

An abstract painting with thick, expressive brushstrokes in shades of brown, green, yellow, and black. The texture is rough and layered, with some areas appearing more saturated than others. The overall composition is vertical and somewhat chaotic, with a sense of movement and depth.

GLOBUS MUNDI

C O S U M N E S R I V E R C O L L E G E

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE & GLOBAL STUDIES

JOURNAL 2021 VOLUME XI

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FACULTY ADVISOR'S PAGE

MARTIN MORALES



Welcome to Volume XI of Globus Mundi, the official publication of the Department of Political Science & Global Studies at Cosumnes River College.

Well here we are. Again. It looks like this is going to be Covid Edition 2.0 ! Can anybody believe we're still teaching and learning remotely ? We used to have events, dinners out on Wednesdays and go on field trips. Does anybody remember campus life or the insanity that was my office ? I, like many faculty colleagues, long to return to the classroom and engage students. It's been a year of Canvas based instruction, ZOOM synchronous sections and not much more. As friends, we've had to make due with ZOOM get-togethers. Will this ever end ? Fortunately, the answer is a resounding "YES !" As I type this, vaccines are now universally available to all adults who want them, schools and businesses are on the verge of reopening and normalcy is within grasp.

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING

The 2020 election marked the end of the worst presidency in American history. I was at home in San Francisco when the election was finally called (Saturday, November 7th), sitting in the kitchen with the terrace doors open. My

partner's phone was exploding with alerts as we heard our end of the city explode into cheers of joy. The local fire station rolled out a truck and were ringing the bell, police cars were yelping their sirens and traffic was all horns. People spilled out into the streets and popped champagne corks. Even though it was a socially distant and masked crowd, it was truly a celebration whose sub-theme is best characterized as "relief."

"El Despertar," by **Mariana Castro de Ali**, was chosen as our cover for this issue as the very title of her work means, literally, "to awaken." The painting is about transitions, about leaving behind darkness and awakening into the light of a new day as we all did on January 20th. Unfortunately, over 500,000 Americans who died from Covid due to the prior Administration's negligence are not with us as we recover and move forward; hopefully, we never forget them. Hopefully, Americans will never forget the images of children, separated from their parents, locked in dirty, overcrowded cages – crying, shaking and, in many instances, forever separated from their families with a future of emotional and developmental problems ahead of them. Hopefully, the racism that was unleashed crawls back down the ugly hole from

whence it came and never comes back. Hopefully, science and reason once again inhabit lawmakers’ approach to climate change – and all other - policy areas. Hopefully, the Biden Administration is as successful in its herculean efforts at rebuilding America as it has been in its rapid and efficient vaccination campaign. Last, hopefully, justice finds all persons in the prior administration and the mob who participated in the failed coup on January 6th.

The effects of Covid on our students and their families has, in many cases, been significant. This year, moreso than in years past, we acknowledge the sacrifices and efforts our transfers’ families made to secure their successful completion of courses at CRC so that they could transfer. Accordingly, we bid farewell and good luck to **Tamoor Ali, Niela Arghandiwal, Samantha Bland, Gabriel Bonilla, Celina Bouri, Hannah Brunkhorst, Steven Davis, Jordan DeSantis, Gavin Donaldson, Chynell Freeman, Miles MacAnulty, Hunter Marcoccia, Jamie Velasco, Paulina Villanueva and Maxine Wagas**. Most have transferred to a UC, a few to CSU, one to a private university and one leaves the country to attend university overseas. Of this short list, I was privileged to have met five students before CRC closed last year. Next year, as has been the case at the end of every cohort cycle, we look forward to rebuilding our ranks. We’re fortunate to have **Omer Ali, Michael Berhanu, Paolo Garcia, Aya Mikbel and Rosa Peshkoff** as anchors. Additionally, we look to departmental friends **Samantha Ayers, Olivia Garcia, Jayme Hungerford** and our colleague, **Dan Aseltine**, to help.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Omer Ali, who continues his studies with us next year, mentioned that his mother **Mariana Castro de Ali** was an artist and got her to agree

to let us use “El Despertar” as our cover. We are grateful and looking forward to seeing her new works at another Second Saturday at the LRCFT Union Hall in the future.

Sam Bland, my TA and our designated subject matter tutor, stepped into an unexpected vacancy midway through last semester and helped many students (and me) this year. In addition to her hard work in the Tutoring Center, Sam served as Editor in Chief for this volume of Globus Mundi. Sam leaves CRC for Hull University (UK) – and is on my list of people to visit next trip.

Steven Davis was this year’s Associate Editor for Globus Mundi, a discipline tutor and major contributor in all the classes he took. He leaves CRC for UC Berkeley in the fall.

Olivia Garcia has, once again, done graphic design and layout for us. Thanks for your hard work, Olivia.

Paloma Ramos is studying IR at UC Davis and contributed “Venezuela's Corruption and the ICC” for inclusion in this issue of Globus Mundi.

Aymaan Sumandi, despite being at UC Berkeley, continues to provide me with tech support and research assistance. Schedule permitting, he graces our Global Studies classes Wednesday nights and contributes to our discussions. It’s not a lie to say I wouldn’t have been able to make it without him since Covid put us on Canvas.

Christina Bouri, currently attending Harvard for her MA in International Relations, guest lectured my Middle Eastern Politics course (Fall) on her time in the Hashemite Kingdom

Our beloved **Dean, Dr. Tonya Williams**, has been absconded to the Chancellor’s Office

and will, hopefully, return in 2023. We thank her for “leaving us alone” to do what we do while supporting us 100% as we did it.

ALUMNI NEWS

This year, we’ve heard from alumni who are graduating and, as well, those who are graduating and heading off to law and graduate school. We congratulate **Hawa Amiri**, studying IR at UCSD, as she’ll graduate early and begin her graduate studies – also at UCSD. **Aymaan Sumandi**, is studying IR and Middle Eastern Studies at UC Berkeley and applying for internships next summer as he prepares to apply to graduate schools for his MA. **Karanbir Singh**, currently at UCSD studying IR, has accepted an employment offer from the US Department of Homeland Security, where alumnus **Marius Iordache** has been for a decade. **Kenny Lam**, studying IR at UCSD, has been accepted into the UCSD graduate program for Global Policy & Strategy. **Paloma Ramos**, studying IR at UC Davis, is preparing to take the LSAT as she completes her course of study and law school applications. Her bigger news is her engagement to **Nick Karnow**. They met while at CRC and we were lucky that Paloma brought him to functions and integrated him into her cohort - making Nick a “friend of the department.” We wish them both love, health and happiness. Felicitaciones ! **Ali Alukrafi**, graduating from UC Berkeley with a BA in IR & Near Eastern Studies, has been accepted into the International Relations MA program at my Alma Mater (San Francisco State University). Mabruk habibi ! The next step for Ali will be a doctoral program. **Ammar Ansari**, also graduating UC Berkeley with a BA in IR, will attend the London School of Economics to continue his studies. **Turab Bukhari** graduates from UC Riverside. He’s been spending time with family in Pakistan (how’s your Urdu now ?) and plans to take a year off before applying to graduate school.

Nikki Karapanos, a recent UC Davis graduate has been accepted at Sonoma State University where she’ll get her MA in Anthropology. **Ella Lockhart-Ralston** graduated from UC Berkeley and will begin graduate studies at UC Davis this fall. Ella will study education and plans to teach. **Malika Mann** graduates from UC Davis with her BA in IR and prepares for graduate studies at UCSD. **Christian Scott** graduates from UC Davis (BA in Political Science) and starts graduate school this fall. He plans to become ... a teacher ! **Summeyer Tarhan** graduates from UCSD (BA in IR) and is bound for Turkey. **Soovya Nagin** (CRC’s “I have 29 units and a 4.0 - and I’m Still Standing Award” winner) graduated from UCLA with a BA in IR and is working at a law firm ahead of starting law school. **Namveer Singh** graduated from UC Davis with a BA in IR while completing studies at Sciences Po (Paris, France). **Jon Sweeney** graduated from UCSB and relocated to the Bay Area where he works at an international investment firm. **Paul Frederici**, Beth’s TA and a former department tutor and Model UN member, graduated from CSU Chico with a BA in Political Science and returns in the fall as a graduate student pursuing an MA in Political Science. **Emily Bills** (BA in Global Studies with Latin America emphasis & Women’s Studies from UCSB) graduated from UC Davis Law School where, in addition to being Research Editor for the Journal of Juvenile Law and Policy, won an award for her work on an Appellate brief as a 1L. Emily will spend the summer studying for the California Bar. **Ryan King**, formerly Nevada Senator **Catherine Cortez-Masto’s** Director of Communications, is back in California working at his alma mater, UC Berkeley, as Associate Director of Media Relations in the Office of the President.

Although not alumna, we’d like to congratulate our former Adjunct Professor, **Alexis Hanson**, on her nuptials.

I look forward to the day when alumni can come visit campus, attend events or an alumni function again.

VOLUME XI

Paloma Ramos, currently attending UC Davis, contributes “Venezuela's Corruption and the ICC.” Her article focuses on the consequences of the Zamora Plan, introduced in 2017, by the Maduro regime in Venezuela.

Sam Bland (this issue’s Editor) wrote “Commercialized Cool: Japan’s Attempts to Harness Soft Power Through Pop Culture.” Sam leaves us for Hull University (UK).

Steven Davis, Associate Editor, publishes “Human Rights: A Trojan Horse of Neo-Colonialism” and presents it in Colloquium. Steven leaves us for UC Berkeley.

Niela Arghandiwal analyzes failures in western feminism in “Learning From Western Failures in Implementing Feminism in the Islamic East” focusing on women’s rights in Afghanistan and the region. Niela presents her work in this year’s Colloquium. Niela will attend NYU next year.

Olivia Garcia, our Graphic Designer, Layout Artist and resident environmentalist, examines consequences of agricultural policy in “Seeds of the Soviets.” Olivia returns in the fall for her final year of study.

Tamoor Ali’s “The Senkaku/Diaoyu Dispute: Japan vs. China,” examines the conflict between Japan and the People’s Republic of China over these islands extrapolating to the current situation China faces on another island: Taiwan. Tamoor leaves CRC for UCLA in the fall.

James Bennett looks at an interesting idea for

the House of Saud in “Neom: The New Future.” James continues his studies at CRC in the fall.

Paulina Villanueva writes a haunting piece on “The Rising Issues Surrounding Femicide in Latin America.” She transfers to UC Davis in the fall.

Samantha Ayers examines “Pervasive Developmental Disorders in India.” Samantha continues her studies in both nursing and political science next year at CRC.

Aya Mikbel provides a look at a decade of Middle Eastern conflict in “Syria: Its Conflict and Future.” Aya resumes her studies at CRC in the fall.

Chardonnay Watkins’ article discusses hashtag activism in the US from the BLM movement post the murder of George Floyd and compares it to “MLVN – Le Mouvement pour Les Vies Noire” in France following the death of Adama Traoré at the hands of French police. Chardonnay will attend University of Chicago this fall.

Jamie Velasco examines “How Violence and Corruption is Forcing Central American Immigration.” Jamie is transferring to UC Davis in the fall.

Omer Ali also looks at issues in Latin America focusing on Mexico in “Mexico: A Proper Diagnosis.” Omer returns to CRC to continue his studies in the fall.

Chynell Freeman writes “Assessing Nigeria: Power, GSM, and Social Media,” a topic which emerged during conversations on Africa last fall in IR. Chynell leaves CRC for UC Davis

COLLOQUIUM

This year, Niela Arghandiwal and Steven Davis were chosen to present their articles at Colloquium. Unfortunately for both of them, Colloquium was done like last year’s: shot and uploaded without the joys of in-person presentation and dialogue. The only consolation I could offer was that their work will be required reading/viewing in my IR class.

Niela’s presentation, “Learning From Western Failures in Implementing Feminism in the Islamic East,” examines the image of the United States as a global leader in supporting democracy, human rights and gender equality. Despite of its image, America’s policies hinder the fight for women’s rights globally. Indeed, “Learning From Western Failures in Implementing Feminism in the Islamic East” shows through case studies how America’s perceived dominance in this realm has negatively impacted women in the Islamic East. Inversely, additional case studies examine what has worked and what feminists on the ground say they need now.

Steven Davis’ “Human Rights: A Trojan Horse of Neo-Colonialism” also examines human rights albeit from a broader perspective. He postulates that adherence and commitment to the project of human rights are often a litmus test with which Western observers come to judge the virtues of foreign governments. The role of human rights has become so significant that perceived violations of human rights can become causus belli for Western states. Steven’s presentation locates the genesis of human rights in the emergence and spread of Christianity; by placing the supreme emphasis on the individual’s relationship with God, Christianity built the ontological foundations for liberal rationalism and human rights. The proselytizing imperative of human rights

produces continual support for Western intervention in the developing world. In some instances, appeals towards a particular minority group, such as the LGBT community or women, are used to garner support from liberals and left. This presentation considers what such an alternative to human rights might look like with an emphasis on localism.

NEXT YEAR

Next year, we get to return to campus (I’d add a smiley face here but the Editor would probably kill me).

Next year will be busy as we work to restart and rebuild our department. Thus far, we plan to host a few remote events and forge new partnerships across departments, with the UC’s and into the community and set the stage for 2022.

Volume XII will have a full report on next year’s events.

CONCLUSION

Future editions of Globus Mundi will follow yearly. Students, alumni and faculty will be asked to submit papers for consideration on topics from international relations, economics, history and theoretical issues as they pertain to global affairs.

Inquiries regarding Globus Mundi should be directed to Professor Martin Morales, Chair of the Department of Political Science & Global Studies at (916) 691-7114 or, via email, to morelem@crc.losrios.edu

We look forward to your continued readership.

VENEZUELA'S CORRUPTION AND THE ICC

PALOMA RAMOS

Introduction and Background to Maduro's Current Government

In the 2010s, Venezuela has been at the center of backsliding democracies in the Americas and illustrates the dangers of populism. After Hugo Chavez's death, Nicholas Maduro came to power in 2014 with severe crisis to tackle: plummeting oil prices, inflation, amongst other economic and social crises. Ever since Maduro's tenure, there has been a mass exodus of internally displaced persons because of the crumbling economy caused by Maduro's isolationist policies that have caused millions to fall into poverty and lose access to basic needs. In 2018, there was a presidential election in which there was international scrutiny because of allegations of election fraud, creating a crisis in which Juan Guaido declared himself president of Venezuela, but Maduro refused this proclamation.¹ Following these events, there have been many protests against the Maduro government.

The rule of Chavez is crucial to the devolution of Venezuela's democracy under Maduro. Maduro's rhetoric mirrors that of Chavez but went to further extremes with the legal authorities and the colectivos, causing the deaths of thousands who are political opponents of Maduro. In April 2020, the United Nations

opened an investigation suspecting that the de-facto President of Venezuela, Nicholas Maduro, and the military's top brass committed crimes against humanity.² Throughout Maduro's presidency, there have been a plethora of instances which stand in violation of the Rome Statute, most notably, the implementation of the Zamora Plan in April 2017 which specifically targeted the opposition. The investigations conducted by the OHCHR and the IACHR provide sufficient evidence for the ICC to indict Maduro and the top brass in the military for crimes against humanity under Article 7 of the Rome Statute due to deeply rooted corruption in the government, failing to address these vast human rights abuses. It is also important to note that Venezuela's constitution has incorporated many international humanitarian treaties into its laws and is a member of the Vienna Convention of Treaties³ as they must comply with customary laws and other forms of international law.

ICC Jurisdiction

This instance is not the first time the ICC has gotten involved in Venezuela. Opposition against Chavez's government requested the OTP to investigate Maduro's government in 2006. However, the ICC's Chief Prosecutor at the time, Luis Ortega, claimed the crimes committed during this time frame were outside

the ICC's jurisdiction.⁴ Venezuela's entry into the Rome Statute (July, 2002), meant any events following that date are under the ICC's jurisdiction.⁵ Since the crimes that the U.N., the IACHR, and several states that have filed for an investigation with the ICC took place since 2014, the time frame falls under the ICC's jurisdiction.. However, the ICC will not indict those accused of crimes against humanity because the allegations occurred after 2002.⁶ The preamble to the Rome Statute states that the ICC's purpose is to complement the state's judiciary. However, under Article 17, if the judiciary is proven ineffective, the ICC can get involved. Article 5 of the Rome Statute gives the ICC jurisdiction of crimes against humanity, genocide, crimes of aggression, war crimes and Article 7(1) enumerates what the ICC considers to be crimes against humanity.

Murder is the first crime enumerated in Article 7(1)(a) as an intentional killing committed without lawful jurisdiction.⁷ The lawful justifications for these murders are self-defense, coercion, necessity, or a mistake committed by the law, so the prosecutor must prove these justifications are invalid.⁸ Article 7(1)(e) involves imprisonment, which constitutes the unlawful deprivation of liberty of an individual without due process of law,⁹ or the OTP to find imprisonment. The criteria must be the detainees were arrested without a valid warrant or given a reason as to why they were arrested, filing formal charges, not telling them their procedural rights, and if their continued detention was legal.¹⁰ Article 7(1) the use of torture and rape is also prohibited; law enforcement utilizes torture as a manner by on those detained to cause severe pain and to suffer physically and mentally.¹¹ Pain caused by arrest does not constitute torture under the ICC. Finally, crimes against humanity are persecution and forced disappearances of people. Persecution could be people in political groups, not just due to an individual's ethnicity,

religion, race, nationality, gender, or cultural identity. Forced disappearances are similar to imprisonments in that it is a forced arrest or abduction that violates an individual's liberty. Furthermore, it entails a lack of information on behalf of the state or political organization regarding the individual's status. The sole purpose of forced disappearances is to remove them from the law's protection for an extended period.¹²

The Zamora Plan and Findings of the OHCHR and IACHR

The OAS highlights the Zamora Plan, which Maduro announced in April 2017 in which he sought to arm a million colectivos to respond to protests.¹³ Many of the murders, torture, and imprisonment perpetrated victims by the colectivos and security forces such as the Bolivarian National Guard (GNB), the Bolivarian National Police, and the Bolivarian National Intelligence Services were associated with anti-Maduro groups. The OHCHR's analysis of the Zamora Plan also reveals a correlation between the increased use of force on demonstrators with the Zamora Plan implementation. Allegedly, these colectivos were associated with 27 killings between April and August 2017 alone.¹⁴ Colectivos will also aid police and GNB forces in unlawful detentions, even though colectivos do not have such power under Venezuelan law. During protests, both the colectivos and security forces would shoot live munitions at the protestors, and the colectivos would detain the protestors and hand them over to the authorities. The acts committed by the colectivos were throughout the thirteen states in Venezuela, including military installations within that same period in 2017. The Zamora Plan is not publicly accessible and there are not any official documents relating to what the Plan entails specifically, The reason why is because public and military officials have referred to it in order

to justify their actions

In 2018, the U.N. Human Rights Council launched an investigation regarding human rights abuses caused by the Maduro administration since 2014. The investigation was 411 pages long and found that Maduro and Venezuela's top brass of the military implicated directly in crimes against humanity against political prisoners and opponents, including torture, rape, imprisonment, and mass killings.¹⁵ The report found that since 2014, violations to the right to an adequate standard of living related to the collapse of the economy, causing citizens to lose access to essential utilities such as electricity, gas, water, and public transportation.¹⁶ There were also instances of discrimination based on political beliefs and indiscriminate use of force levied towards protestors. According to the report, the number of people detained was at least 15,000 and subjecting prisoners to torture, cruel or inhumane treatment, including electric shocks, suffocation with plastic bags, sexual violence, and exposure to extreme temperatures.¹⁷

The IACHR also launched an investigation with the rise of imprisonments and disappearances of Venezuelans. The results from this were millions of Venezuelans fleeing were similar to those found by the OHCHR. These factors have impacted Venezuela's most vulnerable groups; children, women, the elderly, and ethnic minorities. The resolution from this report highlights the need for political reform. The OAS estimates the number of people killed during the anti-government protests between 2014 and 2017 was 131 and executed an additional 8292 due to their affiliations with political opposition.¹⁸ Both reports found that it is not just security and law enforcement who commit crimes against humanity towards the civilians; colectivos who are a civilian group who attack perceived members of the opposition on behalf of the government.

In September 2020, the U.N. issued a report confirming the reports regarding extrajudicial killings committed by Venezuelan security forces and indicated that Maduro ordered the director of the National Intelligence Service SEBIN to detain political opponents without a judicial order.¹⁹ What is troublesome about this report is that these unlawful executions by security forces have not been prosecuted in Venezuela, which caused Francisco Cox, the head of the investigation, to have the ICC consider prosecuting members involved. The report included interviews with 274 individuals, including former state officials and other witnesses, documenting 36 killings and brutal raids in the barrios, where a large part of Maduro's support originated.²⁰ Finally, the panel has reviewed around 5,094 killings committed by the security forces.²¹

A few weeks later, the United Nations extended the probe by two years due to the severity of the Maduro administration's actions. The ICC's Chief Prosecutor announced a reasonable basis there were crimes against humanity committed in Venezuela. The tribunal has been investigating Maduro's regime since 2018, but the reports issued by the U.N. have the court incentive to launch a full investigation into the matter in December 2020. The Venezuelan government has reacted negatively to these allegations by claiming it is all a political stunt.²²

Analysis

Because of the preamble and Articles 5 and 7, the ICC has a basis for jurisdiction in Venezuela because its judiciary has not prosecuted those suspected of committing human rights violations against political opponents. To avoid prosecution by the OAS, Venezuela withdrew its membership in 2017 and has accused the U.N. of acting on a political basis. ecause of their status as members of the Vienna

Convention and the Rome Statute, it will be more difficult for them to withdraw membership and avoid prosecution.²³ What marks the ICC investigation in 2018 significance is a joint request from many states to open a preliminary examination. What is significant to note is that all of the states that filed the request do not recognize Maduro as the President of Venezuela; they recognize Guaido. The causes for the crimes committed in Venezuela stem from deeply rooted corruption, making the prosecution's case even stronger and taking stronger measures to combat corruption.

