have ratified the convention to be able to avoid unnecessary territorial tensions. The United States has an extensive coastline in the Arctic with a continental shelf and is the only Arctic country yet to ratify UNCLOS. Since many of the disputes in the Arctic are about the sea and seabed territory, UNCLOS sets clear boundaries on what belongs to each country.

In 2007, Russia planted a flag on the bottom of the North Pole seabed to strengthen its presence in the Arctic, claiming not only the Lomonosov Ridge but the entire North Pole. The ridge was argued to be a part of the Russian continental shelf, but both Denmark (Greenland) and Canada consider the ridge to be connected to their continental shelves and have claimed parts of the ridge as theirs. This sparked a territorial dispute, one of many in the Arctic that have contributed to rising geopolitical tensions and militarisation in the region. Since World War II, the Arctic has

been Russia's military stronghold, long before Western countries became actively interested in the region. This impacts the dynamic in the region to this day, since Russia's activities in the Arctic, not only resource extraction but militarisation, are huge concerns for the future.

Beyond the dispute over the Lomonosov ridge, there are ongoing disputes between Canada and the US over the right to control which ships, commercial and passenger, can enter the Northwest Passage (NWP). The NWP lies between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans and goes through the Arctic ocean, near the coastlines of Alaska and Canada. The US claims that the passage is an international strait and shipping route, while Canada claims that the NWP is a part of Canadian waters. In addition to this dispute, the countries are also quarrelling over the control of the Beaufort Sea. An issue that has been on the table since 2004. The Beaufort Sea lies near the border between Alaska and Canada and the claims to the Sea have mainly been about where the exact marine border between the countries is located. Canada is heavily involved in several territorial disputes in the Arctic and is trying to establish itself as an Arctic power, not just a pawn of the Arctic superpowers.

*Since the Arctic consists mostly of ocean, there is no international treaty protecting its environment from economic development*

The Arctic is full of economic opportunities that could benefit many societal sectors. Mining, fossil fuel extraction, shipping, but even the green transition are all areas that stand to be profitable for the Arctic countries. Since the Arctic consists mostly of ocean, there is no international treaty protecting its environment from economic development, like there is in Antarctica. The region has the potential to assist the Arctic countries in their green

transition and many of the Arctic countries are investigating the possibility of finding new and more reliable energy sources here. At the same time, the melting ice is making sea routes more accessible which provides opportunities for shipping and fishing. This has led to intense

territorial disputes. The fragility of the Arctic, both in regard to the environment and the power-play between the Arctic nations ought to be restrained to a cooperative pursuit for sustainability and peace.