Venezuela's corruption is regarded as some of the most severe worldwide, ranking at 169 out of 180 in Transparency International's 2017 report.²⁴ There have been alliances forming between high-ranking military officials, organized crime (such as the colectivos and drug traffickers), and the private sector's remaining members have taken advantage of Venezuela's weak economy. Officials have benefited from Venezuela's command economy by enriching themselves with their natural resources and finances. Indigenous people, artisan miners, soldiers, or anyone who might get in the way of enrichment have been killed or threatened.²⁵ These groups benefit from widespread corruption through fake contracts, bribery, controlling ports, natural resources, kickbacks, and financing elections and political parties. Many of these policies create an institutionalized policy that permits the looting of the state and its agencies.²⁶

The hallmark of an effective and transparent democracy is an independent judiciary. Under Maduro, this is not the case; prosecutors are threatened to take any legal action against the military members involved in CAH. Higher ranking officials will intimidate or, in some scenarios threaten, those in charge of prosecutions or investigations of corruption

scandals to prevent any whistleblowers.²⁷ It's not just members of the courts who receive threats, as witnesses are intimidated or even forcibly disappeared. The corruption in Venezuela allows for crimes against humanity to occur as it is a repercussion of getting wealthy off of the state's nationalized economy. Maduro can stay in power because of the military's loyalty to him, and by allowing the military to partake in these illicit acts, he will remain in power.²⁸

The Venezuelan government has not made any efforts to hide its actions towards political dissidents, and the Zamora Plan is a clear instance of Maduro's direct involvement. The Venezuelan government could try to portray the acts committed by the colectivos as just random acts of violence since they are a militia, but there is a huge caveat. First, the colectivos specifically attack whistleblowers, rivals, and inconvenient witnesses. The colectivos also clear out how extortion, illegal extraction such as mining or logging, and smuggling can occur. Secondly, the colectivos can be identified as a quasi-military group as they receive funding and training for the military and act in tandem with the security forces.²⁹

Conclusion

The reports by the IACHR and the OHCHR illustrate clear human rights violations by Maduro and the high-ranking members of the government have participated in, particularly with the Zamora Plan. It would be very difficult for the Venezuelan government to avoid indictment or prosecution by the ICC as they are a signatory member of the Rome Statute and have incorporated international treaties into the constitution. The joint request to the ICC by other states also stands as a landmark for potential prosecution as it is unprecedented and can give the ICC further leverage.

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V A L E T E

TAMOOR ALI

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CELINA BOURI

GABRIEL BONILLA

HANNAH BRUNKHORST

GIORDANO DESANTIS

GAVIN DONALDSON

CHYNELL FREEMAN

HUNTER MARCOCCIA

MILES MCANULTY

JAMIE VELASCO

PAULINA VILLANUEVA

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COMMERCIALIZED COOL:
JAPAN’S ATTEMPT TO
HARNESS SOFT POWER
THROUGH POP CULTURE

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Following the typical fanfare of a White House ceremony, Former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe stood attentively as he received Former President Barack Obama’s remarks on Japan’s cultural contributions. “Today is also a chance for Americans, especially our young people, to say thank you for all the things we love from Japan. Like karate and karaoke. Manga and anime. And of course, emojis”.¹ These words brought forth faint laughter from the Prime Minister and onlookers on that bright April day in 2015, but it alluded to Japan’s ambitions as a leader in a globalized world. It’s a goal that is decades in the making: to harness the soft power of Japanese culture, specifically its pop culture, through a policy called “Cool Japan” (influenced by the “Cool Britannia” project of the 1990’s).² The policy’s origin shows a government’s misunderstanding of the connection between its pop culture and soft power.

The concept of “soft power” originated in 1990 by Joseph S. Nye Jr. and was explored further in his 2004 book *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. Soft power is the

ability to influence and attract others to achieve what you want without coercion.³ It stems from a country’s culture, political ideals, and policies— provided that a state’s policies “are seen as legitimate in the eyes of others”.⁴ For Japan, soft power has its advantages. Japan’s constitution limits its military, reducing the likelihood of getting what it wants through hard power. Soft power can deter others from looking too closely at the committed atrocities of the past or perhaps certain islands a state claims ownership of. Pop culture can be utilized to create Japan’s desired image; as a university student from Nanjing said in 1999, “When I read Japanese comics, I don’t think about the Rape of Nanjing”.⁵

Culture is an attractive resource of soft power in the eyes of the world, but was not harnessed in Japan before the new millennium despite the western fervor for the state’s creative works. Following over two centuries of isolationism in Japan known as the *sakoku* period,⁶ British and American artists of the mid 1800’s became enamored with traditional Japanese art, and bombarded the global art market until said artists would emulate the style for themselves.⁷

Flash forward to the mid-twentieth century, the 1960’s introduced the world to Japanese animation through global syndication of early anime such as Astro Boy and Speed Racer, as well as kaiju monster movies like Godzilla. ⁸ In the 1980’s, American businessmen were clamoring to study the business culture and practices of their successful Japanese counterparts.

That same decade saw an economic boom in Japan: a product of postwar industrialization and modernization. Much of this success is credited to the increase of manufacturing and exports of Japanese automobiles and consumer electronics. Production was facilitated by a government policy which cherry picked businesses by offering loans to companies in industries considered imperative to fostering Japan’s development. ⁹ The widespread popularity of Toyota cars and Sony Walkman opened the door to the global market, and influenced the government to restrict “imports to guarantee local markets”. ¹⁰ The moniker “Made in Japan” attached to every product was an assurance of quality that seemed to remove the skeletons out of Japan’s postwar closet, at least for those outside of East Asia.

Nevertheless, Japan’s pop culture had made its way to China in the 1980’s. Japanese cartoons were substituted to fill the slots of children’s programming in China, specifically Hong Kong. ¹¹ One of the most popular being Doraemon, based on the 1970 manga about a titular blue, catlike robot from the twenty-second century who goes on adventures with his friends through his “Anywhere Door”. To quote Nakano Yoshiko in Shared Memories: Japanese Pop Culture in China, “Doraemon, may be the most memorable Japanese export for Asians under the age of thirty”. ¹² The 50-year-old manga is still in extreme popularity today with an upsurge in copies sold during the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, Japan

alone accounted for Volume 1’s 11,000 copies sold in March of 2020. ¹³ Unlike Japanese dramas, which were scorned by many Chinese adults in the 1980’s, Doraemon and fellow anime characters of the day were often unrecognizable as being uniquely Japanese, and therefore avoided the censorship of many Chinese parents. Anime offered the youngest of Asian middle class children an exposure to Japanese life, with characters children could aspire to be like. For the children of 1980’s China, anime became an attraction of Japan’s culture— which is again, imperative to soft power.

Japan’s rapid growth nourished an insatiable demand for stocks and property, resulting in the economic bubble of 1986. ¹⁴ The bubble materialized during a decline in Japanese manufacturing and an increase in unemployment and labor unions, causing the country to lose its edge in the great, international competition. ¹⁵ Firms sought after the lower labor costs abroad and began to cement their businesses overseas. The increase in unemployment when combined with the collapse of real estate and stock prices, as well as the deterioration of wage level, caused the bubble to burst: creating the period between 1991-2000 known in Japan as the “lost decade”.¹⁶

As reported in “Cool Japan” as the Next Future of Post-Industrial Japan?, the lost decade saw a drastic decrease in Japan’s output per capita growth: decreasing to as low as 0.5% while the global average was 3.2%. The 1997 Asian Financial Crisis also assisted in Japan’s poor economy, losing a quarter of its exports to other East Asian nations. Though the manufacturing industry continues to be the driving source of Japan’s economy today, the bursting bubble caused a major decline in cities once considered to be manufacturing hubs: an industry which has been subsidized by Japan since 1990. The

government's macroeconomic policies did little to stimulate the staggering economy, and would instead need comprehensive structural reform.

Despite the economic downturn, Japanese pop culture began broader distribution and circulation in the nineties, when culture-related industries ventured towards overseas markets. ¹⁷ The syndication of anime to the West was able to achieve success through the act of mukokuseki, “erasing the national identity from cultural products sold outside Japan” in order to remove or wash out Japanese cultural identifiers. ¹⁸ In order to achieve mukokuseki, anime began the process of localization: in which the source text of a product is edited to “match the linguistic and cultural norms of the target country”. ¹⁹ For many English speaking audiences, American actors replaced their Japanese counterparts in shows like Power Rangers, known in Japan as Super Sentai. In another instance, Bishoujo Senshi Sailor Moon became Sailor Moon, featuring a teen protagonist no longer named “Usagi”, but “Serena”: an American-coded girl who used modern American slang. The most memorable American localization change was in Pokémon: in which a character offers another character a “jelly filled donut” when the food depicted was actually onigiri, an iconic Japanese traditional food made of white rice, wrapped in seaweed within a triangular shape. ²⁰

Even Nye noticed the increased popularity of anime marketed to children in the 1990’s. “Japanese images dominated children’s dreams quite handily over the last five years with their mix of cuteness and power”. ²¹ No Japanese intellectual property excelled in “cuteness and power” more than the aforementioned Pokémon: a worldwide phenomenon that has globally sold more than 260 million video games, shipped over 21.5 billion trading cards to 74 countries; and has sold its characters on toys, food, backpacks, tie-in campaigns,

stationary, and more. ²² Pokémon was a successful patron of mukokuseki and reaped its benefits. The franchise’s first American box office release earned more than \$80 million in 1999 and has produced more than seventeen films since. ²³ The Japanese-produced sensation has totaled more than \$20 billion worldwide. ²⁴ Despite being less than three decades old, Pokémon’s notorious mascot Pikachu is associated as a pop cultural icon to rival America’s Mickey Mouse in the public consciousness. ²⁵

The act of mukokuseki allowed Japanese content to reach a broader audience around the world, a necessity to a nation that desires a wide reach in soft power. But mukokuseki could arguably be a detriment: by erasing cultural iconography, a product loses its direct connection to the nation it was exported by, thereby losing out on potential soft power. Yet, children of the late 90’s were well aware of Pokémon’s Japanese origins and often expressed positivity towards Japan. ²⁶ Unlike Chinese parents of the 1980’s, American parents had some understanding of where these cute monsters were coming from. But as one mother stated: “[T]he fact that it comes from Japan, well-- that doesn’t matter one way or another. In the end, it’s only a toy”. ²⁷

The globalization of Japanese pop culture, like Pokémon, does not directly translate to soft power, though some may argue against that. Just because Pokémon has received global popularity, its popularity does not necessarily mean Japan will achieve the policy outcomes it wishes. In order to be considered soft power, pop culture must be directly tied to the culture or country it originates from through some form of policy or practice. It cannot be overstated how much Pokémon’s massive popularity opened the floodgates to Japanese pop culture in the West, and how little was done to harness it as a cultural resource of soft

power. Many in Japan’s bureaucracy dismissed the idea as insignificant and therefore, unable to take such soft power policy concepts seriously.

The Japanese government began to notice the increased popularity of its contemporary pop culture in the new millennium. As stated in, The Japanese Developmental State, The Ministry of Education’s 2000 White Paper recognized anime and manga as a member of Japan’s traditional culture.²⁸ The bubble economy of the 90’s had increased globalization in Japan, opening the door to Japanese women and youth to develop their own contributions to popular culture. One example being Hiromu Arakawa, a female manga artist who broke through the male dominated, teen male targeted shounen genre.²⁹ Her manga, Full Metal Alchemist has sold over 70 million copies internationally.³⁰ By 2002, Shonen Jump, Japan’s bestselling weekly manga, began publishing in the USA distributing more than 500,000 copies per issue per month.³¹ That same year, Douglas McGray’s Foreign Policy article “Japan’s Gross National Cool” was published. The title was a play on the term gross national product (or GNP), meaning in this case to represent the measure of a country’s attractiveness as applied to soft power.

The article emphasized thus: “it is hard to imagine that Japan will be content to remain with so much medium and so little message”.³² This notion would later be refuted by Kondo Seiichi: the first director general of the Public Diplomacy Department, who stated Douglas’ view was a product of “a conventional American mindset”.³³ “Japanese-style public diplomacy may appear weak,” said Seiichi in Wielding Soft Power: The Key Stages of Transmission and Reception, “but it is far from being an inadequate policy by any means.”³⁴ While bureaucrats rode the coattails of Japan’s cultural success, the role of local distributors, consumers, and the distribution process were

neglected.

Nevertheless, Japan saw the benefit to aiding the content industries: industries that produced anime, music, video games, manga, drama and movies. 2003 was also the year Jun’ichiro Koizumi gave his first speech to the Diet as Prime Minister. He continued his previously stated intent to implement a policy to maximize the competitiveness of Japan’s creative industries.³⁵ Koizumi remarked on the success of Hayao Miyazaki’s Spirited Away, a full-length animated film rife with Japanese folklore that received the Grand Prize at Berlin’s International Film Festival and later, the 2003 Oscar for Best Animated Feature Film.^{36 37}

Using the film as an example, he expressed the need to promote Japan’s intellectual properties and would further the establishment of the Intellectual Property Strategy Headquarters (IPSH). It was created to aid Japan’s cultural industries and act as an intermediary between agencies and ministries that may inhibit the progress of those industries from achieving their goals. Following its enactment, IPSH noted how the content industries were imperative “due to their market size, economic ripple effects and the overseas projection of soft power”.³⁸ This indicates a greater shift in Japan’s intentions to harness the soft power of its culture. However, it should be noted that the content industries represented only 2 percent of Japan’s GDP, one percent lower than the international average.³⁹ If the government truly wanted to achieve the outcomes it desired, it would need to create concise strategies coupled with strong, skillful leadership.

In June of 2004, the Diet enacted The Content Industries Promotion Law. It was overseen by five Japanese ministries and organizations that cooperated in implementing the new Cool Japan policy. Little emphasis should be placed

on the word “cooperation”, however. Japan’s bureaucracy invites a system of competition wherein officials squabble over their jurisdictional domains and do little to solve the overarching goals of the nation’s policies.

Many of the conflicts IPSH mediated arose out of the desperation each governmental body had to secure more funding from the Cabinet Office. With so many state actors involved, and no dedicated Cool Japan ministry, the possibility of success became uncertain. In 2005, Prime Minister Koizumi established the Promotion of Cultural Diplomacy project, consisting of seventeen experts who proposed a policy that “defined harmony, compassion, and coexistence, among others, as important values for Japan– in other words, as resources of soft power”.⁴⁰ The proposal also saw pop culture as a “gateway” to broader forms of Japanese culture. By 2006, Japan’s cultural exports exceeded the combined total of its exports and cultural imports.⁴¹

No other state actor was more enthusiastic about promoting Japan’s pop culture than Minister of Foreign Affairs and later Prime Minister Taro Aso, a man purported to read over twenty manga a week.⁴² Aso saw the potential for anime and manga to act as a diplomatic ally, stating: “cultural diplomacy that fails to take advantage of pop culture is not really worthy of being called ‘cultural diplomacy’”.⁴³ He desired to use the ministry of Foreign Affairs, and not the Agency for Cultural Affairs, to partner with cultural industries and endeavored to establish The International Manga Award, won by mainland Chinese artists in its initial two years.⁴⁴ Prior to being voted out of office in 2009, Prime Minister Aso set forth plans to invest in Japan’s soft power industries with the hope to increase employment over a twelve-year period. While the plan died shortly after his departure, the concept of Cool Japan survived.

Aso’s goals of pop culture diplomacy would continue on in the following decade. Even in 2011, Japan’s economy was still encumbered with the lingering shadows of the lost decade. The economic situation worsened following the devastating earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear disaster in Fukushima. Combined with an aging society, it was clear Japan needed to move beyond its domestic markets.⁴⁵ The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) saw Cool Japan as the answer. On November 25, 2013, agencies within METI established the Cool Japan Fund (CJF) to increase the exports of cultural industries overseas. It also was made in the hopes of enticing risk-averse investors to help in overseas expansion of small and medium enterprises who are often inexperienced in foreign markets. The Fund operates through equity investments of cherry picked projects, supporting for an average of five to seven years. The Fund's targeted goal was to achieve net profits of \$85 billion by 2020.⁴⁶ CJF has funded projects in countries such as China, South Korea, Indonesia, Vietnam, Saudi Arabia, France, Brazil, Italy, and India.

Overall, the Cool Japan Fund’s efforts abroad have had little to moderate success. The \$8.76 million CJF-funded remodeling of a store in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia experienced difficulties early on. In the store’s initial year, the April-June quarterly report showed an operating loss that was triple CJF-partnered Isetan Mitsukoshi Holdings’ expectations.⁴⁷ Ten out of the eighteen projects funded in 2016 underperformed, especially those tied to CJF leadership.⁴⁸ The store promotes solely Japanese products with an emphasis on harmony as an internal theme; as of 2018, it has achieved popularity among the locals.⁴⁹ One of its best successes came through a collaboration between the fund and the fashion industry. The fund selected fifteen Harajuku-based fashion stores to sell their products as a collective in a

The fund selected fifteen Harajuku-based fashion stores to sell their products as a collective in a Singaporean mall, generating twenty million yen in its first three months.⁵⁰ The success would lead the government to grant subsidies to the selected suppliers for a distribution channel to Singapore.

The policy of Cool Japan extended beyond the CJF. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has put great importance towards London, Sao Paulo, and Los Angeles through the Japan House initiative: a project that establishes Japanese cultural centers, producing galleries, exhibitions, and events celebrating Japan.⁵¹ However, the high prices of the museum store and restaurant make the cultural exports of Japan both high quality and inaccessible to the general public. This may continue to send the message that Japan is a country of high quality standards, but it could also be perceived as pretentious. Private corporate attempts to market overseas also suffer a similar issue. Tokyo fashion is fueled by its subcultures, and those styles may be difficult to translate from high fashion to everyday wear. Angelic Pretty, an alternative fashion brand based on “Lolita” subculture where girls are adorned in “adorable clothing covered in lace, frills and ribbon like a fairytale princess you dreamed about as a little girl”, has maintained stores in Paris, Shanghai, and San Francisco since 2010.⁵² Dress prices range from \$300 to \$435 with little variation in sizes, demonstrating distinctly Japanese contemporary fashion as exclusive, luxury items inaccessible to the broader public.

As stated previously, the goal of soft power is to get what you want, and one of Japan’s wants was tourism. Japanese pop (J-pop) group and 2010 tourism ambassador of Japan, Arashi, partnered with Japan Airlines to promote domestic locations using the group’s music and image.⁵³ From 2013 to 2018, Japan witnessed an international tourism boom with a record

breaking 31 million tourists.⁵⁴ Anime tourism (the visiting of anime-themed places including museums, cafes, theme parks, bathhouses, and more) has contributed to the influx of tourists. Many anime and manga are set in or inspired by real life locations in Japan, and have become tourism hotspots and photo-ops. A 2018 Japan Tourism Agency survey indicated 4.6 percent of its polled 140,000 tourists had visited anime or movie sites on their vacation.⁵⁵

The idea of “Cool” Japan is nebulous, and like any attempt at soft power, it is difficult to quantify. One might look to tourism as a way to measure its success. Two million tourists from Hong Kong visited in 2017 alone. The visitors consisted of anime enthusiasts and millennials, representing about 29% of Hong Kong’s total population.⁵⁶ Researchers from The Hong Kong Polytechnic University’s School of Hotel and Tourism Management found those who consumed anime are more motivated to travel to Japan, seeing the country with a more positive outlook in proportion to time spent watching— “animation” was stated to be the greatest reason to visit.⁵⁷ While it is difficult to draw a direct connection between Cool Japan and the tourism boom, the study demonstrates a fundamental aspect of achieving soft power through popular culture. Anime was able to shift the audience’s perception of the nation as a destination worth visiting.

However, a nation that exports its pop culture has no control over a targeted audience’s perception or reception of a product, let alone its influence. For example, the globally popular Attack on Titan manga and anime series is recognized by some as having “anti-Korean, nationalist, pro-Japan subtext, parallels to anti-Semitic conspiracy theories, and subtextual references to Nazi Germany”,⁵⁸ is additionally, an anime favored by those among the American Alt-Right.⁵⁹ In 2009, the South Korean parliament halted broadcasting of Axis Powers:

Hetalia, an anime which appropriates major historical events through the lens of the anthropomorphized Axis Powers of Italy, Japan, and Germany as the main protagonists.⁶⁰ Members of parliament were outraged by the representation of South Korea, describing it as “criminal discrimination”.⁶¹

Additionally, how a policy or product is pushed by the state that exports it can make the difference between an audience consuming it as pop culture or rejecting it as propaganda or cultural hegemony. Chinese media criticized the International Manga Award, questioning Japan’s “right” to judge who is the best manga artist in the world.⁶² Regardless of how immeasurable soft power is, no “amount” of soft power can turn an enemy to an ally. One cannot simply phone their foreign ministry and expect a rapid deployment of cuddly Pikachu plushies to settle disputes between adversaries.

Internal public perception of Cool Japan has also hindered the policy. Beyond the views of bureaucracy, Cool Japan had to cross the threshold of a widespread belief that Japanese culture and language is too difficult for foreigners to understand, therefore its pop culture would also suffer the same inaccessibility.⁶³ Many misconstrued the policy as an effort to make foreigners in Asia and beyond buy more Japanese manga; the lack of domestic promotion did little to aid public understanding.⁶⁴ Less than half of those interviewed by Rikkyo University believed Cool Japan would be an important aspect of Japan’s economy.⁶⁵

The federal commercialization of “coolness” is a high topic of scrutiny. What is considered cool usually rises from the depths of a society’s youth culture in an organic manner, not cherry picked by government officials ready to make a profit. Some disparage the project as profiteering off of Japanese girl subcultures as

well as the hyper sexualization and hyper cuteness of women.⁶⁶ With so many Western brands drawn to the city’s fashion subcultures and design houses, it’s clear to Japanese trendsetters: “most global trends start in Tokyo”.⁶⁷ Commodifying cool could make Tokyo fashion appear artificial, and no longer viable for brands and fashion magazines in search of the next big style piece.

The CJF is not without its competition too, political scientist Kent Calder remarked that Beijing and Seoul are more adept at establishing “agenda setting centers” abroad.⁶⁸ Particularly, Tokyo officials have feared that South Korea’s cultural exports cast an imposing shadow over Japan as a soft power super power. The government was well aware of South Korea’s increasing potential. When creating the Cool Japan Fund, METI paid particular attention to the pop culture related policies of the South Korean government, regarding it as a model to emulate.⁶⁹ Should Japan lose out to South Korea and China on soft power, it stands to lose the global perception of its cultural sphere of influence.

The Japanese government initially hoped to invest in the Cool Japan Fund for a period of ten years. As of 2019, it is still footing the bill. The Cool Japan Fund’s finances amounted to 72.1 billion yen from the government and only 10.7 billion yen from private companies.⁷⁰ It has invested in thirty-eight projects with the greatest priority given to expanding media and content industries, but also supports food, fashion, and regional product industries. Japan’s animation industry remains as a major focus, and there is much to be said about the successes and concerns of this endeavor, and the industry at large. The global anime market (including merchandising, which makes up a great deal of the revenue) hit an estimated \$24 billion in profits by 2019,⁷¹ and similar to the aforementioned Doraemon manga, anime has

achieved great success in the binge watching boom caused by the pandemic. Netflix has stated the number of anime-streaming households on its platform increased by over half in 2020.⁷² Streaming services and production companies in China have fully booked and paid large premiums to Japanese animation studios for years in advance. Despite this seemingly lucrative business, many believe the industry faces collapse due to cultural and structural problems, as well as the inability of the government (including the CJF) to properly aid the industry’s bottom line.

Japan’s animation industry is chiefly structured so that coalitions of anime’s financiers (those in industries that reap the benefits of anime merchandising such as toys and comics) profit the most through royalties, especially when a hit is created. As is the case with streaming services and foreign production companies, production studios are given a set fee and sent off to create the show or film. These studios are less inclined to negotiate for better pay, even when a major hit happens. Instead, companies are more likely to wring out as much as they can from young talent who are often hired as freelancers with little pay, creating a revolving door of young talent that cannot simultaneously sustain the industry’s ruthless demands and have a productive life outside of it.

To put it in a focused perspective, the lowest paying job for illustrators is at best \$200 a month, and the industry-made culture exacerbates Japan’s already intense work ethic to degrees that break the country’s own labor regulations. Many employees are proud of this devotion to finishing their projects before a looming deadline even if it came at the risk to their physical and mental health or having to sleep under their studio desks for weeks at a time. Due to such low wages, many employees find it difficult just to afford housing, which has led to nonprofits that assist in housing industry

employees such as those run by computer animator and activist Jun Sugawara who criticized the government, specifically the Cool Japan Fund, on the ineffectiveness of its strategies in bettering industry conditions. Nevertheless, Japan’s Labor Ministry has stated that it unable to aid employees unless they file claims directly, which leaves a lot of responsibility on individuals to change a system that is in dire need of greater structural reform if it wishes to sustain itself long after the CJF’s lifespan. Authorities in the CJF, the national government, and local governments have it within their power to aid in shifting the anime industry’s labor practices, and chooses not to.

While the Japanese government has woken up to the global interest of its cultural products, there is great doubt as to if it has truly succeeded in implementing a policy that generates and exploits its soft power to the benefit of the state. With a policy resting on the shoulders of the ever changing and ever ambiguous “cool”, coupled with much domestic confusion of what such a policy even is, it’s little wonder why the Cool Japan Fund is seen by some as a “meaningless and irrelevant policy”.⁷³ One has to question whether a soft power policy aimed at aiding the creative industries is worth having if it does not change the conditions of those at the bottom rung of the industry it is trying so heavily to support. Simply put, if a state’s soft power does not benefit its people, then it was never “cool” to begin with.

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HUMAN RIGHTS: A TROJAN HORSE OF NEO-COLONIALISM

STEVEN DAVIS

In a nationally televised speech six months prior to the invasion of Iraq, President George W. Bush proclaimed that “America believes that all people are entitled to hope and human rights, to the nonnegotiable demands of human dignity.”^[1] Indeed, America, and the West writ large, has long thought of itself as a political order that upholds human rights. In Western liberal democracies, protections, such equal treatment under the law or the freedom to practice one’s religion, are enshrined in the respective legislation, court rulings, or constitutions of the practicing country. Yet the United States does not merely claim to uphold human rights within the confines of its own borders, it posits itself as an international vanguard of human rights. In the same speech, Bush asserted “People everywhere prefer freedom to slavery, prosperity to squalor, self-government to the rule of terror and torture.... If military action is necessary, the United States and our allies will help the Iraqi people rebuild their economy and create the institutions of liberty in a unified Iraq, at peace with its neighbors.”^[2] The French philosopher Michel Foucault argued that each society upholds its own “regime of truth”.^[3] Truth, and the values that we derive from this truth are

socially constructed by the prevailing relations of power in any given society. In medieval Europe, truth was established through divine revelation as articulated by the Catholic Church; the righteousness of leaders was therefore based in part on their relationship with the Vatican. Today, Americans judge the righteousness of governments on the basis of their fidelity to protecting the human rights of their citizens; North Korea is ruled by an “evil”, tyrannical regime that brutalizes its people while Canada is a benevolent country of liberty and prosperity. And just as Catholic countries utilized perceived heresy as a justification for religious crusades, so too has the United States weaponized violations of human rights to legitimize their “humanitarian interventions”. While the nature of this new *casus belli* is largely seen by liberals as proof of the inevitable “progress” of the human race since it dispenses with the religious superstition and prejudice of epochs past, the “universalization” of human rights and its role in the foreign policy of the United States is a modern iteration of colonialism that fails to guarantee human security and safety. Rather, this articulation of human rights promotes imperialist wars of intervention that engender instability and suffering in the intervened countries. This

article will begin with a brief history of the concept of human rights that demonstrates its Eurocentric baggage before moving into a theoretical critique. I will utilize works from the decolonization movement to analyze the human rights rhetoric surrounding various military actions undertaken by the United States as case studies to substantiate this point. This will then be employed to establish the disingenuous concern the American military apparatus has cultivated for marginalized groups such as the LGBT community and women in order to gain credence among the political left. The essay will conclude with an “alternative” to human rights that seeks to guarantee basic human dignity without the pitfalls of contemporary human rights discourse.

While origin of inalienable human rights is generally located with Locke and the Enlightenment, the spread of Christianity and the erosion of paganism played a vital role in its development. In Ancient Greece and Rome, the law was understood not as an aggregation of the rules of conduct that emanated from morality but as a means of deducing the optimal method of facilitating equity and harmony within society. Plato’s articulation of justice “represented good proportion, the equitable proportion between distributed possessions and duties.”^[4] The same principle was found in Roman law. As Cicero observes, the aim of the law was “to maintain among citizens, in the distribution of goods and in legal cases, a just proportion resting on the laws and customs.”^[5] In antiquity, the law treated human nature as a point of reference but it never treated the individual and their wellbeing as independent of all social relationships. Furthermore, it did not presuppose a “universal” justice or a set of rights that existed outside of social life. Thus, this practice of law never treated individuals as independent entities deserving of certain immutable protections. Jean-Pierre Vernant notes “The Greeks are totally deprived of this

idea of a singular individual, the bearer of universal and inalienable rights.”^[6] This worldview eventually capitulated to Christianity, which posited that every human life had inherent value due to their possession of a soul and that soul’s relationship with the creator. The worthiness a person was no longer contingent on their position within that society but was instead guaranteed through God’s benevolent grace. This treatment of the soul infused Christianity with a profoundly individualistic ethos which that facilitates the use of reason and therefore the capability of deducing the morally correct choice. No longer is the collective body of the social conflated with the ontological condition of individual man; the Augustinian division of the heavenly and earthly city makes this distinction abundantly clear. Michel Villey writes “The Christian ceases to be a part of the political organism, he is a totality, an infinity, a value in himself.... An end superior to the temporal ends of politics and his person transcends the state.”^[7] Christianity thus induces a propensity towards self-evaluation in Western thought, a development which will later naturally give rise to human rights. Moreover, the monotheistic nature of Christianity introduced a fundamental ontological equality among men as they are equally the sons and daughters of the creator. Oliver Mongin observed that “It is indisputable that the egalitarianism which underlies the natural law of belonging to a human community cannot be separated from its Judeo-Christian context.”^[8] The Christian “love” of one’s neighbor does not stop merely at one’s immediate neighbor. On a metaphysical level, this love knows no boundaries, a feature which will mirror America’s insatiable appetite to spread “human rights” to all corners of the world. The Christian imperative demands that one helps those who suffer on the basis of compassion in matters of both body and soul. This Christian universalism lays the epistemological

foundation for liberal equality— a fundamental tenant of human rights, as well as the colonial impulse to subjugate the other to its value system.

To better understand Christianity’s impact on human rights, a distinction between objective rights and subjective rights must be delineated. Objective rights state what is right (or wrong) in general: the moral obligation to obey your parents, to respect authority, or to serve one’s country. Subjective rights, on the other hand, are attributable to a subject: the right to free speech, the right to a fair trial, and the right to be free from racial discrimination. These rights are ones each individual possesses by virtue of being human. The aforementioned development of Christianity facilitated the emergence of this subjective law. Theological scholars such as William Ockham objected to the classical formulation of law on justice on the grounds that a morality constituted in social harmony diminished the role of God since God would, by definition, be subjugated to the order of things.^[9] Consequently, Christian natural law favors divine will over the harmonious order that constituted Greeks and Roman morality. Moreover, because Christianity presupposes humanity is made in the image of God, it is inevitable that Christians locate the will of God in that of the individual. Christianity therefore resulted in a universal morality of abstract rights originating from this individual will.

The Protestant Reformation further intensified the individualistic morality of Christianity by emphasizing one’s personal relationship with Jesus Christ and rejecting the role of the priest as an interlocutor between God and his subjects.^[10] This, combined with scientific innovations, gave rise to the Enlightenment wherein the first formal declaration of human rights was articulated in John Locke’s *Two Treatises of Government*. John Locke made the connection between Christianity and human

rights explicit, writing “He that in obedience to this command of God, subdued, tilled and sowed any part of it, thereby annexed to it something that was his property, which another had no title to, nor could without injury take from him.”^[11] References to the divine notwithstanding, the Enlightenment reflected an increasingly secular and empiricist epistemology and ethics for the Western world; the rise of scientists and mathematicians such as Newton and Descartes served as veritable proof that humans were capable of improving their condition through logic, deduction and reason. Locke himself argued knowledge was derived from the senses and that, through pattern recognition and reason, humans could bring forth social arrangements that were mutually beneficial in the form of the social contract. This social contract contained a primordial human rights as it guaranteed a right to life and property, among other such matters.

The expansion of colonialism and mercantilism during this era is no coincidence; they essentially acted as a positive feedback loop in relation to human rights in two key ways. First, Locke’s “rights” were predicated on the assumption of the “rational man”; the gift of rationality was not extended to the colonized other. It should therefore come as surprise that the United States and France, countries that were among the first to formally guarantee rights in their legal process, were among the last to abolish slavery. The juxtaposition of the civilized European against the Black or Indian “savage” further entrenched the supposed reason of the West (as well as slavery) and, by extension, the rights they had guaranteed to themselves; the slaves and Indians were, of course, incapable of reason. Second, the colonial practices of Europe greatly enriched the colonizing countries and in particular the developing bourgeoisie. Empowered by this wealth, the bourgeoisie lobbied for increased political rights and attempted to weaken the

historical hegemony of the church and monarchies in their respective countries, as demonstrated by the English Bill of Rights among other legal documents.^[12] White colonists in America would also eventually rebel and establish their own legal protections— further solidifying the link between colonialism and human rights. The American was therefore treated as a model for the French Revolution and the Declaration of the Rights of Man. Although the revolutionary universalism of France eventually gave way to a more moderate conservative republicanism, it was nevertheless tremendously impactful in engendering the secularization of human rights.

The next era of significance to the cultivation of rights was that of industrial capitalism. Although 17th and 18th century saw an increased advancement of rights, this privilege was almost entirely restricted to property owners. The socialist thinkers Marx and Engels challenged the rationalism of the rights hitherto established in the Western world and called for the universal emancipation of the working class and “questioned the inequality engendered by the notion of property rights.”^[13] This era was characterized by popular uprisings that sought to expand both the economic and political status of the industrial proletariat and agrarian peasants. The socialist contribution to human rights took the form of enfranchisement, labor protections (including restrictions on child labor), universal male suffrage, and democratization.^[14] The international socialist project ultimately capitulated to nationalism upon the outbreak of World War I, but their contributions to social justice and workers’ rights remain salient to this day.

The cessation of World War I catalyzed an enormous effort to institutionalize human rights. The triumph of communism in Russia and their “guarantee” of international socialism in the form of a 1918 human rights declaration

paralleled the establishment of the League of Nations, which was predicated on a progressive liberal understanding of human rights. The failure of each of these respective visions led to what is arguably the largest-scale violation of human rights in the form of fascism and World War II. Stalin’s rise to power in Russia caused a shift away from international socialism to that of a more particularist perspective: “socialism in one country”. This Soviet doctrine necessitated an ontological enemy in the form of the international bourgeoisie subjected Russia to an unrelenting siege. Consequently, the theory went, socialism must be consolidated in Russia before it could ever hope to spread to other countries. This was used to “justify mass terror against the peasantry and to suppress all internal opposition”^[15]. The liberals too attempted to establish their own kind of international order that would guarantee peace and human rights. Woodrow Wilson purportedly rejected the distribution of power on the basis of violence, instead arguing that the strength of a unified international community could uphold a peace based on “equality of rights”, in the form of the League of Nations^[16]. Ultimately, this project failed miserably; Wilson’s attempt to have America become a member of the League was blocked by the Senate, rendering the League functionally useless. This author submits that even if Wilson was capable of generating the political capital necessary for the United States to join and uphold the League of Nations, the naive notion of an international order without violence would have given way to a more pragmatic security strategy that would willingly dispense violence to uphold its own hegemony. This would be clearly demonstrated during the Cold War. The failures by both liberals and socialists to establish a viable mechanism for enforcing human rights provided fertile ground for the fascist movements that would precede World War II. Despite the communists supposed opposition to this liberal order, it nevertheless

relied on the same ontological framings of “freedom” and “oppression” to enact its violence on the world and consequently betrayed its own project.

Like the end of World War I, the cessation of hostilities at the conclusion of World War II provided yet another impetus to establish international bodies and alliances that would guarantee human rights and promote peace by discouraging hostile actors. World War II had inflicted tremendous costs on every belligerent save the United States, who now produced half of the world’s commodities and were an unparalleled military power due to their monopoly on nuclear weapons. The unprecedented amount of bloodshed and destruction had also created strong support among policy makers for liberal internationalism; political elites desired a world order that would guarantee political and economic liberty while maintaining security and peace. The Soviet Union, newly empowered by their massive territorial acquisition, also set up their own international structure in the form of the Warsaw Pact. Any pretense of “human rights” and “security” was soon dropped, however, as the decolonization movement erupted. Both the United States and the USSR backed autocrats and funded violent insurgents in order to shore up their political power by undermining the other respective superpower. The Machiavellian nature of this geopolitical posturing was palpable; the Soviet Union backed regimes in places like Nigeria and Ethiopia that had historically repressed socialist dissidents.^{[17][18]} Both the United States and the USSR defended their actions on the basis that they were preserving the intervened nation’s self-determination, juxtaposing themselves against that of the other superpower whom working to undermine these lofty ideals by subordinating the intervened country to the international bourgeoisie or an oppressive communist regime. As a result, the doctrine of

“self-determination” and national sovereignty made its way into human rights discourse.

The final major development of human rights emerged in the post-Cold War era of globalization. The collapse of the Soviet Union gave cause for celebration among liberal internationalists. Francis Fukayama famously declared that the world had entered the “end of history”^[19] as liberal democracy was empirically proven to be the ideal mode of governance. This era was marked by proliferation of humanitarian non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that lobbied on behalf of various causes throughout the world. Even so, “contention over the benefits of globalization continues to divide the human rights community.”^[20] A more connected world is supposedly detrimental to violent authoritarian regimes, but globalization stoked new anxieties that have led to a widespread violation of human rights. Al Qaeda launched their attack on the World Trade Center in part because the United States was occupying land considered sacrosanct to Muslims. The United States responded to these attacks with the War on Terror, a war that has led to a plethora of destructive military interventions in the Middle East and Asia.

With the political and intellectual context of human rights established, a critique of such human rights can come to fruition. To begin, we should be immediately suspicious of any “universal” claim to these rights (that is, people all across the globe are entitled to certain legal protections) given its inexorable connection with Christianity and colonialism. This is not even denied by many defenders of human rights. Anthony Pagden claims the modern notion of human rights “is a development of the older notion of natural rights that found its present form in the European struggle to legitimize its overseas empire.”^[21] For Pagden, human rights cannot be separated from the

system of liberal democracy and, as a result, the world should prioritize the Western understanding of humanity as the foundation for evaluating morality. The ethical egregiousness of this statement goes beyond mere political incorrectness and European chauvinism. The ontological primacy of Western institutions in determining human rights empowers these nations to define human rights and, by extension, what constitutes a violation of said human rights to further a specific political end. The concepts of “man” as articulated by the European humanists facilitated the detachment of the individual from the authority and scrutiny of the Catholic Church. In relation to the 21st century, we can understand human rights not as formalized legal guarantees but as a vehicle for postmodern subjectivity. As Douzinas points out, “Humanity does not determine who enjoys human rights; rather it is human rights that ‘construct humans’”.^[22] Human rights as articulated by the Western hegemon makes a demand that the other reflect the West’s own identity and, in doing so, recognize and affirm the West’s perception of itself. Western subjectivity envisions itself as a “universal humanitarianism” that unites all people and all nations. In doing so, the West paradoxically dehumanizes the other to reduce the political costs of war; they will literally call the actions of dictators and terrorist groups “inhumane” or “barbaric”. The West becomes the actor and the nations of interventions the passive recipient, devoid of agency and waiting to be “liberated” so that they may experience the benevolent regime of American-endorsed human rights. Rather than an international order of willing states, this utopian, universalist vision is reminiscent of the colonial empires “missionary” justification to bring Christianity to the unenlightened savages. The “international” nature of these Western institutions creates its own perverse justification; by framing their actions as one

that is representative and in the interests of the human race, the West, particularly America, manufactures consent, to borrow Chomsky’s wording, from the inhabitants of the country they are currently invading. The George W. Bush quote is worth repeating: “People everywhere prefer freedom to slavery, prosperity to squalor, self-government to the rule of terror and torture.... If military action is necessary, the United States and our allies will help the Iraqi people rebuild their economy and create the institutions of liberty in a unified Iraq, at peace with its neighbors.” Military intervention is not only justified on behalf of the interests of “struggling” nations and their inhabitants but on behalf of social groups (that belong to no singular state or country) that have historically been marginalized. The transient and international distribution of these groups has unsurprisingly been exploited by the United States security apparatus.

Jasbir Puar has noted that Western powers often rely on “homonationalism” in order to dehumanize the Muslim “other”.^[23] This was recently demonstrated in the 2016 U.S. Presidential campaign when Republicans argued that their aggressive stance towards radical Islam was in the LGBT community’s best interests due to the Islamic State’s persecution of homosexuals. More alarmingly, however, is the historical role so called “progressives” have played in advancing the neo-colonial ventures of the United States by condemning nations such as Iran for a failure to ensure the “rights” of the LGBT community and, consequently, justifying military action against them. The International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA) was founded in 1978 as a response, in part, to the Iranian revolution. This organization, among others, has contributed to an orientalist understanding of Middle Eastern sexuality. Lisa Power, co-secretary of the ILGA, argues “most Islamic cultures don’t take kindly to organized

homosexuality, even though male homoeroticism is deep within their cultural roots.”^[24] Yet, as Foucault famously observed, it is precisely the concepts of “heterosexuality” and “homosexuality” that were born out of a Western epistemology and the “psychiatrization” of sexuality.^[25] The rhetoric of ILGA and other pro-LGBT NGO’s assumes the category of homosexual/gay/lesbian is a universal one that can be imposed across time and space. In truth, this is an anachronistic way of understanding. Western journalists and academics have “[appeared baffled] by Arab and Iranian men who practice both “insertive” same-sex and different-sex contact and refuse the Western identification of gayness.”^[26] Western observers scoffed at Mahmoud Ahmedinijad’s infamous declaration that there were “no gays in Iran”, but this is not far from the truth. The word for “homosexuality” and “heterosexuality” only entered the Arab and Farsi lexicons in 1950.^[27] Middle Eastern sexuality has varied widely throughout history and, given the great diversity of the region, is far beyond the scope of this essay. The prevailing representations of “deviant” sexual practices in the Middle East proliferated largely by white gay men are ahistorical and a poor anthropological grounding for understanding Middle Eastern sexual practices. To be clear, there was same-sex sexual contact, but this contact (or lack of it) did not make one “gay” or “straight”. Colombia Professor Joseph Massad argues that this imposition of Western epistemology is a way to “re-orient” the orient to the “enlightened” Occident.^[28] This orientalist understanding of the Middle East predictably legitimizes foreign intervention; in 1993, the ILGA attempted to pressure both the United Nations and the United States department to take action against the systemic persecution of “homosexuals” in Iran.^[29] Ironically, it was the West’s “missionary” imperative laden in their discourse of human rights that produced both homosexuals and their

repression in the Middle East. In the 20th century, homosexuality initially emerged among the middle and upper classes who had more exposure to Western influence and culture. Their subsequent persecution should be understood less as a rejection of same-sex practices but as a reaction to West’s encroachment. In Egypt there were no laws prohibiting same sex behavior, but police raided locations frequented by Western sex tourists and Westernized gay Egyptian men. In one raid, the Egyptian men were tried in an emergency state security court, indicating that the Egyptian authorities saw them as a national threat instead of mere “perverts”.^[30] Massad concludes “In undertaking this universalizing project, the [Gay advocacy NGOs] ultimately makes itself feel better about a world it forces to share its identifications. Its missionary achievement, however, will be the creation not of a queer planet but rather a straight one.”^[31] In an ironic twist, the West produces the very homophobia it purports to fight against. Even if one grants that the West bears no responsibility for the intense homophobia as expressed by conservative Islamists, there remains a palpable irony in IGLA’s condemnation of Iran given that the Islamic revolution (and its crackdown on homosexual activity) was itself a response to the imposition of the Shah by Western powers.