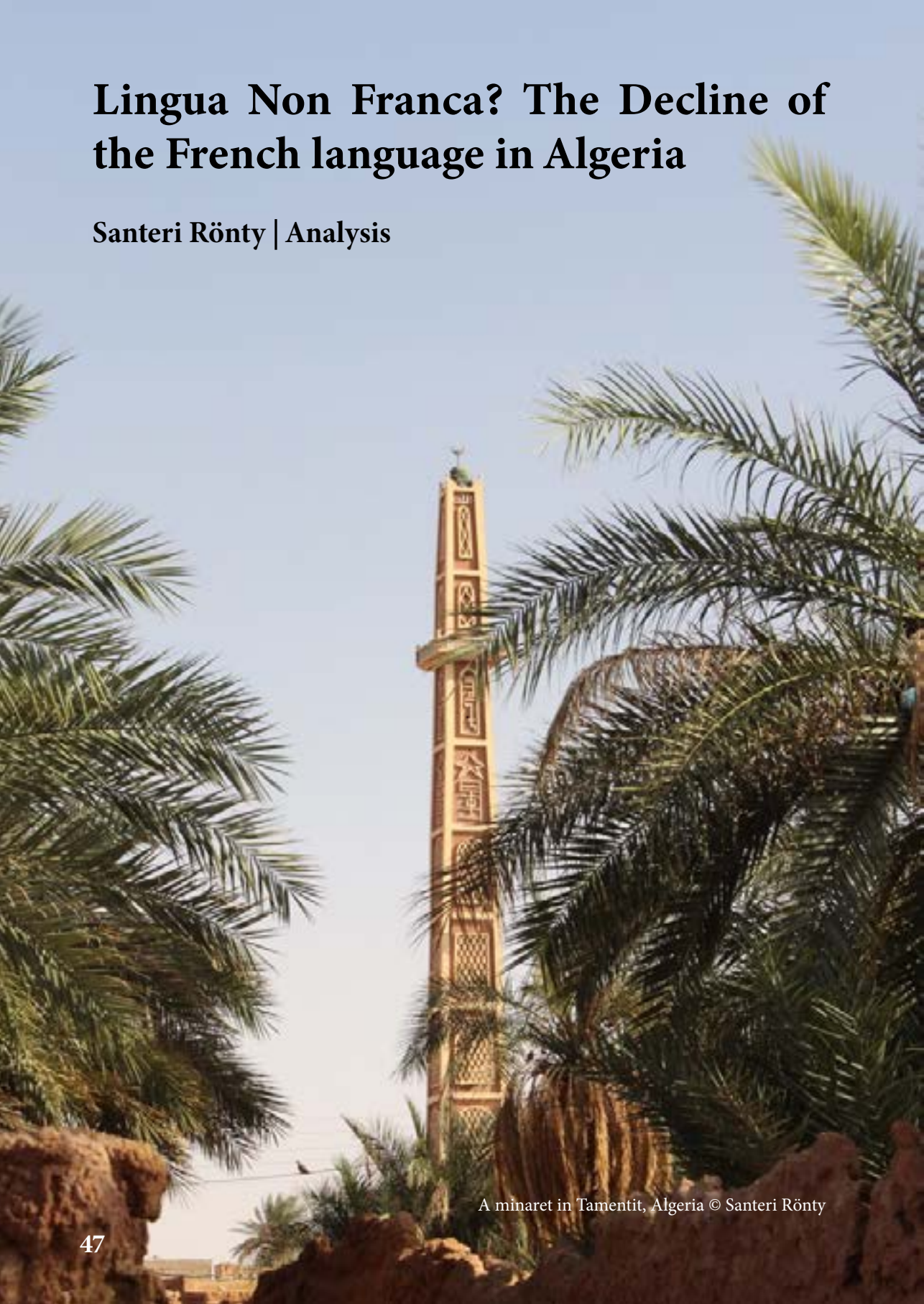


'Map of the Arctic with the 10 °C (50 °F) mean isotherm in July line which defines the border of the Arctic.' © CIA World Factbook | Wikimedia Commons



# Lingua Non Franca? The Decline of the French language in Algeria

Santeri Rönty | Analysis



A minaret in Tamentit, Algeria © Santeri Rönty

SINCE DECLARING ITS independence in 1962, Algeria's identity has remained in a postcolonial setting marked by the continued influence of its former coloniser, France. The use of the French language is among the strongest remnants of Algeria's colonial past. This is true in just about any former French colony, especially in Africa, where 59% of all daily French speakers live.

Unlike many other former French colonies in West and Central Africa which decided to adopt French as an official language, Algeria in its 1963 Constitution defined Arabic as the only national and official language of Algeria, attempting to steer the newly independent country towards a single Arab national identity. Since 2016, Tamazight, a standardised Algerian Berber language, has held an official status in Algeria as well. Yet French has remained a lingua franca in everyday use across the country, alongside the native Arabic dialects and Berber languages. It is arguably the use of the French language in the former French colonies that has kept France's soft power alive – but for how long will this last?

## *The deep wounds of colonialism have stoked anti-French sentiments within the Algerian population*

Despite the French language not enjoying official status in Algeria, it is widely used in media, education, and commerce. In 2018, 33% of the country's population – almost 14 million people – were French speakers. For comparison, the share of francophones in Morocco was 35%, in Mauritania 13%, and in Tunisia 52% the same year. None of the aforementioned countries have defined French as an official language either. The deep wounds of colonialism have stoked anti-French sentiments within the Algerian population. Simultaneously, French language proficiency is highly sought-after, especially within academic and professional fields.

This postcolonial experience is shared by numerous African countries, where the public opinion is often polarised between feelings of antipathy towards the former coloniser and regarding the French language as a language of civilisation and art. The use of French in many former French colonies is often associated with social status, carrying connotations of elitism. The political elite in former French colonies in Africa benefits from the promotion of good economic and cultural ties with their former coloniser, even when those ties might be unpopular with the general public.

## *The Algerian government attempted to standardise the use of Arabic to eradicate French influence*

During the 20th century, the Algerian government attempted to standardise the use of Arabic to eradicate French influence on its society, a process it called Arabisation. In the 1960s, the common language of all primary education, and later much of secondary education, was changed entirely to Modern Standard Arabic (MSA). Despite this, everyday encounters between Algerians persisted in French and MSA was widely seen as unintelligible for speakers of the Algerian Arabic dialect.