In addition to the LGBT community, The United States has relied on the image of the “oppressed” Muslim woman to legitimize so-called “humanitarian” intervention. After the September 11th attacks, the media devoted a great deal of air time to covering Islamic fundamentalism. In concord with the Bush administration, the media stoked racial and ethnic anxieties that generated the jingoism instrumental in supporting military interventions. Feminist organizations such as “Feminist Majority” played a vital role in cultivating support for the War on Terror among liberal intelligentsia. Eleanor Smear, founder of

Feminist Majority, claims she persuaded Bill Clinton that “for Afghanistan's own good....the burqa-clad body of the Afghan woman became a visible sign of an invisible enemy that threatens not only..... citizens of the West, but our entire civilization.”^[32] The veil became an object of fixation, a fact which harkens back to European fixation and fetishization of Muslim women. “Veiled women were mysterious, removed from political and public spaces, and thus beyond the immediate sphere of control of European colonizers. They were symbolic of the Orient, construed as a paradoxical place of simultaneously indulgent, degenerate sexuality and deeply religious repression.”^[33] This Eurocentric discourse on Muslim women locked them into a state of perpetual passive victimhood.

To be fair, the Taliban’s treatment of Afghan women were and are undoubtedly reprehensible, but that does not excuse the blatant dismissal of the veil as one that is wholly tied to a racialized, Islamic patriarchy. These feminist organizations which backed the War on Terror were almost entirely ran and patronized by white, middle to upper class women.^[34] The War on Terror can thus be understood as a cataclysmic shift in the post-modern performance and articulation of whiteness. The Bush administration identified the liberation of Afghan women as a central objective in its military invasion and subsequent occupation. The implication was that, through America’s benevolence, the position of Afghan women could be elevated to that of the (white) American woman. This position is further substantiated a speech by Laura Bush. “Because of our recent military gains in much of Afghanistan, women are no longer imprisoned in their homes. They can listen to music and teach their daughters without fear of punishment.... The fight against terrorism is also a fight for the rights and dignity of women.”^[35] These justifications

bear a chilling similarity to the British colonization of the Indian subcontinent, wherein British officials proudly proclaimed they had prohibited child marriage and sati, the practice of burning widows on funeral pyres along with their recently deceased husband. Yet for all their ostensibly altruistic actions undertaken in Afghanistan, the Afghan people have been less than thankful; only a third of Afghanis support the United State’s military presence in the region.^[36] This is understandable as the military action carried out by coalition forces have claimed countless innocent lives; drone strikes in North Eastern Afghanistan caused innocent casualties 82.5% of the time between January 2012 and February 2013 alone.^[37] The women may have had their legs blown off and their family decimated, but at least they can finally listen to The Back Street Boys. There is, again, a palpable irony in America’s condemnation of the Taliban. During the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, America funded Islamic fighters, the mujahideen, who would later come to form the Taliban and throw the country into the sexist and theocratic regime they now condemn in a self-righteous indignation.

What, then, is the alternative to such human rights? It is no mere task to articulate an alternative worldview for safeguarding the freedom and security of humanity, even if one assumes the concepts of “freedom” and “humanity” can be abstracted from any historical context or social construction. To be against human rights entirely may empower violent dictators who seek to ensure domination over their subjects. It can be said, though, if we are to cling to the notion of human rights, we must strip it of its utopian and universalist baggage that has been so instrumental in upholding neo-colonial practices. To begin, we must abolish “enforcement mechanisms” or “humanitarian commitments” by the United States government (and the West writ large) to

various regions of the world. These are, after all, trappings of the “empire” of human rights which seeks to further both its geopolitical interests and create a world after its own image, as Marx prophetically said. These human rights, or whatever their alternative may be, must position itself against the law, for the law prioritizes what it covers and includes and marginalizes the rest into irrelevance. In practice, this would look like the creation of an ethics outside of the international “liberal” order and its institutions. It would involve the creation and proliferation of a plethora of ethical norms and guidelines contingent on the social context in which they are articulated. Some of these would therefore be mutually exclusive with others. We must affirm the radical other, even if such an other maintains a cultural or social practice that our Western sensibilities would find abhorrent. To challenge this value system would take a revolution in ethics, akin to the revolutionizing force of Christianity, but it is imperative we reject the disingenuous moralizing of human rights and its advocates who ultimately undermine the very thing they cause they purport to defend.

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LEARNING FROM WESTERN FAILURES IN IMPLEMENTING FEMINISM IN THE ISLAMIC EAST

NIELA ARGHANDIWAL

Exactly one year before his assassination, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. gave his Riverside Church speech, calling for social justice and condemning the Vietnam war. He stated, “the Western arrogance of feeling that it has everything to teach others and nothing to learn from them is not just.”¹ If we’re looking at foreign policy implementations of Feminism, Dr. King’s statement still holds true. Whether it be Indigenous Americans, Africans, or Middle Easterns; the global West continues to view itself as the thresholder of progressivism and modernism despite heavy legislative and moral failures.

Yet, because the West’s biggest player, America, is geographically isolated from the rest of the world, its heightened sense of nationalism and superiority allows for this hypocrisy and arrogance to go unchecked. Despite the projected global decline of American legitimacy and the reputation of its institutional practices, the average American still views The West as a righteous power. However, one must not look further than its

failed foreign policy to decipher that this righteousness is little more than a myth. Perhaps there is no better demonstration of this than the country’s longest and nearly twenty-year failed war in Afghanistan. Despite billions of dollars being poured into the nation in efforts to rebuild civil society, despite a new government crafted by the U.S. government, despite a constitution built on the core principles of Democracy, the country has not been able to rid itself of the extremism that has left millions of women living in conditions that earn the country the title of being the worst nation to be born a woman again and again, every year. It’s a clear demonstration that the same recipe that allowed for social progress in the West will not reflect what the Islamic East needs in order to further advance itself. It is not a method or struggle that can be simply copied from American history, and pasted into modern day Afghanistan. And it was not America’s failure alone. Nearly every global hegemon in the last century heavily involved itself in Afghanistan, and yet none of them seemed prepared to take on the non-secular nature of the country successfully and bring any sort of

concrete change that would help the lives of women in the country in a substantial way. And if one were to ask feminists in Afghanistan how this came to be, the tales of why are often the same; “they didn’t listen,” “they didn’t ask,” “they didn’t take the time to get to know us,” “they didn’t look past the surface.” If any lessons were learnt by Eastern feminists in the last twenty years, under the West’s plight of achieving feminist-friendly societies in the East, it’s that they need to ditch the West.

In 2016, American chess star Nazi Paikidze boycotted the World Championships held in Iran in the name of Feminism, refusing to honor Iran’s legal code by wearing a hijab while participating in the tournament. This legal code was enacted after the 1979 Iranian Revolution, when Iran adopted Sharia and one of the regulations stated women must cover their hair and wear long, loose-fitting clothes.² The law was enforced heavily and police would go as far as seeking out violators on the streets and through social media pages. During her protest, Paikidze took to her own social media to defend her actions as brave and an act against oppression.³ The result of her tirade? A media blitz in the U.S., fuel poured on the fire for anti-Western Iranians pointing fingers at the West for not valuing their culture and heritage, and fundamentally no change for Iranian women.

This sense of polarization is in line with Western villainization of the hijab, and Islam in general. Furthermore, Paikidze failed to understand that the Chess Championships were one of the first women sporting events held in Iran in decades. Competing in itself was an act of feminism, an act that Iranian feminists on the ground fought hard for. “This is going to be the biggest sporting event women in Iran have ever seen; we haven’t been able to host any world championship in other sporting fields for women in the past. It’s not right to call for a

boycott. These games are important for women in Iran; it’s an opportunity for us to show our strength”⁴ one Iranian female activist told the Guardian. Without any attempt to understand the social-political culture of Iran, Paikidze’s out-of-touch push for feminism gave Eastern critics of women’s rights more ammunition in their arguments against women in sports. Many of Paikidze’s fellow chess mates had a local understanding of politics and condemned the boycott as disadvantaging women. Perhaps Paikidze’s intentions were noble, but had she taken the time to speak to one of her teammates who understood the region or even a local feminist and had asked “what can I do to help you?” The outcome could have been very different. Instead, she chose an lazy route with a surface level of understanding Iranian women that left local feminist enraged. An activist from Tehran claimed Paikidze was boycotting to make headlines, arguing that “Iranian women [are] gradually changing the situation from within, so why should we stop that from happening?”⁵

What Westerners typically fail to see is that Easterners do not want their teachings and advice, primarily because of the West’s failure to learn, empathize, and respect other viewpoints that are not their own. Again, the biggest example of this failure can be found in Afghanistan. One study from Oxfam titled “Delivering Aid in Contested Spaces Afghanistan,” found “the single greatest challenge to aid effectiveness in Afghanistan has been the lack of substantive engagement with local communities and most donors’ reliance on remote management and monitoring of projects—specifically, the physical and theoretical distance and lack of direct communication between many aid actors and the communities they are trying to serve.”⁶ This mistake was repeated in Iran. Compare Paikidze’s effort to Iranian activist Masih Alinejad, who led the campaign to loosen

restrictions on women's clothing. Activists often credit her effort had influenced Iran’s moderate President Hassan Rouhani’s calling off arrests and prosecutions for violating the rules; in exchange, requiring women to attend Islamic courses if they violate the law.⁷

Alinejad’s campaign was simple, she asked women who supported easing restrictions to take a picture of themselves in white scarfs and post them on social media. The campaign took off like wildfire and gained support from some unlikely allies including women who believed in wearing hijabs, men, and elders. Alinejad succeeded by paying attention to her community. She knew people were afraid to post images violating the law on social media because it could be viewed by the police. She knew some women would be hesitant because they themselves are religious and believe in hijabs. She knew to get Iranian men on board, whatever she did couldn’t be too crazy. She also knew the influence of social media and its popularity.⁸ Alinejad used this multitude of knowledge to build an effective campaign, amplifying calls for leniency on a dress code without insulting the nation, its culture, or the religion. The campaign not only worked in Iran, but it combined with other feminist campaigns in Saudi Arabia, igniting what political pundits called a race between the two longtime rivalling nations to pass gender reforms. Saudi Arabia lifted certain sexist bans , including regulations against women driving and attending sporting events.⁹

Aside from the West’s willful ignorance, its own societal failures to address sexism in the United States also bleeds into and halts their efforts from bringing any sort of real change for women in the East. This can be seen through the West’s tendencies to have symbolic freedoms versus actual equity for women and minorities in their countries. The psychological effects of this kind of oppression can normalize

abuse and stall real progress on change for decades. One can see this with how despite being heavily oppressed, women from Islamic countries have a confidence that is rare within women from the West. Despite being arrested, shot at, living in fear, women in the East are hungry for change and this gives them a level of courage that comes naturally, to tackle the issues that affect them. Women in these regions understand the cards they are dealt, are forced to be resilient, and survive within their given circumstance. In contrast, American culture gaslights women, telling them they are equal by granting them equal rights like the right to vote, and the right to work, without addressing the system created to oppress them. Women in America experience more of a psychological form of patriarchy. They are expected to succeed as men do without any of the proper care and resources. They are given a job but not for the same pay. They can work, but cannot speak up with the same assurances of job security their male counterparts are. Western women live under the pretense that they live with the protection of law and order but are abused by law enforcement in attempts to seek justice or legal aid in domestic violence and rape cases, and suffer from a skewed self-image due to the oversexualization of young women. Newly released data from December of 2020 discovered American employers were forced to cut over 140,000 jobs due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Women accounted for all of the job losses while a couple thousand men gained jobs.¹⁰ This trend of symbolic activism, where equality is not yet a reality and instead the bare legal minimum, is disguised as progressivism. Additionally, the trend has seeped into how the West implements nation building in the global East as well.

The negative effects of this kind of empty symbolism in regards to human rights advancements in the East can again can be seen in the United States failure to de-radicalize

Afghanistan during their attempt at nation building in the region and is highlighted by the Afghan’s failed attempt to pass the Elimination of Violence Against Women law in 2013 (EVAL). EVAL was initiated by presidential decree in Afghanistan by then President Hamid Karzai. It provided Afghan women with the most basic legal protections; making the age of marriage for girls 16, providing shelter for domestic violence victims and further criminalizing rape and sexual assault cases.¹¹ Karzai, along with the Afghan parliament were a product of the U.S. government’s effort to instill Democracy in the nation. The parliament was celebrated in Western media as having more women politicians than most parliamentary parties in the Western countries. Yet, the power of the women in parliament was minimal, largely symbolic, and had been untested. As U.S. and NATO troops were preparing to withdraw most if not all their troops at the end of the year, a doomsday feeling loomed over the country in regards to what it would mean for Afghans and for the re-emerging growth of Taliban rule in the country, and for women - what it meant for a now vulnerable EVAL. Since the toppling of the Taliban in 2001, the U.S. had reinstated a number of warlords from the country's civil war days back into power, in an attempt to keep peace amongst different tribal factions. These warlords were powerful and while they were anti-taliban, their extremist views were not much different. In fact, it was their destructive ways that had brought about the extreme circumstances in which Afghan’s had welcomed the austere rule of the Taliban in hopes of some sort of peace from the warlords’ chaos. While many Americans believe Afghanistan’s problems start and end with the Taliban, Afghans themselves understand that these extremist views came with the repercussions of the nation being the battleground for empires and tribal divides for decades. As a result of the war and American

presence, the former warlords now turned lawmakers played nice and progressive solely out of necessity for foreign aid money to pay their salaries. One would assume the U.S. valued women's rights enough to appoint leaders who held humane and Democratic views – which would ensure the success of the nation building following the withdrawal of American presence, yet the world was about to find out that was not the case.

Women legislators rushed to test their power and take parliamentary action for the first time to protect Afghan women by passing ERAW into law. Pressure from women rights activists was mounting to pass EVAL as a law, rather than keep it as a presidential decree because much like a presidential executive order, a decree could be undone by the next president if he had more extremist views and with foreign forces leaving this was beginning to seem more and more likely. ¹² The debate over the law lasted all of fifteen minutes, and the warlords who were once the face of Afghanistan’s new Democracy stood up, now emboldened by the U.S. dissipating influence, and said no way would they forbid child marriage and even accused their female colleagues of being damned to hell for even being in parliament, for it was no place for a woman. It was the first time the warlords had been so outspoken against women’s rights and Western ideals. The law also faced efforts from more conservative members of parliament to discredit select witness testimonies in order to make trial more difficult for victims of rape and assault. The backtracking for the support for women’s rights did not stop there. Women continued to see an attack on their rights as President Karzai appointed former Taliban members as the head of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC).¹³ This empty symbolism fooled donors and even activists nation-wide into believing Afghanistan had made progress that it actually had not. Had there not been such

smoke screens, there could have been more urgency to bring about change, the efforts of the international community to aid Afghan women could have been more effective had they known what their odds and troubles really were. There could have been course correction. Instead, they were 13 years into an exhaustive war and much of the support to aid and reform the country was dwindling, leaving behind a devastating fate for Eastern feminists.

The low prioritization of women’s rights in foreign policy by U.S. and Western politicians who are hesitant to pass equity laws for women in their own countries, is also another way how sexism in the West bleeds into the East. In Afghanistan, this meant Afghan women activists called on the West to condition their aid to the country on the basis of upholding Women’s rights. This was particularly important to them after the previously mentioned back-tracking of support for women’s rights by many parliamentarians and even the president. The U.S. did not, the European Union did some months later. Their delay in taking action failed to send a strong message of condemnation to Afghan politicians who were attacking women rights. Currently, Afghan women have been sounding the alarms in being excluded in Afghan peace talks with the Taliban, which the United States has been facilitating. The Taliban have voiced that they do not believe in women being a part of the process and many journalists and activists alike have sounded alarms on how little the Taliban’s mindsets have changed in regards to women.¹⁴ Yet the U.S. appointed Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation, Zalmay Khalilzad, continues to deny that women rights are at any kind of threat in their negotiations.¹⁵ America’s refusal to properly address the culture they claimed to be attempting to rebuild in addition to their own subtle misogyny has played a role in Afghan women activists not getting the support they need from the West.

Not only does America not take necessary measures to pressure allies like Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia both to uphold women's rights, they also fund projects that oppress them and have yet to correct their course. This can be best seen with America’s aiding Afghanistan in developing its own prison system. Prisons are a very expensive industry, and American dollars are continually required to keep them running. In a nation plagued with terrorism, it is easy to assume the prisons would most logically be filled with terrorists and those that pose a threat to civil society and national security. On the contrary, similar to how the United States presently utilizes mass incarceration and the imprisonment of Black and Brown individuals, to maintain control of their marginalized populations and fund their own prison-industrial complex; Afghanistan utilizes their prison for women who commit “moral crimes” such as having premarital sex, fleeing from an abusive environment, and having children due to rape.¹⁶ The abuses of these prisons are well documented by the Human Rights Watch and other organizations but there is little political will in the U.S. to correct course. If America was not a patriarchy itself, it would take more action in setting an example. It would stand against these horrendous acts; instead, it enables them. As a result of not addressing its own social ills, America has caused the oppressive norms it’s set on its oppressed people to bleed over in their social missions in foreign nations as well.

Mishaps like these only further fuel the Islamic East views that nations such as America suffer from moral failures. This view has come about in a large part due to the hypocritical condemnation of human rights abuses in Islamic countries by the West, only for them to support other nations that oppress Muslims such as Israel, China, and even Islamic nations known to propel terror themselves, like Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. The deterioration of the

value of a family unit and traditional values being largely diminished in some Western societies, and the over sexualization of women in entertainment has also brought a negative cloud over Western ideals of feminism in conservative Eastern nations.

This is why works such as Mona Eltahawy’s book titled *Headscarves and Hymens: Why the Middle East Needs a Sexual Revolution*, are condemned by Eastern feminists as being Islamophobic and a part of neo-colonialist thought.¹⁷ Fueled by her own experiences with sexual assault, Eltahawy claims Muslim men hate women. This outlook that patriarchy only exists because of and alongside Islam is ignorant and offensive to many Muslims, as history shows every nation and religion share a history of oppressing women and using religion and politics as a basis to do so. Most Islamic nations have simply been slow on the reforms, mainly due to poverty, conflict in their home nations, or due to poor dictator-like leadership in the cases of Iran and Saudi Arabia. This view also ignores the fact that the sexual revolution America experienced is because of ideals listed in the bible that sex is an act only to be performed to procreate, otherwise it was considered shameful. Islam does not treat sex as a shameful act, sex for pleasure is encouraged but must only be had between married couples. The Quran even goes into detail about how much responsibility men have to pleasure their wives and not deny them sex. Again, ignorance here drowns out good intentions and causes more damage to the very people authors like Eltahawy’s claims to want to help.

To many Islamic nations, any form of sexual protest is thought to be an attempt from the West to destroy their culture. One Afghan artist in 2015 wore an iron body suit in the shape of a female body and wore it while she walked down the street to protest sexual harassment. The first sentence heard by bystanders was, “Is

she a foreigner? The whore.”¹⁸ Local news stations wrote her off as someone seeking attention and gaining enough international publicity to gain her a visa so she could relocate to another country. This is what ultimately occurred as the young woman could no longer live in Kabul due to the death threats she was receiving. Her efforts were chalked up to be another ill Democracy had brought to the nation.¹⁹

Perhaps the most significant contributing factor in the formation of Western feminist resentment comes from the same place most anti-Western sentiments in general come from, and that is due to the fact that the citizens of Islamic countries have been the victims of Western organized terror for decades now. As a result, their idea of a prosperous and fair state specifically excludes Westernization. Some Afghan women activists feel that even mentioning the West or Democracy is the kiss of death for any argument with religious leaders. Shukria Barekzai, an Afghan feminist, argued that if women in her nation were to gain rights it would have to be via education and Islam, not through examples of Western Democracy.²⁰

With Islam being so deeply embedded into the fabric of the cultures in most Eastern countries, it is clear that if one were to pursue incorporating feminism into the culture of the Islamic East, there is a need for an Islamic revolution via the lens of feminism. Recently, a new global movement has evolved by the name of “Musawah,” which means ‘equality’ in Arabic. Created in 2009, the movement aims to reclaim the Quran as being a feminist text rather than a tool utilized for oppression.²¹ Women spend time reinterpreting parts of the Quran in a non-oppressive manner, as the reasoning for the patriarchal ways within Muslim countries is cited as the result of men interpreting the Quran in a certain way. The

Musawah movement is a great step towards the right direction. If provided with the proper support, the movement can be further legitimized as women speakers and Islamic leaders slowly emerge. Musuwah advocates for equality under family law, as more female Islamic leaders emerge and the social-political nature of household conversations are given room to evolve. Anti-Western sentiments can be so strong in the East, that legislative efforts by Arab governments to cooperate with the West, results in the citizens of those nations feeling betrayed by their leaders. That betrayal is felt so deeply that events like the assassination of Egypt’s President Anwar Sadat (by the Muslim Brotherhood) in broad daylight during a military parade for brokering a deal with Israel, are widely celebrated by the masses.²² The East struggles to hold onto their values and traditions in the presence of continual pressure created by Western hegemony and Globalization. Exploring Islamic feminism within a non-secular nation is important in order for harsher critics of modernization to process the new perspective of Islamic thought without rejecting it for having Western influences.

The age of social media and smartphones has made the mission of pursuing women rights in a way that works for them all the more possible. Muslim women from all over the Eastern hemisphere are able to connect, share, and gather in protest as one for social issues. They are no longer at the mercy of Western media to tell their stories and are able to speak out when faux activism is hurting their causes. They are able to spread awareness about their plights in a helpful way. In Saudi Arabia, women successfully took to social media by posting videos of themselves driving to fight the nation’s driving ban on women. The cause picked up a momentum that would have otherwise been drowned out as they called for all international drivers to hit the roads in

protest and solidarity with Saudi women.²³ At a time of rampant polarization, rebelling women may find it difficult to find the proper platforms to reach their targeted audience. Traditionally a woman attempting to rewrite the narrative of women within Islam would have to fight first for her right at a mosque, along with her right to speak and educate both sexes— social media has taken out this step and allowed for direct vocalization of grievances within the community. In an attempt to counter the resistance of the driving ban, one man claimed driving would damage a woman’s ovaries. The claim was instantly met with mockery and backlash from Saudis on Twitter.²⁴ Thus, social media has actually helped the East fight misinformation campaigns that are aimed to create the rationale to oppress certain groups. The success of Saudi women gaining support in their fight for their rights via social media may have started with the driving ban, but it has opened doors to them solving much larger humanitarian issues. Saudi Arabia currently has a male guardianship system, in which women need permission from any male relative before any significant task such as traveling, marrying, obtaining an education, and even exiting prison.²⁵ The male guardianship and other issues can now also be tackled via social media campaigns.

Clearly implementing feminism into the cultures of the Islamic East successfully has been a mission that women in the region have been working on for decades on end. The rise of social media has given many activists the tools they need to garner wide support and awareness for their causes and shift public opinion. In addition to using social media, they have also begun to interpret the Quran in a feminist sense, and grown a movement to support it. Feminists in the East have achieved the most success when they have worked within the framework of their own culture, rather than looking to the West to copy another’s tactics. It’s time for the

West to stop thinking about how they can “teach Muslim women to be strong.” Women who risk being executed every day for standing up for their rights do not need a lesson on strength. They could use allies who listen, who are willing to learn, and who find ways to help facilitate their movements instead of copy and pasting what worked in the West onto another nation. As powerful as the Western world is, their imperialist attitude and lack of understanding of local cultures makes them unfit to carry out the responsibility of progressing feminism within the region. Even in America’s own feminist revolution, a specific amount of social, industrial, and political changes had to be implemented first before the society was ready to move on as a “progressive” one. Any region whether it be Latin America or the Middle East is going to have their own unique cocktail of events unfold to set the stage for modernization. Modernization simply cannot equate to Westernization in order for it to successfully become a reality.

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SEEDS OF THE SOVIETS

OLIVIA GARCIA

I. WHAT IS SOIL AGGREGATION?

Soil is a major aspect of every human’s life; it is quite literally the very ground we walk upon. Soil consists of five main components: minerals, organic material, gas, living organisms, and the most important of all, water. A soil aggregate is simply a piece of the soil components bound together by organic matter. It affects plant growth, water infiltration, and soil erosion as well as is a good measure for levels of carbon in the soil, and allows for the formation of precious minerals. ¹ The process of soil aggregation is the arrangement of these aggregates in the ground. These basic terms are all necessary to understanding the impact soil quality has on all aspects of daily life.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Soil affects more than just plant growth. It impacts the quality of water, the production of fruits and vegetables, the diet of the animals that feed on what the soil grows, and even fertility.

“Changes in aggregate stability may serve as early indicators of recovery or degradation of soils. Aggregate stability is an indicator of organic matter content, biological activity, and nutrient cycling in soil....Stable aggregates can also provide a large range in pore space, including small

*pores within and large pores between aggregates. Pore space is essential for air and water entry into soil, and for air, water, nutrients, and biota movement within soil”.*²

The vegetation planted in the ground may determine the survival of an entire civilization. The quality of the soil is important in planting because if a plant is unable to establish healthy roots, nothing will grow. This means that a civilization relying on a few key staple crops to survive may face starvation if root development is stunted. When discussing soil health and water, it is important to remember that at the bottom of every body of water is soil. Water itself plays a major role in forming and breaking down soil aggregates. Water erosion can break down substances over a period of time, but the current of the water can also form precious aggregates. If the soil is unhealthy because of a human factor, say chemical distortion, then that body of water no longer is a viable source for the human and animal population that relies on it. Even if the soil were arable, a contaminated source of water would not allow for plant growth nor would it allow livestock to thrive, as animals would naturally stay away from contaminated water. With no plant growth, no livestock, and no water, it is hard to see how any form of life could thrive in such conditions.

B. HOW DO HUMANS IMPACT SOIL AGGREGATION FORMATION?

Humans impact the world around them every day simply by living. The more they grow and change, the more they change their very surroundings. Industrialization, however, is maybe one of the most major ways in which humans have impacted the environment. Prior to the Industrial Revolution of the late 1700s, the Agricultural Revolution taught people the importance of the health of the soil they were farming. It was important for the soil to maintain health because entire ways of life relied upon it. The industrial revolution led to a transition of agrarian life to city life, and introduced less environmentally friendly practices for economic advancement. The burning of coal, or fossil fuels, was one of the first major impacts on the environment.

*“...coal is always polluting. In fact, it is the most polluting way to produce electricity. When coal is dug up and later burned in power stations. It releases massive amounts of pollution, damaging our health and contributing to intensifying climate change. Along with adding to greenhouse gas pollution, burning coal emits toxic and carcinogenic substances into our air, water, and land, severely affecting the health of miners, workers and surrounding communities.”*³

Once people realized the possibilities coal-burning allowed, the idea for more environmentally friendly practices were almost all but abandoned. The demand for coal increased mining practices not only for fossil fuels, but for precious gems as well. Countries with an abundance of natural resources became even more susceptible for colonization. As the natural progression of human nature tends to be, this only led to further scientific exploration and so-called improvements on how to more

efficiently produce electricity. Fast forwarding to the Cold War, the demand for a new source of power, atomic power, was at the forefront of the world’s conversation. The race for whether the United States or the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR or Soviet Union) would be the first to corner the market on nuclear power intensified.

II. THE SOVIET UNION - STALIN’S INTEREST

Joseph Stalin officially came to power in the year 1922, when he became the Premier of the Soviet Union, until his death in 1953. He was known for multiple genocides and cruelty within his own country and in territories occupied under his rule. Under Stalin, industrialization boomed and as a result, irrevocable changes to the environment were made. While it may seem a bit of a reach to jump from soil aggregation to the Soviet Union, The USSR under Stalin had a large effect on the quality of soil and life for many people. The Soviet Union made quick work of establishing their presence in Central Asia and the Middle East as well as within their own region. There are many countries the Soviet Union occupied for their natural resources, however the two regions I will be focusing on analyzing are Uzbekistan’s Aral Sea and Chernobyl in The Republic of Ukraine.

Stalin’s interest in Uzbekistan intensified when he learned of the vast natural resources in the region. Uzbekistan is rich in natural gasses, petroleum, coal, gold, uranium, silver, copper, lead and zinc, tungsten, and molybdenum; it also shares a border with Kazakhstan separated by the Aral Sea.⁴ Uranium is the resource Stalin was most interested in harvesting, and after much violence, in October of 1924 the Uzbek SSR was established. Stalin passed in the year 1953, thereby ending his rule. The very next day, Georgy Malenkov took power and

continued on with Stalin’s policies of forced collectivization, forced industrialization, terror, and Stalinism.

THE SOVIET UNION - A BRIEF LOOK INTO THE ARAL SEA AND CHERNOBYL

A. CASE STUDY - THE ARAL SEA

Prior to Soviet Union occupation, The Aral Sea was the fourth largest body of water. However due to water diversion that resource was quickly, and quite literally, drained. The Aral sea was formed more than 2 million years ago and today marks a border between Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. Despite fluctuating water levels as a result of the natural cyclical nature of the area’s climate, the Aral Sea had been able to maintain a vast amount of water up until the 1960s.

“Beginning about 1960, the Aral Sea’s water level was systematically and drastically reduced, because of the diversion of water from the Amu Darya and Syr Darya rivers for purposes of agricultural irrigation. As the Soviet government converted large acreages of pastures or untilled lands in what are now Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and elsewhere in Central Asia into irrigated farmlands by using the waters of the Amu Darya, Syr Darya, and their tributaries, the amount of water from those rivers that reached the Aral Sea dropped accordingly....By the end of the century the Aral Sea had receded into three separate lakes: the Greater Sea had divided into a long, narrow, western lake and a larger, broader, eastern lake, with the remains of the Lesser Sea to the north. The water level had dropped to 125 feet (36 metres) above sea level, and the water volume was reduced by three-fourths of what it had been in 1960. Almost no water from the Amu Darya and the Syr Darya ever reached the Aral Sea

*anymore. In the early 21st century the eastern portion of the Aral Sea suffered the most drastic and immediate decline—diminishing by some four-fifths between 2006 and 2009.”*⁵

If lack of a major water source was not bad enough on the quality of the soil, The resulting chemical footprint from Soviet Union testing left the quality of soil at hazardous levels. Since the decline of this major water source, attempts to revive the water levels in the region have been attempted, however the level of soil degradation simply will not allow for its revival.

B. CASE STUDY - CHERNOBYL

When people think of the Soviet Union and nuclear fails, the Chernobyl accident of 1986 tends to be the image most think of. Truly, the accident that took place in Chernobyl was horrendous, and the after effects even more so. Chernobyl is a city located in Kyiv Oblast, Ukraine. During Soviet Rule, a nuclear power plant was built in this city, its proximity to water making it the perfect location for a power plant. The basic function of a power plant is simple -- to generate energy. There are five different kinds of power plants; thermal, nuclear, hydroelectric, geothermal, and solar. In the case of Chernobyl, the power plant was a nuclear plant. Nuclear plants run on a small supply of cold water that is run through a chamber and heats up through a forced chemical reaction producing vast amounts of electricity. This process, however, is dangerous because the elements involved are all forced to the point of instability in being able to get the correct reaction. So, one small accident may result in a huge disaster, which happened to be the case in 1986. A shutdown for April 26th was scheduled to ensure that Chernobyl 4 was functioning properly.⁶ On the 25th, in preparation of that shutdown, a series of tests

were run to see how long power could still be generated during a shutdown. However, the reactor was in an unstable condition and combined with a flaw in the structure of the reactor, the plant exploded causing two deaths and irrevocable damage to the environment.

IV. SOIL DEGRADATION & FERTILITY

Both of these instances give an introduction into how Soviet Union forced industrialization affected the land, and now a closer look will be taken into the long-term effects on the soil and the people.

A. CASE STUDY - THE ARAL SEA

The first major impact on the soil as a direct result of water diversion is the salinity of the land. The exposed lakebed is vulnerable to the winds of the area which mixes the salt with the residual chemicals from Soviet Era testing and creates dangerous winds resulting in respiratory issues for the human population.

*“Shrinkage of the Aral Sea has resulted in growing concentrations of chemical pesticides and natural salts; these substances are then blown from the increasingly exposed lake bed and contribute to desertification and respiratory health problems; water pollution from industrial wastes and the heavy use of fertilizers and pesticides is the cause of many human health disorders; increasing soil salination; soil contamination from buried nuclear processing and agricultural chemicals, including DDT”.*⁷

Not only has this had an effect on the respiratory health of the population, but fertility rates in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan have been drastically altered since 1950. In the year 1950, Uzbekistan’s fertility rate was at 4.940 steadily increasing into its highest score of 6.500 in

1963. However after 1963, a steady decline in fertility rates began leading to a current (2020) birth rate of 2.357. This is a score 2.538 less than in the year 1950, and 4.143 less than its peak in 1963. Kazakhstan, just on the opposite side of the Aral Sea, had a fertility rate of 4.317 in 1950 with a peak in 1960 of 4.555 and a current score of 2.679.⁸ Though this is not as drastic a drop as Uzbekistan experienced, its score is still almost half that of what it was in 1950, with a similar trend of decline after Soviet occupation.

B. CASE STUDY- CHERNOBYL

Chernobyl did not go without its own decline in fertility. In 1950 the fertility rate was 2.876 which is also the fertility score’s peak for this time period. By 2020, the fertility rate was once again cut nearly in half standing at 1.439.⁹ The radiation cloud that covered Chernobyl after the explosion had damaging effects not only on the people, but the environment. Aside from the immediate deaths of two employees and countless injuries due to the effects of radiation, the event left lasting effects on their bodies, especially pregnant women, and the genetic makeup of generations to come. 35 years later Chernobyl is a ghost town as the land is still unsafe to inhabit. Even today, tourists are not allowed an up close and personal view, and must see the plant from an approved distance.

V. CONCLUSION

Though Stalin had been long dead when the Chernobyl Accident took place, his influence on the pursuit of nuclear power and industrialization at the cost of environmental concerns was alive and well. Had it not been for the steps he took in Central Asia and similar countries, perhaps environmental practices in the Soviet Union may have turned out differently. Then again, probably not due to the highly antagonistic nature of relations with Western Powers during The Cold War. While it

is normal to expect a fluctuation in fertility rates in a 70 year period, it is worth noting that all three regions where major Soviet Union industrialization took place, and resulted in disaster, the fertility rates dropped by nearly 50%. Soviet testing is just one extreme example of what happens when environmental concerns are not taken into consideration when pursuing technological advancement. The health of the soil affects not only the vegetation of the area, but the people that live there as well. In the end, a failure to practice more eco-friendly industrialization will result in the steady decline of populations of entire countries.

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THE SENKAKU/DIAOYU DISPUTE: JAPAN VS. CHINA

TAMOOR ALI

The People’s Republic of China and Japan share centuries of conflict and disdain for one another. They have been quarreling with each other since the first Chinese-Japanese conflict recorded in history back in 663 AD with the Battle of Baekgang. ¹ Recently, a dispute has emerged over the Senkaku (Japanese) or Diaoyu (Chinese/Mandarin) Islands. The Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands are a group of islands comprised of; Uotsuri, Kitakojima, Minamikojima, Kuba, Taisho, Okinokitaiwa, Okinominamiwa, and Tobise, located at the west side of the Nansei Shoto Islands. ² The current conflict continues to escalate, and could lead to armed conflict. The dispute will be reviewed from both the Chinese perspective and Japanese perspective to properly comprehend the present situation. Before discussing the island dispute, it is important to contextualize China’s and Japan’s historical relationship with one another as their historical relationship informs their current feuding over the islands.

Although Sino-Japanese relations go further back than the First Sino-Japanese War, this event is one of the most impactful for both countries. The First Sino-Japanese War began

in 1894 fighting over the sovereignty of Korea. Korea was China’s most significant tributary, but Japan sought to colonize it due to Korea’s strategic location opposite Japan's islands and its natural resources of iron and coal. Prior to the war, in 1875, Japan began to adopt Western technology which forced Korea to open itself to foreign trade, especially Japan, and Korea to declare itself independent from China and their foreign relations. ³ Korea had to declare independence because Japan forced them to since they overpowered the country with its advanced Western technology. Soon enough, Japan was identified with more modernized forces, influencing the Korean government while China sponsored conservative officials around the royal family. Years later, in 1884, a group of pro-Japanese reformers attempted to overthrow the Korean government. The group was halted by Chinese troops under General Yuan Shikai who were able to save the leader; King Gojong. They murdered many Japanese legation guards in the process of the rescue. The only reason a war did not break out was due to the Li-Ito Convention where both China and Japan signed a treaty agreeing to withdraw troops from Korea. This “peace” did not last long and a few years after the convention, the first Sino-Japanese War began.

In 1894, Kim Ok-Kyun, the pro-Japanese Korean leader of the coup, was lured to Shanghai where he was assassinated, presumably by Chinese agents of Shikai. After the assassination, the body was taken back to Korea and displayed as a warning sign to other rebels who dare to defy their government. The Japanese government and the public were furious about what the Chinese did. Additionally, the situation grew more tense due to the Tonghak rebellion. The Tonghak rebellion was a Korean peasant-led rebellion that essentially sparked the first Sino-Japanese War. The rebellion grew out of hand, and the Korean ruler was required to call for assistance. He requested the assistance of the Chinese troops. The Japanese perceived this as a violation of the Li-Ito Convention, therefore they sent their own troops, roughly eight thousand, to Korea to fight against the Chinese. When the Chinese attempted to send reinforcements, the Japanese sank the steamer, escalating the situation even further. ⁴ On August 1, 1894, war was declared, thus beginning the long foreseen battle against the two countries.

The first Sino-Japanese War began with the Chinese occupation of Pyongyang, however by September 15, 1894, the Japanese forces surrounded the entire city and simultaneously launched attacks from every direction. After about a day's worth of fighting, the Japanese took control of Pyongyang, leaving about two thousand Chinese soldiers dead and four thousand injured, while the Japanese reported only less than six hundred soldiers dead, injured, or missing. ⁵ Once they took over Pyongyang, the Japanese advanced north to the Yalu River, where they were able to go past the fortified defense of the Chinese and attack them on their side of the Yalu River. Soon after, they claimed another victory against the Chinese. With the Chinese forces losing territory, they decided to retreat from Korea and fortify their

own borders to prevent Japan from gaining any more of China's territory. However, with their powerful army and phenomenal tactics, the Japanese forces outclassed the Qing fleet. Japan soon seized multiple Chinese cities: Mukden, Xiuyan, Talienwan, and Lushunkou. ⁶ Japanese forces rampaged through Lushunkou, murdering several thousands of unarmed, Chinese civilians in what became known as the Port Arthur Massacre. Although they aimed to defend their territory, the Chinese army was not able to overpower the Japanese. By February, Japan expanded on claimed territory, China lost; Yingkou, Manchuria, and the Pescadores Islands near Taiwan. Once the Chinese government realized that Japan was nearing Beijing, they stopped fighting against an unstoppable force and sought out peace.

Finally, Qing China and Meiji Japan had come to a consensus ending the first Sino-Japanese War; the Treaty of Shimonoseki of 1895. The treaty required China to recognize Korea as an independent state, to relinquish power over Taiwan, the Pescadores Islands, and the Liaodong (South Manchurian) Peninsula over to Japan, and pay Japan two hundred million taels (over thirty-three million US dollars). In addition, China was to open the ports of Shashi, Chongqing, Suzhou, and Hangzhou to Japanese trade. ⁷ The war resulted in China's defeat and of course Japan's victory, but it also brought about the independence of Korea, which has been territory China or Japan could seize control of. With Korea as its own sovereign entity, it could now determine their own affairs without China or Japan influencing their domestic policy in order to acquire its resources. It is worth noting that many foreign observers believed that the Chinese army would easily win this war due to their larger army compared to the Japanese forces, however due to Japan's rapid modernization, they had a significant technological and tactical advantage.

This war was merely the beginning of the two countries' future of conflict and dispute. Once the war concluded, there was massive tension between the two nations. As stated previously, Japan adopted Western technologies and thus gained an advantage over China. Japan became extremely industrialized while China's underdeveloped industries were incapable of supplying munitions or engineering quickly/efficiently or in adequate quantities. Additionally, the Chinese military had no tanks and only some aircrafts, therefore they were unable to keep up with the Japanese and their advancements. Once the Qing dynasty collapsed in 1911, it further weakened the Chinese government, thus rendering it defenseless against Japanese expansion and influence. In 1915, the Japanese government issued the Chinese president, Yuan Shikai, a set of twenty-one territorial and concessional demands. Shikai could not refuse the demand due to Japan's industrial and technological advantage. In September 1931, the Chinese allegedly blew up part of the tracks on the South Manchuria Railway. This provided the Japanese the needed casus belli to invade China and seize control of Manchuria. In 1932, with Manchuria being in Japan's possession, they established a puppet state called Manchukuo and installed the former Qing dynasty emperor, Puyi, as its formal head of state. ⁸ Japan was not satisfied with only controlling the northern portions of China and they declared that all of China was to become a Japanese preserve where no power could take significant action without Japan's consent. ⁹ Essentially, Japan wished to control the entire country of China and use the country as a means to expand Japanese influence and attain greater power.

In 1935, the Japanese forced the withdrawal from Hebei and Chahar of any officials and armed forces that may prove to be unfriendly to the Japanese. These territories eventually passed partly into Japanese control. The

following year, in December, Nationlist leader Chiang Kai-shek devoted China's resources to fighting Communist forces, however two of his own generals, Zhang Xueliang and Yang Hucheng, seized Kai-shek and forced him to devote his attention towards fighting the Japanese who had already conquered northern China. This was called the Xi'an Incident, where he was compelled to team up with the Communist party to fend off the Japanese. ¹⁰ On July 7, 1937, the Chinese and Japanese confronted each other in a minor clash at the Marco Polo Bridge, near Beijing. The Japanese understood that Chiang Kai-shek and his troops would not yield, therefore they were to be eliminated to move forward. With the Communists joining forces with the Chinese government, it posed a greater threat for the Japanese. The Communists agreed to fight under the Chinese government as a single entity known as a United Front. Soon enough the minor confrontation escalated, initiating the second Sino-Japanese War.

The war started out rough for the Chinese. In November 1937, they were driven out of Shanghai and the following month the Nationalist capital, Nanking, had fallen prey to the Japanese as well. The Nanking invasion, also known as the Nanking Massacre or Rape of Nanking, lasted for a period of six weeks where the Imperial Japanese Army razed, pillaged, and demolished the city leaving it in ruins. On top of that, they murdered hundreds of thousands of Chinese soldiers and citizens in the city, and sexually assaulted twenty to eighty thousand women. ¹¹ The Japanese did not show any mercy to the Chinese, not only did they rape and destroy the city, they buried thousands of civilians alive, machine-gunned civilians or used them for bayonet practice. Also, females were forced into labour as "comfort women" (sex slaves for Japanese officers and soldiers).¹²

The Chinese army became so desperate that

Chiang Kai-shek was willing to destroy the Yellow River dikes at Huayuankou in Henan province in a desperate attempt to block a Japanese military advance. Although his plan succeeded, the impact of the flood came with a tremendous cost. The flood killed between five hundred thousand to one million Chinese civilians, resulting in up to ten million people becoming homeless, and annihilated millions of acres of crops.¹³ This caused a famine which contributed to the peasant's rising hatred of Chiang Kai-shek and the Nationalist regime. Another result of the flood was that for the next nine years, the Yellow River's waters had spread southeast into the Huai River system, overwhelming vast quantities of land in the Henan, Anhui, and Jiangsu provinces.¹⁴ The significance of the various lands being drowned is the destruction of crops which resulted in a major famine and homelessness issue, and left Chinese civilians defenseless to incoming attacks.