Even by the 1990s, much of Algeria's industry and commerce continued to operate in French. In July 1998, Algeria imposed a law called the 'Arabic Language Generalisation Law' which criminalised all transactions, meetings, correspondences, declarations and statements on behalf of agencies and institutions in Algeria published in any other language than Arabic. All TV programmes, newspapers and traffic signs were mandated to be in Arabic only. The law has since ceased to exist. The Algerian government refused to join the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie, an international organisation representing countries where French is a



Oasis in Tamentit, Algeria © Santeri Rönty

customary language, at its inception and, to this day, Algeria remains outside of the organisation.

The use of French in Algeria is best reflected by the education system of the country. Despite the government's Arabisation efforts, French largely remained the language of education in Algerian universities throughout the 20th century. In higher education, French has typically been used in the scientific, technological and medical fields, whereas Arabic has been used in literary specialisations and English within different fields of engineering. Starting from September 2023, however, the Algerian authorities decided to adopt English as the language of instruction in universities, replacing French.

According to the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, these measures aimed to gradually remove French from teaching in large universities and colleges. Moreover, Algeria is attempting to put an end to French and private schools teaching outside the nationally mandated, predominantly Arabic

curriculum, as well as expanding English language courses in elementary schools, in the form of two extra classes of English per week. Despite this, Algerian officials have stated that French will continue to be widely taught.

### *Mali removed French as its official language in July 2023, replacing it with 13 Indigenous national languages*

Algeria is certainly not the only part of the former French colonial empire that is taking steps to reshape its postcolonial identity. Mali removed French as its official language in July 2023, replacing it with 13 Indigenous national languages. In 2021, an independent survey by the British Council on the shift to English in Morocco found that 65% of Moroccans aged 15-25 regarded English as important, while 62% felt the same way about Arabic and only 47% about French. In Tunisia, French is in widespread daily use but also carries the connotations of a foreign, elitist language of the

privileged. The decline of France's influence in its former colonies is mirrored in other events, for instance, Burkina Faso expelling French military forces in February 2023, followed by Niger in December of the same year. Such examples signal France's ongoing loss of influence in formerly colonised countries in Africa.

### *French is often seen as the language of the elite, making it at once desirable and a relic of foreign domination and postcolonial trauma*

The French language is witnessing a decline in several countries. The removal of its status as an official language in countries like Mali and changing public opinion and attitudes

towards the language are contributing to this. French is often seen as the language of the elite, making it at once desirable and a relic of foreign domination and postcolonial trauma. Algeria's latest attempts at promoting English as an international language in its national curricula and higher education will certainly affect the coming generations, but chances are that French will remain a lingua franca in daily life for some time before real linguistic change can take place.

The Algerian authorities do, however, see this as a step forward from the postcolonial trauma that it has suffered from for decades. By distancing itself from French linguistic and cultural ties, Algeria seeks to alter its self-image to feel a sense of liberation from French soft power. The linguistic change in Algeria is, nevertheless, only one among many when it comes to France losing its grip on its former empire.



The ruins of Tipaza, Algeria © Santeri Rönty

# A Crisis of Solidarity: The Dublin System Under Pressure

Mathilde Perrin | Feature

ON 20 NOVEMBER 2023, 1087 people arrived in Lampedusa, an Italian island between Malta and Tunisia. During their journey, a two-year-old died and eight people went missing. This is only an example of the substantial number of people just one country has to manage when it comes to migration. In 2023, over 150,000 people undertook dangerous sea routes to reach Italy.

While critics argue that the number of refugees arriving in Europe is negligible compared to the number welcomed by Jordan or Lebanon, for example, it is fair to say that the asylum burden-sharing is unequal in Europe. As stated by Ban Ki-Moon, former UN Secretary-General, “this is not a crisis of numbers, it is a crisis of solidarity”. This leads to many issues, as has been highlighted by the death or disappearance of more than 3500 people in just the year of 2023. In the first month of

2024, 35 people have already died or gone missing while trying to reach Europe.

*“This is not a crisis of numbers, it is a crisis of solidarity”*

The determination of which EU Member State is responsible to examine an asylum application is governed by the Dublin Regulation. This Regulation was adopted in 2013, two years before the so-called ‘refugee crisis’ in Europe. It follows the 1990 Dublin Convention and the 2003 Dublin Regulation II and is part of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) framework, governing asylum in Europe.

The Regulation states that only one Member State is responsible for each application, and sets out the criteria that determine this state.