After 1938, the war entered a stalemate. There continued to be little confrontation on both sides and Japan marched forwards conquering more and more of China. By 1940, Japan controlled all of the north-eastern coast of China and roughly four hundred miles inland. Like the first Sino-Japanese War, Japan installed a puppet government within China in the city of Nanking. They utilized Wang Jinwei as the leader because he politically rivaled Chiang Kai-shek. China finally received foreign assistance from the United States since Japan bombed Pearl Harbor, drawing the United States into World War II. Although the United States framed Communism as a dangerous and oppressive ideology, they were against the Japanese for bombing them more than they were against China.

As the war entered its final phase, Japan was being bombed by US and Chinese aircrafts. While China's Nationalist government had been

significantly undermined by the war, the communists had grown more powerful under their leader, Mao Zedong. However, China gained an advantage because Japan's focus was split fighting the war against China and fighting in World War II. By having to fight on two different fronts, the Japanese army was required to withdraw part of their troops to fight in the Pacific Islands. Consequently, the communists were able to advance and organize more liberated areas. Although the Chinese were advancing and finally gaining an edge over the Japanese, there was still a tension between the Communist party and the Nationalist party. The US attempted to mediate the conflict and dispute between the two parties, and it worked until the Japanese surrendered in 1945. Once Japan surrendered and China won the war, the two parties' conflicts resumed as if there was not truce at all. Japan did have the lead in the war, but the US dropped not one, but two nuclear atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945. With the severe devastation of the bombs and the horrific impact on Japan, they had no choice but to surrender, thus ending the second Sino-Japanese War.

The history between China and Japan has been tainted with war and destruction. Although, as of recently, there has not been any serious conflict between the two countries, after the second Sino-Japanese War, the relationship between China and Japan was permeated with tensions lasting decades. By discussing the two wars between the two countries, it can be illustrated why there would be future conflicts, as seen by the Senkaku Islands dispute. Not only is the current dilemma a means of obtaining resources from the islands, but the pride of both countries are on the line because both have endured much pain from each other in regards to the two Sino-Japanese wars. Therefore both countries would want to acquire an advantage over the other, especially China.

Fast forwarding a few decades, China and Japan face another dispute; the Senkaku dispute. With China and Japan arguing over which country should control the Senkaku Islands, the situation continues to grow larger and more countries are hearing.

To begin with, let's begin with China's perspective on the dispute. China's government has been claiming sovereignty over the islands contrary to Japan since December 1971.¹⁵ Although China claimed the islands are in their control, Japan has also claimed its sovereignty over the islands dating further back than China, in 1895.¹⁶ The islands have been privately owned by Japanese citizens for over a century, except during World War II where the United States occupied the territory. When the islands became part of Japan's territory, Japanese citizens settled on the Islands and ran businesses such as dried bonito manufacturing and bird feather collecting. There were over two hundred Japanese living on the Senkaku Islands.¹⁷ China reasserted its dominance of the islands in the 1970s demonstrating its historic rights over the region. Since the islands are located in the East China Sea,¹⁸ it can be presumed that the islands should belong to China. The dispute had become minimized until September 2012, when the Japanese signed a contract worth two billion yen, over twenty-six million US dollars, with Kunioki Kurihara, their private owner, purchasing three of those islands. By doing so, Japan had effectively nationalized the islands.¹⁹ According to the Global Conflict Tracker, the islands are significant economically. The islands are northeast of Taiwan, which have potential oil and natural gas reserves. They are also near prominent shipping routes, and are surrounded by rich fishing areas.²⁰ Prior to 1971, China nor Taiwan had made any claims to "territorial sovereignty" over the Senkaku Islands. For seventy-six years, the Chinese government and Taiwanese government did not

express any objection to Japanese sovereignty over the islands, therefore there is an assumption that the islands were in fact part of Japan's territory.

Why did China and Taiwan change their positions from essentially letting Japan own the islands to wanting to own them for themselves? They changed their positions on the islands because of a UN report. In the late 1960s, a UN agency, the Bangkok-based Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East (ECAFE), surveyed the waters around the Senkaku, and the survey suggested potentially rich deposits of oil beneath the seabed. After the ECAFE released what they found, Taiwan made its first territorial claim to the islands and months later, China made its claim as well.²¹ In regards to the history of the islands, the islands had been uninhabited by the Japanese since 1895 until the beginning of World War II. In the 1920s, there was a Japanese factory built on one of the islands, Ishigaki, and the residents there rescued Chinese fishermen caught in a storm near the Senkaku islands. The Consul of the Republic of China in Nagasaki sent their regards via a signed letter of appreciation for the rescue.

Decades later, the Chinese discovered copies of an article disclosing information regarding the Senkaku islands. Once the Chinese discovered that they had been using the name "Senkaku", it indicated that the Japanese owned the islands, specifically the Okinawa prefecture, even though the Chinese did not believe that was true. Although the Chinese named the islands under Japanese pretext, the "Diaoyu" Islands had long been under the Chinese coastal defense of the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1912) dynasties. The Qing court further placed the islands under the jurisdiction of the local government of Taiwan. With this Taiwan could have played a role in the current dispute however, China still

claims that Taiwan is part of its territory and that Taiwan’s government is merely an illegitimate rebellion. Supposedly evidence for this claim can be found in various official documents or maps originating from China, Japan, and the Kingdom of Ryukyu.²² China believes that Japan had stolen the Diaoyu Islands during the first Sino-Japanese War similar to how they conquered Manchuria, Formosa (Taiwan), and Pescadores. In the Cairo Declaration, China states that all the territory conquered/stolen by the Japanese must be returned to the People’s Republic of China. Additionally, in Article eight of the Potsdam Declaration, after the second Sino-Japanese War, it reaffirms what had already been stated in the Cairo Declaration. With the surrender of the Japanese in 1945, it states that the Japanese have pledged to fulfill their obligations in the Potsdam Declaration which is to return all of the land stolen during the two wars.²³

In regards to treaties, China also invoked the Treaty of San Francisco/Treaty of Peace. The Treaty of San Francisco is a treaty created for Japan after the events of World War II. It officially ended Japan’s imperial rule/position and provided compensation to those Japan attacked(i.e. China, United States).²⁴ With the Treaty of San Francisco, China believed that it was Japan’s responsibility to return the Senkaku Islands like they returned Taiwan. However, because Japan already occupied and controlled the Senkaku Islands before WWII, and it was not included in the treaty itself, Japan argued it was not obliged to return the islands to China. Essentially, China’s perspective on the island dispute seems to be rooted in multiple treaties that Japan signed to bring peace, and that China is attempting to take back what was stolen from them when they were at war in the late 1890s. China may have controlled the islands in ancient times, but in the late nineteenth century, Japan was able to claim the uninhabited islands for themselves and China did not see that as

important because they were unaware of the abundant natural resources of oil and other minerals. China’s claim is that since Japan stole the islands from China during war, they should return it as they relinquished the other Chinese territories, however that was not until the 1970s when the abundance of the resources on the islands was made known by the United Nations.

Moving onto the Japanese perspective on the Senkaku dispute, the Japanese have claimed that they examined the islands for a decade in the nineteenth century and determined the land was uninhabited. On January 14, 1895, Japan claimed supremacy over the land and made the territory its own. As said previously, after WWII, Japan returned many territories and islands back to China in the 1951 Treaty of San Francisco. These islands were under US supervision until 1971 where they were returned to Japan under the 1971 Okinawa Reversion Deal. On top of that, China had no objections to the San Francisco treaty, therefore implying that they agreed to allow the Japanese to keep the islands. Once the news of oil resources and mineral deposits were discovered on the island, both China and Taiwan began to state their claims that the islands belong to them.²⁵ Japan presumes that there should not be a dispute in the first place because the area remained insignificant for a long period of time, but China does not want Japan to get their hands on the oil reserves and other resources found on the islands. Besides the islands having a multitude of natural resources, the matter is tied with each countries’ morals. In essence, both countries believe that the territory belongs to them, and neither country wants to give it up.

With understanding both countries’ perspectives and claims vis the islands, the history after China and Taiwan made its claims on the islands are important to consider. When the Chinese government claimed that the islands

belonged to them, a negotiation commenced in 1972. China and Japan made an effort to negotiate the normalization of their diplomatic relationship. The Japanese Prime Minister, Kakuei Tanaka, and Chinese Premier, Zhou Enlai, had a brief conversation vis a vis the Senkaku Islands. A document captured the conversation where Tanaka questioned Zhou; “What is your view on the Senkaku Islands?” Zhou’s response to the question was abrupt; “I do not want to talk about it this time. If there wasn’t oil, neither Taiwan nor the United States would make this an issue.”²⁶ The conversation brings the concept of “shelving” the issue into consideration. “Shelving” an issue is a term to describe the acknowledgement between two parties on an existing issue, and the agreement to postpone resolution to a future date. Japan and China never agreed upon “shelving” the issue of territorial sovereignty over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands.²⁷ As evidence to this claim, there are documents released by the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

In 1996, Japan installed an aluminium lighthouse on one of the disputed islands. After the installation, a wave of anti-Japanese sentiment that swept Hong Kong, Taiwan, and China. The sentiment further emphasizes the point that this dispute is a highly sensitive issue for the Chinese community. As the situation grew, the dispute took a further bitter turn. On September 26, 1996, a Chinese activist from Hong Kong drowned near the disputed island as he desperately attempted to illustrate China’s sovereignty over the islands via a People’s of Republic of China flag.²⁸ With occurrences such as these, the dispute gradually grows out of hand. Yes, it is admirable for people to give their lives for their country, but if the situation can end with a matter of a compromise, then it does not seem appropriate for people to give up their lives. Of course both have their reasons why the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands should belong to them, but there is no mention of coming to a

compromise. Therefore, as time moves one, the more the dispute escalates, and the greater the chance of armed conflict will occur.

According to the Pew Research Center, a survey conducted in Spring 2016 portrayed that thirty-five percent of Japanese citizens are very concerned of an armed conflict and forty-five percent of them are somewhat concerned, therefore it can be concluded that eight-in-ten Japanese are, overall, concerned that territorial disputes between China and neighboring countries could lead to a military conflict. On China’s side, eighteen percent of the people are very concerned and forty-one percent of them are somewhat concerned. This can be converted to six-in-ten Chinese citizens being concerned overall.²⁹ While China’s percentage is lower than Japan’s, the statistics still demonstrate that the majority of both Chinese and Japanese citizens are worried about potential military conflict which may lead to another war causing more suffering and anguish to everyone.

The Senkaku/Diaoyu dispute can also be perceived through a symbolic way where both China and Japan see the islands as more than just a means to procure natural resources and earn a profit. For China, the islands represent a nationalistic symbol which reminds them about Japan's past military aggression, frequent evasion of war responsibility, and possible military revival.³⁰ It can be stated that China has more of an emotional sentiment with the islands compared to the Japanese due to its past. With both countries’ pride on the line of the dispute, the situation at hand is seemingly uncompromisable with no solution to be found. For Japan, according to a former vice admiral, the islands represent a psychological symbol where Japan cannot allow China to take the islands physically and psychologically. Additionally, Japan perceives the islands as a nationalistic symbol like China. By having similar symbolic perceptions of the islands,

both countries may understand why the other wishes to keep the islands. The countries do not solely value the islands for its practical applications such as oil and fish, they value it for what the islands mean to them via their honor. With the islands representing more than merely natural resources and oil reserves, it may be more difficult to come to a consensus because their dignity will interfere with the commonality both countries share.

Ultimately, the dispute is over highly coveted land that supposedly belongs to China, but Japan is in control for the time being. The dispute began to escalate in the early 2010s, but the situation has stalled momentarily. This does not mean that the situation should be ignored, there should be a resolution made promptly in order to prevent the problem from escalating any further than it already has. A possible solution would involve several steps that would satisfy both countries. For instance, both China and Japan would acknowledge the other’s sovereignty over the islands. However, Japan would have the formal rights over the islands according to international law. Since Japan would mostly be in control of the islands, Japan will have to delegate equal administration to China. In particular, there could be some kind of island council and both countries could alternate being the head of the council. With both countries having a share with the islands, the dispute would settle down, but it would not disappear completely since each country wants the entire territory to itself. Understanding their long history/rivalry, this solution may only be temporary. Eventually one country would want all of the islands to themselves. However, this interim resolution could allow the two countries to come to a more permanent consensus where no major conflict could come to fruition.

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NEOM: THE NEW FUTURE

JAMES BENNETT

Saudi Arabia, known for its rich culture, bountiful oil, conservative populace, and authoritarian governance, seems to be shifting away from some of its societal framework. Its government is enthusiastically jumping on the “Vision 2030 sustainability” bandwagon, with the intention of leading the globe into a more futuristic era. According to Business Insider, Saudi Arabia’s Vision 2030 is “an ambitious plan to revolutionize Saudi society, reduce dependence on oil, and make the country a technology hub.”¹

A key method of achieving its revolutionary aims is to build “smart cities”. Smart cities bear the “smart” moniker for similar reasons, as those of smartphones. They are meant to be something new, futuristic, and more technologically advanced than their non-smart counterparts. Smart cities differ from regular cities in that they have the ability to monitor and sense activity in a way that is not possible elsewhere. This is done to make the city incredibly efficient in its use of resources and to increase the quality of life of its citizens.

Saudi Arabia is heavily investing in digital infrastructure. Faisal Al-Sadhan, the programme manager for Technology Investment at the Saudi Ministry of Communications and Information Technology,

claims that the Saudi government has already invested \$29 Billion dollars in its ICT market alone.² The smart cities will be utilized to enable the Saudi Government to become “the most connected and digitized nation by 2030.”³ They have already pledged to build sixteen smart cities, with the world’s most ambitious project, Neom, to be completed by 2025. The very name “Neom” is foretelling of the importance of this new Saudi Arabian smart city. “Neom is a portmanteau of the Greek word neos, meaning "new," and mustaqbal, the Arabic word for ‘future.’”⁴ Neom has the potential to overshadow Israel’s international role to become the most strategically located and powerful sphere of influence in the region.

Historically, Saudi Arabia has historically been economically dependent on its oil exports; however, oil is a limited resource and the Saudi government recognizes that use of petroleum contributes to the global threat of climate change. Experts seem to view Saudi Arabia’s shift from petroleum to renewable forms of energy for Neom, namely wind and solar, as inevitable. ““I think everyone now understands clearly there is no future for the petroleum industry,” said Mohamed Salah, 25 co-founder of Social n’Tech - an Amman based digital content firm. He continued, ‘I think the Arabs are finally thinking in the right direction.

Because by the end of the day, they will need new resources for money after the oil crisis.””⁵ In fact, solar power will be critical to the sustainability of Neom.

Although Neom is primarily designated to be a sustainable city, its goals go far beyond that. Neom wants to become a hub for technology in the area, including such ventures as solar desalination plants, biotechnology, artificial rain, robotics and drone technologies. Neom partnered with the UK corporation Solar Water Limited to build a “solar dome” for a water desalination plant. According to David Reavely, the CEO of Solar Water Ltd “thousands of desalination plants around the world rely heavily on burning fossil fuels for water extraction, and we have the technology to desalinate water in a way that is completely sustainable and 100 percent carbon neutral.”⁶ The solar dome for the desalination plant planned for Neom is nearing completion. It began construction in February, and should be finished by the end of 2020.⁷

While the purpose of the solar dome is designed for the desalination of the Red Sea’s water, it is also an environmental milestone for the world. David Reavely notes that most desalination plants active today are fossil fuel powered and are hazardous to sea life, whereas Neom’s solar dome is not, making Neom a symbol of what the New Future should be.⁸ According to Saudi Arabia's Minister of Environment, Water and Agriculture, H.E. Abdulrahman Al-Fadli, the solar dome desalination plant is simply proof that Saudi Arabia is following the goals set by the United Nations for sustainability.⁹ However to others, namely Professor Chis Sansom, who is a consultant at Solar Water Limited and Head of the Centre for Renewable Energy Systems at Cranfield University, “The adoption of solar dome desalination in NEOM will be a trailblazer for other countries struggling to generate environmentally-safe and sustainable

sources of fresh water. The process could be used to produce clean water for a range of uses including farming, reforestation, biotech consumption, or use by high-tech industries that rely on pure clean water for their manufacturing.”¹⁰

Neom is envisioned to be the epicenter of cutting-edge medicine, integrating biotechnology, smart technology and AI in an effort to provide a model of health care in line with the requirements of the Fourth Industrial Revolution Era.^{11 12} The model will emphasize personal responsibility for preventative healthcare. The vision includes smart hospitals providing a variety of automated services- allowing citizens to monitor their own personal health.^{13 14}

Neom will provide the unique opportunity for both citizens and visitors to get “digital twins” of themselves. According to Dr. Maliha Hashmi, an executive director at Neom and Deputy Sector Head for the city’s Health and Wellbeing as well the Biotech Sector, “At the point of entry, everyone - both Neomians and visitors-will have the opportunity to have a digital twin of themselves created. This will lead to personalized and precise medical treatment. General treatment pathways will be removed and everything will be catered to a person’s specific genome profile.”¹⁵

Genetic engineering for the sake of humanity’s improvement is anticipated to be part of the medically advanced landscape of Neom. Saudi Arabia has already begun the extensive process of sequencing the genomes of all of its citizens with the Saudi Human Genome Program (SHGP), which was initiated in 2013.¹⁶ Neom may be tasked with creating the stronger, healthier superhumans, which have to date, only been depicted in futuristic books and films.

While all of these incredible developments in technology are believable and can be justified as logical for a scientific utopia or dystopia, there are some claims made about Neom that are ludicrous and if true are very concerning. For instance, Neom's weather is manipulatable. According to Business Insider, Neom will create artificial clouds through “cloud seeding” technology to create abnormally high amounts of rainfall. ¹⁷ While that sounds beneficial on paper, it does raise queries on when this method of increasing rainfall was discovered, why it has not been utilized to decrease droughts and prevent wildfires around the world, and how severe a manufactured rainfall could be.

Other claims given by Business Insider are not necessarily scary, but rather comical. The claim that Neom will create a robotic Jurassic Park ¹⁸ does not seem implausible to do, but aside from being beneficial to tourism, it certainly wouldn’t add to Neom’s ability to monitor activity for the purpose of efficiency. Another absurd claim is that Neom will have a fake moon. ¹⁹ If that is true, it could be frightening. After all, if Neom could manipulate humans into believing a fake moon is real, then the sky’s the limit in how they could control their populace. As both these claims were originally reported by the Wall Street Journal as leaked documents obtained from Neom planners, they could be seen as propaganda tools to make Neom’s almost dystopian use of technology seem vague, far off and farfetched, when the opposite might in fact be true.

While Neom’s technological ambitions may seem dystopic to some, others are excited at the technological marvels Neom could bring. Hossam M. Zayed, an Egyptian innovator with a passion for robotics, believes “Neom will be an anchor for boosting robotics research the Middle East and it will develop into a global technology hub that is close to us both in terms of culture and geography,” “It would be like a

heaven for us and if it really happens, I would seriously consider living there.” ²⁰

Mr. Zayad is correct in his assumption that Neom could be a bastion of robotics research. According to Joseph Bradley, the head of tech and digital at Neom, “We want to build a citywide operating system that is aware, predictive and can take action.” ²¹ Additionally, Neom’s founders claim that robots will outnumber humans and that everything will be linked with artificial intelligence. ²² These three facts together paint a society that is more of a utopia for robots than for humans. Humans seem to be visitors in a city of machines where the humans are completely unnecessary for Neom’s survival. The robots that will “outnumber humans" may be primarily drones.

The drones, according to the industry leaders at Drone Tech, will play a critical role in Neom. Healthcare, transport and retail will all include the use of Drones. ²³ In fact, drones will do practically everything humans will do. Businesses will be able to cut costs by replacing human workers with drones. Instead of a large number of independent thinkers with human rights, they could have an army of drones controlled by a single hive mind.

Once completed, Neom will be roughly thirty-three times the size of New York City. It will span across Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Egypt and include the former Egyptian islands of Tiran and Sanafir. Neom will create a global hub, connecting Africa, Europe and Asia in such a way that 70% of the world’s population will be able to reach it in under eight hours. ^{24 25} “The location to construct the giant smart city is chosen in a way that the city will have a direct advantage from the trade routes of the Red Sea, Suez Canal, and Gulf of Aqaba. The new bridge which is known as the ‘King Salman Bridge’ will establish a direct connection between Saudi Arabia and Egypt – another strategic advantage

for the city.” ²⁶

Neom is intended to be “the world’s first independent international zone.” ²⁷ It will not be subject to Saudi Arabian Sharia-based law, nor its judicial system. ^{28 29} Even though Neom will create its own laws and develop its own taxation system it will still receive protection from the Saudi Arabian military. ³⁰ In essence, Saudi Arabian citizens living outside of Neom will be responsible for helping to fund the protection of citizens living within Neom, while the Neom residents, will bear no such reciprocal responsibility to the rest of Saudi Arabia. Neom will embrace “world-class investment laws" and will conduct its operations “in accordance with international best practice”. ³¹

While Neom is officially part of Saudi Arabia, its functionality is an enclave within Saudi Arabian Territory. The driving force behind the development of Neom is a corporation of the same name as of January 2019. ³² While the CEO of that company is Nadhmi Al-Nasr, whose loyalty is no doubt to Saudi Arabia, Neom, while part of Saudi Territory, is being designed by a corporation that has partnered with Saudi Arabia to achieve its goals. Additionally, Klaus Klienfield, who was the German CEO of both Siemens AG and Alcoa Inc, “will take over wider responsibilities to enhance the economic, technological and financial development of Saudi Arabia.” ³³ While Klienfield is likely part of the Crown Prince’s inner circle, it still highlights that Neom is not being developed exclusively by Saudi Arabia and the founders of Neom are not united under the Saudi Arabian banner. Neom appears to be more of an entirely new international state than an extension of Saudi Arabia’s government.

According to the Saudi Arabian Crown Prince Mohammed, 98% of the laws that Neom will

have could differ from those within Saudi Arabia. The laws that would remain are relatively trivial due to the geopolitical location of Neom. For instance, alcohol will be banned within Neom’s borders for religious reasons, but alcohol is not illegal in either Egypt or Lebanon. The Crown Prince himself recognizes that even when on the opposite side of Neom from Egypt, it would only take twenty minutes by car to get within Egyptian territory, completely invalidating the law. ³⁴ The ban on alcohol is either a distraction to mislead the populace on what they should be concerned about within Neom or a justification to use Neom’s highly advanced technology to monitor its citizens.

It is possible, however, that Neom was never intended to be part of Saudi Arabia, but rather a beneficiary for the entire world. This seems unlikely, but it is no doubt true Neom is to be a global hub. Joseph Bradley, who is the head of tech and digital at Neom, believes that it is important for everyone within Neom to talk in their own languages and be able to communicate with anyone else in real time. ³⁵ Additionally, it is possible that Neom is not meant to be an outsider to Saudi Arabian society, but rather the first major step in changing Saudi Arabia as a whole. Saudi Arabia may be intending to alter its culture, however slowly, to reflect a more liberal society. Mohamed Salah of Social n’Tech, when commenting on Neom, said “The Saudis were always the most conservative community in the Middle East, this is just one of the changes that shows they are becoming more open-minded and that’s good for the whole region.” ³⁶

Even though Neom is to be an independent city-state, all of the territory involved will be under the sovereignty of Saudi Arabia. The territory of Neom that already belongs to Saudi Arabia is the northwest province of Tabuk. ³⁷

The other lands to be incorporated into Neom include the Jordanian Port of Aqaba, the formerly Egyptian islands of Tiran and Sanafir, as well as portions of the Sinai peninsula. The yielding to Saudi Arabia of Egyptian territories by Egyptian president Sisi has elicited much controversy for the government and protest amongst the disgruntled Egyptian citizens.

Both the Prime Minister of Egypt, Sherif Ismail, and Egyptian President Sisi did agree to relinquish Egypt’s hold on Tiran and Sanafir and allowed Saudia Arabia to claim sovereignty on April 8th 2016 in Cairo. However, not only did Egyptian people oppose the decision, the decision itself is an extremely confusing political move. “In ceding the islands to Saudi Arabia, Egypt is essentially relinquishing its strategic presence over the Strait of Tiran, and, by extension, its geopolitical control over access through the Gulf of Aqaba to Israel and Jordan.”³⁸ Supposedly, in exchange for transferring Egyptian sovereignty to the islands to Saudi Arabia, Egypt will gain \$22 billion worth of oil and development aid over five years. However, it appears that the terms are loosely defined by the Saudi Arabian government, meaning how the aid will be provided is up to interpretation.³⁹ The yielding of the islands and a portion of the Sinai Peninsula could also be seen as a byproduct of Egypt’s economic dependence on Saudi Arabia. “Since 2013, Saudi Arabia has been supporting Egypt’s failing economy by providing over \$12 billion in economic aid.”⁴⁰

Although Neom is touted by Saudi Arabia as one of their planned economic cities meant to diversify the economy for the benefit of all citizens, many doubt that to be the case. “It’s quite revealing that [Neom] is more of a vanity project targeting the domestic elite and an international audience in terms of a new Saudi, one that’s open and economically or socially liberal,” explained Josh Cooper, of the Saudi

rights group Al Qst. Mr. Cooper believes that the lack of inclusion of locals in the process is a telling sign regarding the true motives of the Saudi Arabian project. Huwaitat activist and spokesperson, Alya Alhwaiti surmised: “It’s definitely not for the people already living there! It’s for tourists, people with money. But not for the original people living there.”⁴¹

Due to the fact that the residents will be living in a city-state with its own laws, they will not necessarily enjoy the same rights or have the same level of influence as Saudi citizens outside of the region. Additionally, since the entire region will be covered by constant drone surveillance, facial-recognition technology and data collection, they may ironically have less freedom and privacy than Saudis living under Sharia law outside of the city-state.⁴²

In promotional material, Neom is described as being built on “virgin” land, implying that it has never been inhabited.⁴³ The truth is that for centuries, long before Saudi Arabia was even founded, one of its oldest tribes, the Huwaitat, has considered the land designated to become part of Neom their home. The pristine coastal mountain range which the creators of Neom have been promoting to investors has now been stripped of its native residents. At least 20,000 Huwaitis, comprising 13 villages along the Red Sea, are being forced to relocate.^{44 45}

Alya Alhwait described how the Huwaitis had initially been deceived by the Saudi government; “When [Saudi Arabia] started Neom, in the beginning of 2016, Mohammed bin Salman promised [the Huwaitis] to be part of it and share in the development and improvement of the area.” “But in 2020,” she continued, “they are forced to leave their land without places to stay. And the minute you open your mouth or say something on social media, you disappear from the face of the earth.” This was exactly what had happened to an activist by

the name of Abdul Rahim al-Huwaiti.⁴⁶

Abdul Rahim, acting as a citizen journalist, posted real time reports of government activity on social media, including what the authorities were doing to remove his fellow tribe members from their land. In one report on the government security forces, he noted, “They have begun the process of removing people, beginning with surveying homes with the intent of removing people and deporting them from their land.” He added, “They arrested anyone who said they’re against deportation, they don’t want to leave, they want to remain [in] their homes, [and] they do not want money.”⁴⁷ Most of the tribal members have refused to take the \$3,000 the government has offered them to relocate. In addition to brute force, the government has found other means to coerce them to leave. Electricity has been cut off, schools have been closed and fires of unknown origin have appeared.⁴⁸

In that same video, Abdul Rahim stated, “I would not be surprised if they come to kill me in my house now, and place a weapon next to me.”⁴⁹ Later that day, the police arrived and did in fact, kill him. They claimed he had shot at them first. Since his death, Al Qst has contended that government authorities have been acting to cover up his murder to both avoid public awareness of what they are doing and to prevent the martyrdom of Abdul. Instead of Abdul being perceived as a martyr, Al Qst believes that the authorities are actually trying to use his death as a propaganda tool. Al Qst suspects that “They are hoping to pull off a major publicity stunt by getting prominent figures among the Huwaitat to publicly disown Abdul Rahim and ‘renew their allegiance’ to the king.”⁵⁰

The Huwaitat has requested UN intervention on their behalf. Their attorney, Rodney Dixon, is claiming that the Saudi Arabian government’s

actions against the Huwaitat are potential “crimes against humanity.” It is not just that the Huwaitat are being forced from their indigenous lands by their government, but it is also the way in which the government is implementing its goal. Dixon says, “People are being intimidated. They’ve been threatened. It is gratuitous, the needless threats are being used in order to build this big city.”⁵¹

Neom evidently is of incredible importance to the future of the Middle East and the future of society as a whole. It has the potential to be a utopia under just governance, or a dystopia under unjust governance. Neom will set the precedence for what the rest of the world will become. If Neom ends up being a critical success, no matter what form it may take, we may see a push from our leaders to replicate it. When the United States was founded it radically shaped Europe as countries strived to reject the status quo and bring in the new future, and Neom is quite literally the New Future.

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ON THE ISSUES SURROUNDING FEMICIDE IN LATIN AMERICA

PAULINA VILLANUEVA

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, a growing number of women have experienced violence worldwide. It occurs in all regions and is not only a social problem, but also is a violation of human rights. Approximately 35% of women have experienced violence globally.¹ Oftentimes this violence results in murder or what has become known as femicide. Latin America is home to fourteen countries with the highest rates of femicide in the world.² Some of these countries include Brazil, Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Chile, and Mexico. Much of the violence that is perpetrated against women mainly takes place in Central America. Specifically, two different countries, Mexico and El Salvador. Mexico, apart from the COVID-19 pandemic, additionally deals with the epidemic of murdered women. El Salvador similarly deals with a femicide crisis today, and ranks as one of the countries with the highest rates of femicide. To understand why Mexican and El Salvadoran women are being murdered, it is necessary to first define what femicide, its characteristics, and why the rate of femicide is increasing so much in these two nations.

FEMICIDE

The term “femicide” was first coined and popularized by feminist writer Diana H. Russell in 1976 at the first International Tribunal on Crimes against Women. She defined it as “the killings of females by males because they are female.”³ While the term has variations on its meaning, the most accurate in today’s time and date would be “the assassination of women for reasons having to do with their gender.”⁴ Since the term was first coined, it has broadened to encompass any killing of a woman and in order to politicize and challenge male violence against women.⁵ The theoretical framework of “feminicidio”, developed by feminist Marcela Lagarde, describes the dramatic rise in violence and killings against women. It is important to note that femicides differ from female homicides. A female homicide is any murder of a woman regardless of circumstance, while femicides are the murder of women because of their gender, as previously mentioned.⁶ Femicide is a broad term, as the definition addressed above does not focus on the different types of femicides that occur. The most common femicides are known as “intimate” femicides. Additionally, there are murders in the name of “honor”, dowry-related femicide, and

non-intimate femicides.

INTIMATE FEMICIDE

Intimate femicide, or intimate partner femicide as it is also known, is usually committed by a former husband or boyfriend.⁷ There are also cases in which these intimate femicides have been carried out by other male family members such as uncles, cousins, brothers, and fathers.⁸ Intimate femicide is the most common form of killings against women, given that the perpetrators of these homicides tend to be close family. More than 40% of femicide victims are said to have known their killers.⁹ In places such as in Mexico and El Salvador, these types of murders are the most recurrent.

HONOR KILLINGS

Honor killings differ from intimate femicide as these homicides can be carried out by females as well as males. These killings occur as a result of women becoming involved in adultery, sexual intercourse, pregnancy outside of marriage, or even rape.¹⁰ The murders of this type typically view femicide as a solution to “restore the family honor”. This type of killing tends to be linked to the machismo mentality, which often has the negative side effects of violence and or the death of young women while trying to bring honor to the family name. Honor killings are often accepted in many cultures where “honor” to the family name matters most and results in some of the most tragic killings.¹¹

DOWRY-RELATED FEMICIDE

Dowry-related femicide tends to occur more on the Indian subcontinent, but is still an important method of femicide to discuss. This form of murder is linked to cultural practices involving dowry. Dowry refers to the property or money gifted by a bride to her husband with marriage.

There are usually conflicts with dowry, such as providing a dowry deemed insufficient to the husband’s family. Many in-laws will murder the new bride because of a lack of dowry.¹²

NON-INTIMATE FEMICIDE

Non-intimate femicide is growing at an alarming rate, specifically in Latin America. This type of femicide occurs when someone without an intimate relationship with the victim murders them. These types of killings tend to be random and often involve torture before the murder occurs.¹³ These killings are also referred to as sexual femicide, given that it often involves sexual aggression or abuse prior to killing them.¹⁴

THE HISTORY OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE & FEMICIDE

Mexico and El Salvador are dealing with a femicide epidemic that can be attributed to the history and gender roles within the two countries. Prior to European colonization, there was sexism which heightened during this era. In line with the European thinkers, Mexico’s general consensus was that women “were more well-suited to the domestic sphere as opposed to men who were born to think and act as independent agents.”¹⁵ This ideal spread throughout Latin America, which additionally aided in paving the way for gender based discrimination. While gender discrimination and gender violence are different, they feed off each other, which can be observed by the alarming increase of gender-based violence and the femicides that result thereof.¹⁶

These two countries also deal with corruption and narcopolitics, which have been linked with femicides. Mexico and El Salvador deal with the violence caused by drug cartels, and much of the violence is perpetrated against women as they are considered “easy targets”. There have

been efforts to reduce cartel related violence, yet they have failed. The war against cartels has only brought an increase in the violence seen and has undoubtedly led to an increase in gender violence as well.¹⁷

FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

Apart from the history of Latin America and the growth of femicide in the two countries, it is also important to understand the reasons behind femicide, from a feminist perspective.¹⁸ Feminist theory is generally referred to as the “patriarchal perspective” founded on the belief that patriarchy and, consequentially, oppression are common threads in the structures of society.¹⁹ Feminist explanations of violence against women and its resulting femicides are due to the male-dominated culture, power, and gender. Additionally, the violence women experience can also be accredited to gender inequality and societal structures such as the patriarchy and institutional violence.²⁰ Mexico and El Salvador, tend to fit into this concept of a male-dominate culture. This is where machismo is again a key player when it comes to violence against women or femicides. This feminist perspective also explains, “the relationship between this cultural ideology of male dominance and structural forces limit women’s access to resources.”²¹ This indicates that men result to violence or use their “positions as the superior gender” as a means to keep women under control. While it may seem ridiculous that men are flaunting their “superiority” over women in this day and time, it is a common occurrence in Mexico and El Salvador. Women are subjected to verbal or physical violence because they are the “lesser gender” in many areas of these countries. Feminist theory or the feminist approach to this subject is not the only perspective towards femicide as the concept of femicide has become more known and as a result, different perspectives have emerged. A different perspective on femicide is a human

rights approach which “extends femicide beyond the lethal and into extreme forms of violence against women.”²² The history and the perspectives present are important to remember when looking at the following case studies.

A CASE STUDY: MEXICO

While femicide in Mexico is not a new occurrence, it has grown. Such that Mexico is now considered to be dealing with an epidemic of femicide. It is one of the fourteen countries with the highest rate of femicide in the world, and is ranked sixth in gender crimes “with a rate fifteen times higher than the global average.”²³ As previously mentioned, there are four main forms of femicide; however, the most common ones in Mexico would be intimate femicide and non-intimate femicide. The first instances of femicide in Mexico emerged in 1993 in Ciudad Juarez. Reports showed the discovery of mutilated bodies of raped and murdered women on the outskirts of the city.²⁴ These women were considered to be easy targets as Ciudad Juarez was plagued by drug cartels, police corruption, and severe underdevelopment.²⁵ Since 1993, Ciudad Juarez has become the capital of femicide and is considered to be one of the most dangerous cities in the world.²⁶ Although these killings in Ciudad Juarez gained international attention, many of these femicides went unsolved or local authorities reacted to the killings poorly by blaming the victims rather than the perpetrators of the crime. Even with these killings being classified as femicide in 1993, it was not until 2012 that Mexico legally distinguished femicide from homicides.²⁷

Many of these femicides in Mexico occur because of machismo. Machismo is defined as male behavior that is strong and forceful, which often shows very traditional ideas about how men and women should behave.²⁸ Machismo beliefs revolve around the notion that a woman

should be a subordinate and must attend to the needs of the males in the family. Violence against women includes a structural violence which keeps women subordinated to men as a result of this masochist way of thinking.²⁹ In addition to machismo being one of the causes of femicide in Mexico, human trafficking and cartel violence also play a part in these femicides. Trafficking of women is very common in Mexico and those who are trafficked are forced into prostitution or are often killed if they resist.³⁰

Femicide continues to grow throughout Latin America, especially in Mexico. There were nearly 35,000 people murdered in 2019 alone, with ten percent of these murders marked as femicides. The percentage of femicides in Mexico has been said to increase exponentially at a rate of 145% since 2015.³¹ Recent events have brought attention to femicide in Mexico once more. The murder of twenty-five-year-old Ingrid Escamilla and the later kidnapping and murder of seven-year-old Fatima Aldrughett at the hands of an unidentified man,³² sparked outrage in communities. The tragedy confirmed that these crimes against women continue to happen. Last year, due to the outbreak of the pandemic, many women were restricted to their own homes. Violence against women and femicides increased as well. Many of these women were to remain under the same roof as their abusers, and the impact of this can be seen in the increasing numbers.³³ In 2018, the average number of femicides were seven per day. As of 2020, this number increased to ten cases of femicide per day.³⁴ It is difficult to think how this type of violence against women continues to exist in this day and time, but it does. Mexico is not the only country in Latin America that is plagued with femicide as El Salvador similarly deals with this issue.

A CASE STUDY: EL SALVADOR

El Salvador’s femicide epidemic is no different than the one occurring in Mexico. El Salvador is one of the smallest countries in Central America and has an estimated population of 6.2 million people. Yet this number has fluctuated in recent years not only because of the pandemic, but because of the high rate of femicides it has. Since El Salvador is a nation with considerable gang violence, brutality, and murder, the country receives little international attention in regards to femicides, and is often overlooked.³⁵ Yet, it is important that more attention is needed, as El Salvador suffers from one of the highest femicide rates in the world;³⁶ 13.29 deaths per one hundred thousand women and it continues to rise.³⁷ Although one El Salvadoran woman is murdered by a man every twenty-four hours, the country has some of the lowest conviction rates. Only five percent of femicide perpetrators are convicted. In simpler terms, only one out of twenty of the murder convictions result in an actual conviction.³⁸ Additionally, violence against women within the country has become normalized in the nation’s recent history.³⁹

The multitude of femicides in this country is a result of its culture and current environment. Like Mexico, El Salvador has an ingrained culture of virulent machismo. In El Salvador, machismo penetrates neatly every sector of society. It is an ideology deeply embedded in law enforcement; because of this, most people believe domestic violence against women is normal.⁴⁰ Additionally, Catholicism is very prominent within the region, so men have authority over women due to the Catholic country’s patriarchal social structure.⁴¹ Gang culture in El Salvador also plays a role in the number of femicides due to the negative aspects associated with them. Gangs view women as nothing more than sexual objects and drag them into their conflicts. The high levels

of gang and narco-violence are a key factor in many of these gender violence cases against women.⁴²

A COMPARISON BETWEEN CASE STUDIES

Both case studies presented are in parallel. These two countries belong to a region which sees high levels of femicide on a yearly basis: both dealing with their own epidemic of murdered women. They share similar ideas of machismo rooted deep into their societies and act as players in these femicides. The prominent religion of Catholicism in the region also plays a role as men believe they have the authority over women due to the patriarchal social structure. Gangs and cartels tend to take advantage of women in these regions as well. Additionally, the violence and brutality caused by gangs and cartels tend to distract from the femicides as there is already so much violence. There are low conviction rates for these perpetrators as well. While femicide is not a new occurrence, it is important to look at how the current leaders, organizations, and groups have approached the situation.

AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

THE UNITED NATIONS

The United Nations’ primary goal when it comes to femicide and violence against women in general is to eliminate all forms of it globally. Recently, the United Nations, along with the European Union, has announced their Spotlight Initiative. This initiative, a multi-year partnership between the United Nations and European Union, is meant to draw attention to the violence against women and femicides which occur worldwide. It places this issue at the forefront in an effort to achieve women’s equality.⁴³ The United Nations and European Union announced that they would invest 50

million to end femicides “in Argentina, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Mexico.”⁴⁴ Additionally, different world leaders have thought that it is necessary to intervene with this issue and are in support of this initiative. Yet, the funds provided by these organizations do not seem to be enough. The rate of femicide is not decreasing and while action is being taken by both the United Nations and the European Union, the violence against these women persists and only continues to grow. However, Mexico and El Salvador’s respective leaders have taken a different approach in addressing these femicides.

MEXICO’S PERSPECTIVE

The current president of Mexico, Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, and his administration have received a true challenge to deal with. During the last two years of his presidency, the country has dealt with a rising number of femicides. His administration has been deeply criticized when it comes to femicides and is often called “slow to respond”. When Lopez Obrador is asked about his stance of the femicides within the country, he claims that the “lives of all men and women, all human beings must be protected.”⁴⁵ Lopez Obrador is criticized in his response against femicide and commonly perceived as not having an idea on how to combat this issue. Additionally, when asked about the severity of the issue, he claims that he does not want to talk about the gender motivated killings, sometimes downplaying the violence women face. He claims that “90% of calls to the domestic abuse hotlines are fake.”⁴⁶ In comparison the to the United Nations’ initiatives and focus on femicide, Lopez Obrador seems to have no concern over the amount of violence against women and the femicides that often result because of this violence. Furthermore, Lopez Obrador and his administration claim that the gruesome femicides of Ingrid Escamilla and Fatima

Aldruggett last February were a result of neo-liberal policies from his right winged predecessors.⁴⁷ The femicides in Mexico are not being taken seriously and the current administration is unconcerned with the issue at hand as they continue to dismiss the crimes.

Many feminist groups (and women in general) are furious with the way Lopez Obrador disregards the situation, especially after the murder of Ingrid Escamilla when her mutilated body was put on display. Protestors took to the streets in outrage as the President failed to take the issue seriously. The protestors spray painted slogans against gender-based violence at the presidential palace last February in attempts to get the President and his administration to listen to the issue.⁴⁸ Yet, the president still seems to avoid finding a real solution to femicides and the violence women experience. Lopez Obrador’s vague plans and his idea that encouraging Mexicans to “love thy neighbor” will resolve femicide in Mexico is nothing short of delusional. Real action needs to be taken.

EL SALVADOR’S PERSPECTIVE

El Salvador’s current president Nayib Armando Bukele Ortez, seems to take a similar approach to Mexico’s. El Salvador has always had a problem with gender and violence so much so that it is one of the only countries in the world with a law against “femicide suicide” This occurs when the abuse a woman takes is so much that it drives her to suicide.⁴⁹ This law was implemented as a means to prevent the violence women face, yet a majority of the country continues to see rising rates of femicide. The current president has not taken any action to prevent or lower the cases of femicide in the country. This led women to flee El Salvador and go somewhere safer. Furthermore, prior to his election, Bukele Ortez, was asked about what he would do about the gender violence and femicides in the

country and only responded with vague plans much like Lopez Obrador.⁵⁰ These vague plans seem to have little to no effect on the country, given that the President and his administration are not taking the issue seriously. They often blame these femicides on gang violence in the country and do nothing about the perpetrators of the crimes.