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These criteria are identified hierarchically and include whether the applicant is an unaccompanied minor, whether there are family members of the applicant who are beneficiaries or applicants for international protection in a Member State, family procedure, the issue of residence documents or visas, whether the applicant entered the EU irregularly, visa waiving and whether the application has been made in the international transit area of an airport. When none of these criteria can be identified, the first Member State in which the application for international

protection was lodged is responsible for examining it.

Currently, the Dublin System is facing difficulties. As recognised by the European Commission itself, ‘it was not designed to ensure a sustainable sharing of responsibilities for asylum applicants across the EU’, and engenders a number of problems. In practice, a large proportion of migrants arrive in frontline countries, bordering the Mediterranean Sea, such as Greece, Italy, Cyprus and Spain. While the Dublin Regulation was designed with

the aims of providing fast access to asylum procedures for asylum-seekers in the EU and avoiding 'asylum-shopping' – applications for international protection by one third-country national to more than one EU State – the result is that frontline countries bear disproportionate asylum burden-sharing pressures.

*'The EU refugee protection rule is focused away from the refugee'*

Once the Member State responsible for the examination of the application has been determined, asylum-seekers have to be transferred to this state. However, linguistic, ethnic, cultural, religious and other considerations may influence the places in the EU where asylum-seekers wish to settle. The omission of these factors in the Dublin Regulation highlights, as denounced by Panebianco and Fontana, (associate professors at the University of Catania in Italy), that 'the EU refugee protection rule is focused away from the refugee'.

In 2011, the European Court on Human Rights highlighted the deficiencies of the Dublin Regulation in a case concerning an asylum-seeker from Afghanistan who first arrived in Greece and subsequently travelled to Belgium. Following the Dublin Regulation, this person was transferred back to Greece, where he was detained and beaten up by police officers. The Court in this case judged that the Dublin Regulation should not be applied if the rights under the European Convention of Human Rights cannot be guaranteed.

While the Dublin Regulation provides for an exemption 'when there are systemic flaws in the asylum procedure and in the reception conditions for applicants in that Member State', this illustrates the issues that the Regulation causes. Moreover, this case illustrates the capacity issues that frontline countries are facing, as they are not able to properly examine

asylum applications and respect human rights.

According to the International Rescue Committee, between 2014 and 2020, more than 700,000 asylum-seekers and migrants reached Italy. In line with the Dublin Regulation, when Italian coastguards rescue asylum-seekers at sea, it is Italy that has the responsibility to process the asylum applications, consequently placing the entire burden on a single EU Member State. In 2015, the EU, facing the arrival of more than 911,000 refugees and migrants on its shores, launched an emergency response. This included the EU ad hoc relocation system, which seeks to relocate individuals arriving in Italy or Malta to another Member State, contravening the Dublin Regulation System and illustrating the limitations of this system in its response to the actual refugee flows.

*When Italian coastguards rescue asylum-seekers at sea, it is Italy that has the responsibility to process the asylum applications*

The Dublin Regulation negatively impacts both refugees, because they are not able to choose a country or region that best suits their needs, and frontline countries, who do not have the capacity to take in so many refugees. The lack of solidarity between EU Member States has prompted calls for changes to the Common European Asylum System.

In December 2023, the European Parliament and the Council of the EU reached a political agreement concerning the New Pact on Migration and Asylum. This New Pact includes different proposals to better manage the arrival of migrants in the EU, among them the Asylum Migration Management Regulation, based on the principle of solidarity and fair sharing of responsibility. It remains to be seen how this will develop and the impacts it is poised to entail.

# State, Architecture and Aesthetics: Reconfiguring 'the people' through India's new parliament



WITH PROF. SHIRIN M. RAI (SOAS)



# Reimagined Communities: Make-believe States in a Worrying World

Ffion McEvoy | Travel

THE DRIFTWOOD PLANK I'm perched on creaks. I step forward, slip on wet wood and nearly gouge my eye out on a rusty nail. Cursing the hare-brained architect of this insane structure, I climb upwards.

That architect was Lars Vilks, a crotchety but committed artist mired in controversy for much of his later life. Vilks began building this wooden deathtrap, otherwise known as Nimis, in a remote corner of Skåne in 1980. Two years and 70 tons of driftwood later, the local authorities discovered the structure. Decades of legal battles, fines and demolition threats ensued. Vilks kept building and declared the site an independent state, the Kingdom of Ladonia.

I make it through the teetering maze of haphazardly assembled wooden planks, eyeballs intact. Pausing to appreciate the view from the top, a seabird shrieks overhead, furious at the intrusion.

Ladonia is a micronation – a small, self-declared state unrecognised by any recognised state. It has many of the trappings of statehood: a flag, a currency, a national anthem (the sound of a stone being thrown into water), its own language (a grand total of two words) and time zone (three minutes behind neighbouring Sweden). Ladonia has a monarchy, a constitution (explicitly banning men from the throne), and a government composed of a great many ministers and elected officials. This chaotic assemblage includes a Minister of Misinformation, a Minister of Extraterrestrial Oceans, and a Minister of Danger and Unexplained Phenomenon, not to be outdone by the Minister of Long Term Consequences,

the Minister of Lost Time, the Minister of Shouts and Whispers and, of course, the Minister of Thermonuclear Eye Protection.

*Micronations are established for fun, fraud, political protest, artistic expression, activism, and more*

Micronations, peculiar political entities which dress up in the language of statehood, vary substantially in size and substance. From the very small (a bedroom, an uninhabitable rock in the North Atlantic) to the very large, micronations are established for fun, fraud, political protest, artistic expression, activism, and more. A dollhouse replica of the international state system, intermicronational and supramicronational organisations, such as the Micronational Association of Southeast Asia and the European Union of Micronations, foster diplomatic relations between micronations, aided by a number of micronational summits.

Last summer, I spent 34 hours on buses journeying to and from the small Belgian city of Ypres to attend MicroCon, Europe's largest conference of micronations. Ostensibly, I was there to present a research paper on environmental micronations. Formed in protest of ecological degradation and climate change for the purpose of environmental activism, these micronations count among their ranks the Grand Duchy of Flandrensis, a micronation in West Antarctica with the motto, 'No humans, only nature!'; the Empire of Angyalistan, a micronation claiming the



© Tomás Castro Rojas

world's oceanic garbage patches as its territory, declaring itself the only country in the world which wants its territory to disappear; and the Principality of Anthophilia, a micronation created for the protection of insects, with a honey-based economic model. In truth, I came to the conference to meet the minds behind these eccentric creations. And these minds did not disappoint.

Micronationists proved to be an incredibly warm and welcoming community of people united by their innovative reimaginings of statehood. Whether motivated by frivolity, egomaniacal delusions of grandeur, or something else, listening to conference participants, it became clear that many of the people devoting their time to micronational projects had a genuine interest in challenging conventional conceptions of statehood and

entering wider discussions of legitimate authority and postnational politics. Given the state of the world and the shaky foundations of the state system, is it any wonder that people would try to reinvent statehood in some small way?

*A number of disputed territories, home to millions of people, do not adhere neatly to mainstream visions of statehood*

States are not homogeneous, naturally occurring entities. Besides from being a relatively recent invention, there are countless variations on the theme of the sovereign

territorial state. From Palestine to Taiwan, Abkhazia to Nagorno-Karabakh, a number of disputed territories, home to millions of people, do not adhere neatly to mainstream visions of statehood. The slap-happy sticker-gunning of academia throws around a confetti of labels which are highly politicised and far from self-evident. Separatist movements (Kashmir, Khalistan), de-facto states (Kosovo, Kurdistan), Indigenous territories (Inuit Nunangat in Canada, Sápmi in Fennoscandia), proto-states (Bougainville in Papua New Guinea), constituent states (Wales in the UK), quasi-states, failed states (arguably Wales again) – the list of terms is almost as long as it is bitterly contested.

While the Montevideo Convention sets apparently authoritative criteria for statehood under international law, its simplicity is

undermined by the persistent malleability of concepts, practices and performances underlying statehood. Micronations seize upon this malleability to challenge assumptions and open up new narrative spaces.

Is the Kingdom of Ladonia a heroic outpost of artistic resistance or one man's local authority dispute gone mad? Are micronations daft or daring, silly or significant, a puerile pursuit or a cutting critique of governance structures and our broken state system? Whether both or neither, for me they are a welcome if momentary distraction from a world in which the response to the violent conflict, rising inequality and the climate crisis is apathy, ballooning military budgets and the politics of the armed lifeboat.

© Tomás Castro Rojas



# The West Bank Through the Lens: A Photo Story of the Contrast of Palestinian Lives Under Occupation

John Charles Fenech | Opinion

FOR QUITE SOME time, I have been interested in Palestine and its people. I have met many Palestinians in the countries I have lived in or visited, many of whom have shared with me their family's stories of struggles due to

forced displacement and occupation, while at the same time expressing the love they have for their land and their culture. That is why, while studying in Jordan last year, I made the decision to get my camera and go to the West Bank to

visit my Palestinian friend Mohammed in his home in the Al-Arroub refugee camp, located between Hebron and Bethlehem.

I remember being told that once you go to Palestine there are certain things you cannot see, but I did not understand the true extent of this until I went there. Palestine is a country of contrasts. On the one hand, the occupation looms heavily on every single aspect of life, from checkpoints, to control towers, to areas A, B, and C, and most of all, people's struggles. On the other hand, Palestine is a story of beauty, resilience, and a thirst for life.

I was in Jordan a week before 7 October 2023,

which means that all the photographs I took showcase the lives of people in occupied Palestine just before the start of the war that has led to the death of over 28,000 Palestinians at the time of writing. This photo story highlights how the war did not truly start on 7 October. It has deep historical roots embedded in the daily struggles of Palestinians under Israeli occupation since 1948.

My aim is to show how I perceived the daily lives and struggles of Palestinians prior to 7 October through my photographs, and for viewers to reflect on those who continue to live in these areas today. The accompanying text is a contextualisation of my images.



All Images © John Charles Fenech

## AL-ARROUB REFUGEE CAMP

When I arrived at Al-Arroub, I was shocked to see a village. One in very poor condition, but a village nonetheless, officially inhabited by over 15,000 people. It is small and compact, with very narrow alleys separating each building, and large families living in small spaces. Since 1982, the Palestinians in Al-Arroub have been dependent on Israel for their water supply. Since the first Intifada (civil uprising), Israeli forces started cutting their water supply regularly as a form of collective punishment.

The camp itself is surrounded by Israeli military checkpoints. The main one is a control tower with rifles on the front façade where Palestinians in Al-Arroub catch the bus every day. Many elderly refugees who lived through the 1948 Nakba and subsequent displacement are originally from cities and villages in what is now Israel.

I could see two contrasts during my stay in Al-Arroub. On the one hand, there is the dire state of the camp, the control tower, the bullet holes, and the suffering. On the other hand, the happiness, the comradeship, the new restaurant which is opening, children playing in the street, guys talking at the barbershop, and their constant smiles. In contrast, I was told that a week before my arrival, a child was shot dead by Israeli forces who argued that he threw a rock at them.

Most refugees across the globe retain their citizenship regardless of their refugee status. However, Palestinian refugees have no citizenship. They are refugees in their own land, which makes them eternal refugees and citizens of nowhere.



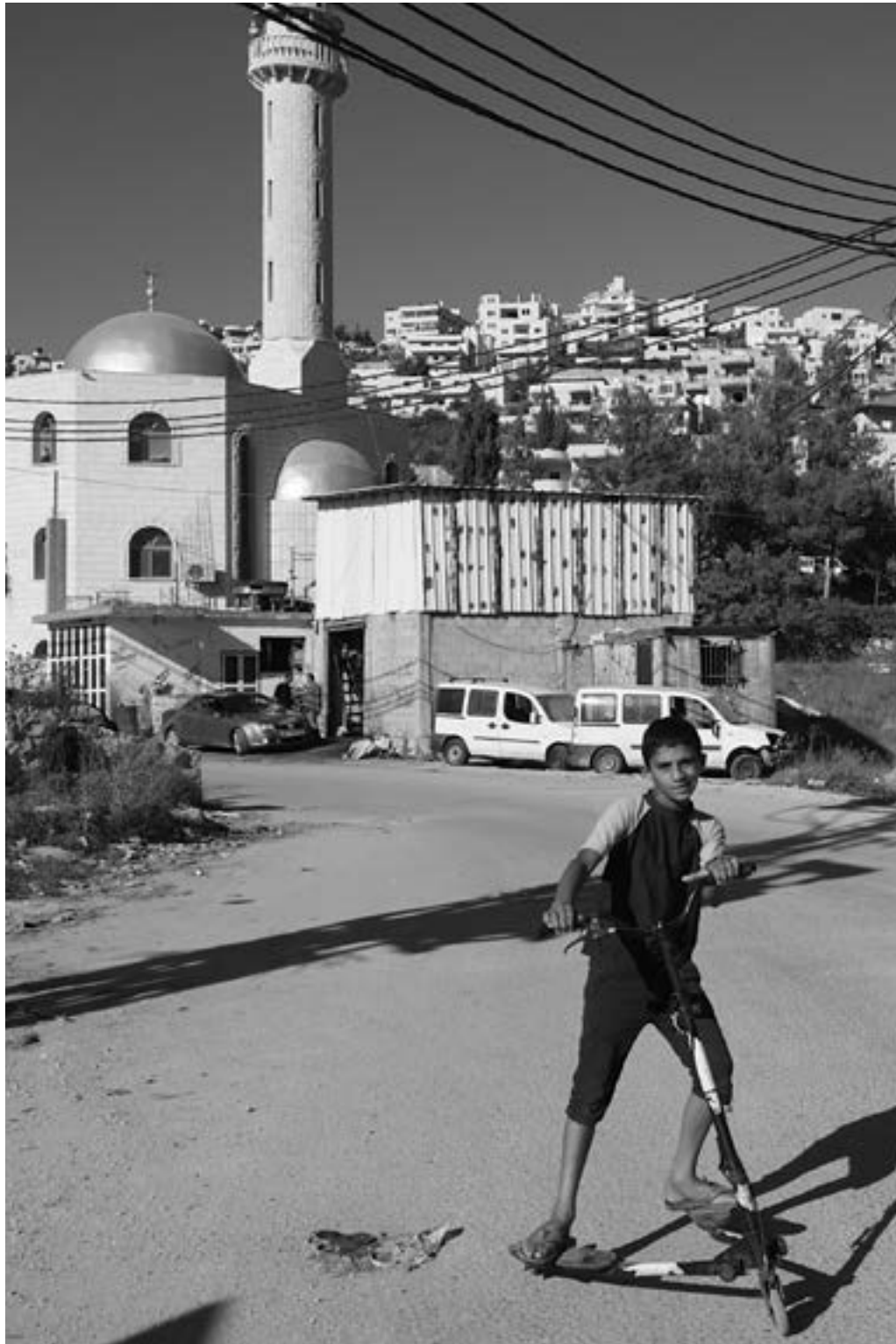
- ▲ Young martyrs depicted on a wall in Al-Arroub refugee camp.
- ▶ A man sitting in front of a shop looking at the Israeli Control Tower at the entrance of Al-Arroub refugee camp (top right).

- ▶ Martyrs depicted on a wall in Al-Arroub refugee camp (middle right).
- ▶ A bullet hole in a wall close to the Israeli Control tower, the product of struggles between the Israeli occupying forces and the Palestinian refugees (bottom right).



When you hear 'refugee camp,' what do you think of? Big tents set across an open space? What happens when a space and a people have remained in a state of impermanence and insecurity for over 75 years? How does a refugee camp transform in the span of generations? How do people who are born and die as refugees live? How do they build a functioning society despite the obstacles that they face?





▲ A boy with a scooter in Al-Aroub refugee camp.



▲ A Palestinian refugee in Al-Aroub refugee camp checking on his neighbour.

## HEBRON - AL-KHALIL

Being relatively close to Al-Arroub refugee camp, I decided to visit the city of Hebron, known in Arabic as Al-Khalil. I knew about the situation in the city, however upon seeing it with my own eyes, I was left shocked.

Al-Khalil is one of the most scarred cities in the context of the occupation. The city has been sliced into areas A, B, and C. Most of the historical centre of the city has been occupied by Israeli settlers for the last thirty years, after evicting most of the locals. To move between the occupied area and the non-occupied area

requires passing through several checkpoints. In the occupied area you can find thousands of soldiers protecting a few hundred settlers. There are even streets that have been divided from top to bottom, with the upper floors of the buildings in the street occupied by settlers. Checkpoints separate streets and alleys that used to form part of an interconnected labyrinth – typical for historic Arabic cities.

I tried to photograph the different sides of the city to best showcase the contrasts of occupation and the feeling that the city imparts to those who visit it, as well as show it from the perspective of the locals.



▲ Palestinians waiting to cross through the checkpoint to get to one of the occupied neighbourhoods of the city.

▶ A Palestinian child looking through a fenced window in the occupied neighbourhood (bottom right).



▲ A Palestinian school turned into a synagogue by the Israeli settlers (top).

▲ Inside the occupied area. One can observe the emptiness of the street; all shops have been closed and all the local life pushed out (middle left).

▲ Outside the occupied area. This street greatly contrasts the one in the occupied area. It is still full of life thanks to the locals who make up the soul of the city (middle right).





▲ Walking under the fence. The street is surrounded by the occupied neighbourhoods from both sides and has been separated from above (with the upper part occupied). You can see stones and other things that have been thrown down on the fence, which is there for the protection of local Palestinians.

## THE WALL

One can argue that the separation wall, or the Wall of Apartheid, as it is described by Palestinians, is the biggest symbol of the division and occupation of Palestine and its people. Constructed by the Israeli forces, it separates towns, regions, families, and most of all, Jerusalem, known in Arabic as Al-Quds, from the Palestinians in the West Bank. Many Palestinians are not allowed to cross to

the other side and thus have never been able to visit Jerusalem or even see the coast. The 'lucky ones' are permitted to cross for work or short visits. However, they have to return by 5 pm or otherwise risk getting arrested. The border crossing journey takes a long time since Palestinians cannot cross by car—unlike the Israeli settlers. They have to pass through multiple security checks and catch transport to go to the workplace, which might be as far as the coast.



▲ A crowd of Palestinians trying to cross the wall on 28 September 2023, the feast of the birth of Prophet Mohammed. Only two gates were kept open by the Israeli forces.



▲ The wall from the West Bank side.



▲ This man, known as Al-Hajj, is 77 years old. He was born before the Nakba (1948) in the village of Aggour, located in what is now Israel. He has been a refugee since he was two years old and ended up in Al-Arroub. He currently receives 60 shekels (around five euros) worth of aid from UNRWA every 3 months.



### CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Watching the sun set over Palestine from Jordan with my friend, Milena, we reflected on how Palestinians here must feel, being able to see the sun set over their homeland every day, being so close, yet never being able to touch it.

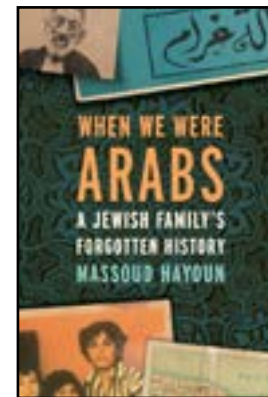
The collective pain of Palestinians has spanned generations. The West Bank and Gaza are part of this story. Many Palestinians have been forcefully displaced across the globe, and most have been denied the right to return.

This is a story of resistance, a story of a people whose love for their culture and land has withstood generations of occupation.

*This piece is an extension of the article 'A photo story: contrast of lives in the West Bank' published by Milena Ayvazyan and John Charles Fenech for The Perspective Webzine.*

## Reading Recommendations

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

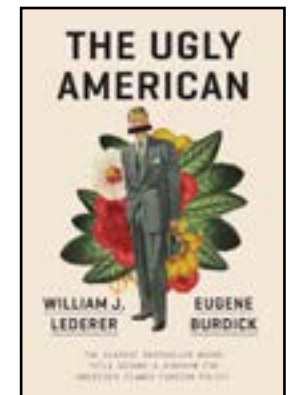


### *When We Were Arabs: A Jewish Family's Forgotten History* – Adla Lagström Jebara

'When We Were Arabs' by Massoud Hayoun is a captivating memoir that delves into the author's quest to reclaim his Arab identity through recounting his family's memories from a lost world. In his debut book, Hayoun confronts the legacies of French and British colonialism, Zionism and Israeli politics, and their impact on the Jewish Arab community in North Africa and Western Asia. This memoir is a rich and compelling narrative that challenges our modern perceptions of Arab and Jewish identities, and offers readers a unique perspective on the complexities of belonging and sheds light on an often overlooked part of human history.

### *The Ugly American* by Eugene Burdick and William Lederer – Micol Zubrickaite

Through a mosaic of characters and stories, this satirical novel comments on the role of the US in Southeast Asia during the Cold War. Set in the fictional nation of Sarkhan, Americans and Soviets try to dominate and spread their respective ideologies. However, educated elites and those in the diplomatic corps jeopardise this mission with their lack of sensitivity to the local customs and language. Through these fictional stories, the authors narrate their experiences as a political scientist and a special assistant to the commander-in-chief of US forces in the Pacific during the Vietnam War. The publishing of this book sparked a debate between American elites, becoming a staple book for experts and students of foreign affairs.



### *The Outlaw Ocean* by Ian Urbina – Ffion McEvoy

The culmination of four years of investigative journalism, this book unearths the crimes and extralegal activities commonplace at sea, a dystopian place, home to dark inhumanities. From worker exploitation, debt bondage and human trafficking to illegal fishing, marine pollution and vigilante environmentalists, Urbina skilfully uncovers the inadequacy of maritime law enforcement and the impunity of perpetrators of crimes. Lighter chapters explore the Principality of Sealand, a micronation situated on an offshore platform in the North Sea, and Women on Waves, a non-profit organisation created by Dutch doctor, Rebecca Gomperts, to give women in countries with restrictive abortion laws access to reproductive health services.