However, different feminists within the country are calling to action and pressuring the current administration to do something about gendered violence. The feminist movement in El Salvador is very effective at drawing attention to the reality of these gender-based killings in the country. More than fifty El Salvadoran feminist organizations came together to develop a cohesive platform that would outline a plan to change the growing number of femicides in the country.⁵¹ This plan would move El Salvador towards more gender equality and justice. Yet, the government would need to implement this plan and as previously mentioned, the current administration does not take the issue seriously.

CONSEQUENCES OF FEMICIDE

It is also important to look at the consequences of violence against women and femicide. Apart from the obvious deaths that can result because of the violence carried out against women, the effects of violence against women are well chronicled. Many women subjected to violence because of their gender take to alcohol abuse or illicit drug abuse.⁵² The rate of smoking among women who experienced violence increases as well. Femicide suicide rates also increase, as most women view it as an easier way out of their situation. Apart from the effects it has on women, violence and femicides have a psychological impact on the countries. Femicide is a form of intimate terror which has the misfortune of being normalized in Mexico and El Salvador. This “normalization” of femicide and the ignorance the government of

these two countries show devalues the violence women face. They bring zero attention to the femicides and apart from the personal cost, it reveals the deep and damaging failures of the country.⁵³ Finally, one of the bigger issues that results from femicide is the low conviction rate. Many perpetrators of femicide are not convicted of their crimes, such as in El Salvador where only five percent of perpetrators are convicted. Femicide affects the whole region and needs a solid solution.

WHERE TO GO FROM HERE?

Femicide is not an issue that can be solved overnight; it is deeply rooted in areas around the world. This “normalization” of femicide, is not something that should be considered “normal.” Change needs to happen. Since the early 90s, Latin American countries have passed laws to protect women and their rights. One of the first laws passed in this region established protection measures for women with regards to violence suffered within the private sector. This private sector refers to family, intrafamily, domestic, and intimate affairs.⁵⁴ There is the additional Convention of Belém do Pará, in which article seven of chapter three titled “Duties of States” upholds that:

“Parties, condemn all forms of violence against women and agree to adopt, by all means appropriate and with - out delay, policies to prevent, punish and end the mentioned violence and to carry out the following: c) include in their domestic legislations, penal, civil and administrative codes, as well as of other nature, which are necessary to prevent, punish and end violence against women and adopt appropriate administrative measures as the case may be.”⁵⁵

While these laws and regulations against violence seem to be enough, they are not. Violence persists in Mexico and El Salvador,

and this violence is aimed at women. It is also important to note that it was only in recent years that laws were implemented to criminalize femicide. In 2016, sixteen countries, including Mexico and El Salvador, passed laws or amendments to finally criminalize femicide.⁵⁶ While it seems as if action is being taken, it was very slow: the first time international attention was focused on femicide was in 1993. Action should have been taken immediately after and not years later when the situation worsened. Additionally, this issue is cannot be solved by implementing laws or amendments. The disregard the leaders of these two nations show for the issue needs to be addressed. Leaders must be dedicated to lowering the cases of femicide. It cannot be all talk and no action as the rate of femicide and gendered violence will only continue to rise unless something is done about the situation.

CONCLUSION

The femicide epidemic in these two countries is a perfect example of what gendered violence is like for many women in the world. They are subjected to physical and verbal violence because of their gender and oftentimes killed because of this. The women of these countries experience intimate and non-intimate forms of femicide the most. It has been an ongoing battle in Mexico and El Salvador for years when it comes to gendered violence. With their respective leaders not acting against the harsh reality these women go through, the number of femicides will only continue to increase. While action has been taken in the form of laws and legislation against gender violence and the recent criminalization of femicide, it is not enough at this point. Further attention has risen as a result of the hymn “Un violador en tu camino”*, which has become a global feminist hymn. Femicide is on the rise even after implementation of laws and the awareness that has been bought. The effects femicide has on

women and nations, whether it be because of their history or a different factor completely, must be acknowledged. Thus, it is important to bring awareness to this issue and the number of women who are killed each year because of their gender.

*Translation: A rapist in your way.

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PERVASIVE DEVELOPMENTAL DISORDERS IN INDIA

SAMANTHA AYERS

Autism. Asperger Syndrome. Childhood Disintegrative Disorder. Rett Syndrome. We have all probably met at least one person in our lifetime who has one of these disorders. These disorders fall under the category of Pervasive Developmental Disorders or PDD. They affect all aspects of life, mainly with “the delay of development of basic functions like communication and socialization”. (NINDS) ¹ There is no determined cure for any of these disorders, “Medications are used to address specific behavioral problems”. ² In both the past and modern era, cultures and societies often set apart and look down on individuals born with PDD.

In India, there is a good amount of support for people with these disorders, but there wasn’t always support. Throughout history, people with mental illnesses were ostracized because they were different. Individuals who are neurotypical and suffer from these disorders have not been considered the societal ideal of “normal” and were outcasted from their communities, often making their illnesses worse. India, as well as most Asian countries have a “cultural-habit” regarding mental illness. These cultures tend to perceive only the

physical illnesses, rather than look for mental illnesses. If there was something “mentally wrong” with a person, societies tended to blame the parents or the family of the mentally ill person, causing rumors and near societal exclusion.

There are a lot of mental health issues in Asian countries because of this deep-rooted cultural need to have a perfect family, which meant having no mental illnesses and practically no physical problems (excluding physical problems earned in battle). These deep-rooted ideas are still present in India, and is heavily influenced by India’s former Caste system. This system is described as a “Hindu sociocultural system that was traditionally divided into castes that were exclusive, hereditary, and endogamous.” (Wade) ³ The majority of the system has been outlawed since 1950, but culturally and socially, the system still plays a huge part in the everyday lives of India’s citizens. The system had 4 major groups that includes the Brahmins, the Kshatriyas, the Vaishyas, and the Shudras. Those who were outcasted by the caste system or were the subordinates to all were called the Untouchables. (Wade) ⁴ This meant that they were not touched by others and seen as too dirty

to even touch or look at. The other tiers turned up their noses at them, and treated them like feral dogs.

At the top of the hierarchy were the Brahmins. The Brahmins were the priests, masters, and teachers of “sacred knowledge”. Below them were the Kshatriyas, originally called Rajanya or kinsmen of the king. These people were warriors, generals, captains, etc. of the army who protected the people from invaders. Below the Kshatriyas were the Vaishyas: the farmers, merchants, and landowners. Under all three of the previous categories were the Shudras: the servants, peasants or commoners. Some of the Shudras had to work dirty, hazardous jobs like disposal of dead animals or street sweepers. This deemed them “Untouchable” as the higher categories could not and would not physically touch them (Madan). ⁵

The different tiers in the caste made it harder for persons of the lower tier to receive medical care, let alone mental illness care. In countries that produce tiers of the population with clear divides, the lower tiers are the ones who need the most medical care and have the hardest time getting it. It was not fair at all. Even though the system was majority outlawed, many people in India still follow it culturally and socially. This means it is still difficult for the “lower tier” citizens to move up in society, maintaining the struggle to find medical care. Children and adults living with Pervasive Developmental Disorders are most often from the lower tiers in the old caste system; therefore, share the same difficulties in receiving healthcare. People with these disorders are also more socially ostracized than those in the low tier without disorders.

India has a population of about 1.38 billion people (India Demographics). ⁶ Looking at the population, there are two major groups that emerge: the upper/middle class, which used to be the Brahmins, the Kshatriyas, the Vaishyas;

and the lower class, composed of the Shudras and the Untouchables. The upper/middle class are still mainly the descendants of the upper caste system groups, which means they are considerably wealthier than the lower class. This makes healthcare easily accessible, specifically mental illness care. The lower class make up the majority of India, live below poverty lines in rural areas, and have a difficult time finding access to medical care. This creates problems because mental illness is most common in these poorer areas, and those who live there can’t access the medical attention they need.

“However, despite the increasing research interest in PDD worldwide, data from developing settings such as India are scarce. Although such children are seen and treated in several [medical] centers around the country, information about how they and their families fare is scant” (Malhorta, 10). ⁷ Though children are seen in India about their PDD, information is limited due to cultural and societal pressures. The sight of an upper to middle class child in a center creates rumors about specific families not being “perfect” among the public eye. Yet a lower-class child in a center confirms the belief that a family is where they “should be” economically because of how their child turned out. There is hope for this system. As Indian culture continues to grow and evolve, Indian citizens are gradually coming to accept their inability to control the problems people are born with, and it’s not the family’s fault. It is slow, but there is a push for change by the younger generation.

There are a few different types of disorders categorized under the umbrella terminology that is PDD. These include Autism, Asperger Syndrome, Childhood Disintegrative Disorder, and Rett Syndrome. “Most children with PDD come to the attention of professionals in the second and third years of life. However, the

correct diagnosis of these cases may depend on the effectiveness of the available child health surveillance and evaluation, procedures, which vary from one country to the other” (Eapen, 202).⁸ Autism, better known as Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), is a “developmental disability that can cause significant social, communication, learning, and behavioral challenges.” (CDC-Autism)⁹ Children living with Autism Spectrum Disorder fall somewhere on a spectrum depending on the severity of their presenting symptoms. In India, about 1 in 100 children under 10 has been diagnosed with Autism, and has at least one neurodevelopmental condition. (Katsnelson)¹⁰ This means there is about 10 million people suffering from Autism in India alone. Autism and other PDD disorders weren’t officially recognized by the Indian government until 2001. Autism was not reported in India until the 1980’s; there is nothing before then about the disorder in the country. Up until 2001, children and adults with autism in India were deemed “mentally retarded”. (Ahmedabad News)¹¹ Many of these children deemed “mentally retarded” were either placed in institutions for the rest of their lives or left to die by their families because of medical costs or fear of being shamed. As a parent, taking care of a child or adult with severe PDD can be a full-time job, and most low and middle-class families either can’t afford care, or can’t stay home to take care of their kids because they need to work provide for their families. “Professionals commonly held the view that “refrigerator mothers” were responsible for the symptoms observed in these children. Deficits in the children’s functioning were assumed to be linked to poor attachment and/or absentee parenting” (National Autism Center)¹²

There are 3 major sections of diagnosis on the Autism Spectrum. People who are high-functioning often have an easier time developing social skills and go through life

without noticeable deficits in social interactions or learning. The next category on the spectrum is Autism. Individuals with autism often have a harder time learning social interaction which makes their diagnosis of Autism more visible and apparent to others. Lastly on the spectrum, there is Severe Autism. Individuals with Severe Autism have an extremely hard time with social interaction, and often need substantial support. (CDC-Autism)¹³

Asperger Syndrome is also a developmental disorder. “Young people with Asperger’s Syndrome have a difficult time relating to others socially and their behavior and thinking patterns can be rigid and repetitive.” (Nationwide Children’s).¹⁴ Autism specialists or physicians often group ASD and Asperger’s together because people are easily misdiagnosed with one, when a they have the opposite. There is a major difference in the two disorders. People living with Asperger’s can communicate well with others and do well in school, but have a hard time with social interactions and understanding social cues like humor and sarcasm. Those on the Autism spectrum have a harder time in school, and can’t speak well with others unless they have supportive treatment.

Childhood Disintegrative Disorder, also known as Heller’s Syndrome, is a condition in which “children develop normally up to an age of two and then suffer a severe loss of social, behavioral and communication skills.” (Austimag)¹⁵ This disorder came before the confirmed diagnosis of Autism. It is fairly rare, but is important to note as part of the Pervasive Developmental Disorders umbrella.

Pervasive Developmental Disorder not otherwise specified or PDD-NOS is called Atypical Autism. It is “a neurobiological disorder characterized by impairment in ability to interact with others and by abnormalities in

either communication or behavior patterns and interests.” (Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica)¹⁶ It is similar to autism because people with PDD-NOS show some, but not all of the symptoms of autism.

Rett’s Syndrome is “a rare genetic neurological disorder that affects 1 in 10,000 females (and even more rarely in males) and begins to display itself in missed milestones or regression at 6-18 months. Rett syndrome leads to severe impairments, affecting nearly every aspect of life: ability to speak, walk, eat and breathe easily.” (Rettsyndrome.Org)¹⁷ Rett’s Syndrome, out of all the Pervasive Developmental Disorders, causes the most physical impairment.

Since the turn of the last century in 2000, there has been a lot of improvement of patient care and research done for people living with the different Pervasive Developmental Disorders in India. There are a variety of different non-profits and charities set up for children and adults living with Autism, Asperger Syndrome, Childhood Disintegrative Disorder, and Rett Syndrome. Some of the major charities include “Action for Autism”¹⁸, “The Latika Roy Foundation”¹⁹, and “The Indian Rett’s Syndrome Foundation”²⁰. These charities raise money to help support both children and adults living with Pervasive Developmental Disorders, as well as their families. With the help from donations and fundraisers, these charities are able to provide medical support, therapy, and safe spaces for the patients.

Without the evolution of modern medicine, children and adults living with Pervasive Developmental Disorders would still be outcasted in India. They would still be pushed aside and seen as lesser than, but with medicine and the modernization of the Indian government, there is hope. People living with PDD in India are starting to get the medical

support they really need. Yet, there could be more. It’s one thing to change the laws, it’s another to change people hearts. It is too simplistic to think people a change in a day. It takes time and effort to show how the change can be good, and how it can help people. This is the case in India.

The caste system was outdated, and went against human rights violations, but a big part of the population in India, both socially and culturally, believe it to be the best way to run the country. The newer generation is helping to change their beliefs to show how the modern government, and the push for more healthcare benefits everyone. They are pushing to show that change is good, and that people deserve to survive in the world without being put down for what they look like or how their brains functions.

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SYRIA: ITS CONFLICT AND FUTURE

AYA MIKBEL

Its Conflict

West of Iraq and south of Turkey lies what is deemed to be the world's second-to-most dangerous country, the Syrian Arab Republic. With its capital, Dimashq (Damascus) and its official language, Arabic, the population of Syria- 24 million- has drastically dropped to 16 million due to its prolonged civil war. Syria’s civil war began in 2011 in the wake of the Arab Springs; however, it has grown into a ten-year long proxy war, without an end in sight.

Although called the Syrian Arab Republic, Syria is home to many different ethnic groups- Kurds, Turkmen, Armenians, Assyrians, and of course Arabs- who make up 80% of Syria’s population. The predominant religious groups are Sunnis, Shias, and Alawites. Alawites, a minority religious group that represent about 10% of the country- yet make up nearly all government and military officials. This injustice is the core of the convoluted Syrian conflict.

The foundations of the conflict were built by one Faisal al-Assad; the former and father of the current president of Syria, Bashar al-Assad. Faisal al-Assad served as Syria’s Prime Minister from 1970 to 1971 and subsequently served as Syria’s President for nearly 30 years. Being an Alawite socialist, Al-Assad made sure

to appoint an overwhelming majority of Alawite government officials and military officers, regardless of the Syrian Sunni majority. Al-Assad also relocated thousands of Alawites to the cities of Halb (Aleppo) and Dimashq where, unlike the rest of the country, money and power existed in excess.

Al-Assad’s presidency came to an abrupt stop in 2000, when he died suddenly of a heart attack, and just as sudden, another Assad was in office. Faisal’s passing allowed the inconceivably vicious and horribly tyrannical- Bashar al-Assad, to succeed the presidency. At the time of his father’s death, al-Assad was an ophthalmologist, working in the U.K. Syria's parliament rushed to change the legal age to rule from 40 to 34, solely for Bashar’s sake. Upon taking office, Syrians were overjoyed that a young and modernized man was leading their country. In his first year as president, he promised many social, political, and economic reforms, thus establishing hope in the Syrian people, hope he made sure to annihilate.

Al-Assad vanquished these hopes quickly with the arrest of Riyad Seif in 2001. Seif, a liberal Sunni Muslim, actively challenged the one-party regime by creating the Forum for National Dialogue, which aimed to advance political debates within the Syrian government

and advance freedoms for Sunnis. Seif challenged the regime even further by being a part of the Damascus Spring. The Damascus Spring, a “period of intense opposition activism and tentative political liberalization,”ⁱⁱ was violently extinguished by the al-Assad regime. Additionally, Seif publicly called for an end to the “monopoly of political power by the ruling Baath Party and announced his intention to create a new political party.”ⁱⁱⁱ He was arrested on the following day of his announcement, September 5th, 2001.

Assad’s regime remained strong until a “combination of Western pressures over Syrian military presence in Lebanon, and internal factional struggles”ⁱⁱⁱ violently shook the regime. The Western pressure was initiated by the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister, Rafik Hariri. This assassination led to the Cedar Revolution. This revolution, or زلأا قروث , was a “large-scale anti-Syrian protest movement led by the main Sunni, Maronite Christian, and Druze political forces”^{iv} which ultimately resulted in the expulsion of Syrian forces out of Lebanon. Additionally, the United Nations was looking into Hariri’s murder, implying that Syria was involved in his death. This time of vulnerability for the regime was taken advantage of by the Sunni organization, the Muslim Brotherhood. The group “joined forces with domestic opponents within the Damascus Declaration for Democratic Change”^v however, they were wildly unsuccessful. The Syrian government did not hesitate to arrest protesters and dissidents, thus eradicating any hope for change.

Riyad Seif’s arrest in 2000 was only the beginning of the silencing of Syria’s population. In 2007, the Syrian Government passed a law mandating any comments posted on any type of chat to be posted publicly. The following year- the social media platforms- Facebook and

Youtube, were blocked nationwide. With the regime becoming intolerable and Syria becoming unlivable, Syrians could not be expected to sit in silence, especially with عيبرلا يبرعلا or the Arab Springs taking place. The Arab Springs were a series of anti-government protests that spread across the Arab countries in 2010. The core of the protests were all quite comparable; the insurgents were similarly rebelling a tyrannical unjust government, originating in Tunisia, and spreading to Egypt, Libya, and finally Yemen, and Syrians craved to be next.

Syria’s silence officially expired on February 15, 2011, when 15 high school boys from Deraa graffitied on a wall near their school the phrase “,اوتكد” meaning “your turn is coming, oh doctor”. The “doctor” being Bashar al-Assad, and the “turn” being his anticipated defeat. The boys were implying that al-Assad would follow the then recent overthrow of the Tunisian and Egyptian Presidents. The presidents were overthrown by massive public protests and these boys insinuated that al-Assad was next; however, it was them that were next. Next in terms of being detained, beaten and tortured, and one, murdered. Their revolutionary words sparked the inevitable civil war, and their torture lit the match. The protests started in Deraa and spread to the mixed Sunni-Alawite cities of Baniyas and Hom.

Revealingly, these three breeding grounds of the revolts were the birth cities of- once prominent- Sunni politicians who were pushed aside, Abdul-Halim Khaddam, Faruq al-Shara, and Mustafa Tlass. Only two weeks into the revolts, al-Assad delivered an extremely intransigent speech and deemed the protesters as “foreign conspirators.”^{vi} Al-Assad was fully convinced that conciliating the protestors through democratic concessions would make the minority ruled regime seem weak and

vulnerable.

Syria’s revolts were quite different from those of its neighboring countries;’ Tunis’s and Egypt’s presidents fell in mere weeks, but Al-Assad could always rely on his Alawite controlled military to keep him safe. His military was “wedded to the ruling clan and ready to defeat the Sunni-dominated revolt by any means.”^{vii} The means being whatever deemed necessary by the regime- detainment, torture, and murder. Thirteen-year-old- Hamza Ali Al-Khateeb was subject to all three of these. Upon the delivery of his body, his mother fainted at the mere sight of it. Hamza was shot, burned, whipped, electrocuted, defiled, his neck broken, and genitals mutilated. This was only one month into the war.

With the outrage that stemmed from Hamza’s death, the protests quickly turned into a full out civil war. The death count was multiplying, and quite rapidly. Tens of thousands of protestors were murdered, and even more detained, nearly 20,000 of whom passed while in custody. Shock and outrage spread quickly throughout the nation and citizens began to demand for the immediate resignation of al-Assad. The regime-controlled military marginalized their Sunni soldiers and depended heavily on their Alawite-based units. To substitute for the unused soldiers, the regime had to increase its “firepower throughout 2012 by resorting to artillery, aircrafts, ballistic missiles, and chemical weapons.”^{viii} In the same year, numerous massacres of Sunni civilians were held, these massacres carried out by “pro-regime paramilitaries on the fringes of the Alawite heartlands,”^{ix} took the lives of thousands of Syrian children. In the latter half of 2012, al-Assad’s regime was on the brink of falling; the insurgents took over the lion’s share of Halb, half of Dimashq, and the crossings with Syria’s bordering countries, Iraq, and Turkey. Extensive portions of the republic

became “administered by an archipelago of self-standing courts, committees, and local councils run by insurgent groups and civilians.”^x The revolt’s presence in Dimashq became strong enough for them to be able to break it off from the international airport for about a week. Soon after, the revolts caused an attack resulting in the death of four government officials, including al-Assad’s brother-in-law, Asef Shawkat, weakening the regime.

The snowball of the insurgents' strength came to a halt the following year. In 2013, Bashar’s forces were able to regain not only their strength, but their presence. The regime “secured strategic roads along the Damascus-Aleppo axis, and gradually encircled the rebels in Aleppo and the suburbs of Damascus.”^{xi} Most of the insurgent dominated territories were taken back by the regime in 2014; the rebels were expelled from the city of Homs and the Qalamoun mountains. The sudden recovery of the regime is largely due to two main factors. The first factor being the recruitment of new soldiers. The regime recruited civilians and established the NDF, National Defense Force. They also recruited foreign Shi’a militias from Lebanon, Afghanistan, Iran, and Iraq. The second factor being the dearth of foreign reaction. The silence made it extremely facile for al-Assad to create strategies aimed at “emptying rebel-held areas and forcing them into submission through the targeting of civilians with makeshift barrel-bombs, the destruction of vital infrastructures, and forced starvation.”^{xii} Thus, causing the displacement of nine million Syrians, in just the first three years of the war.

The year 2015 brought many climacterics for the regime. Fights regarding factional control were regenerated, while “Alawites demonstrated against the unbearable human cost of the regime’s war effort for their community.”^{xiii} Al-Assad was able to narrowly

escape defeat from the hands of the insurgents due to the foreign military assistance from Russia and Iran. Russia’s airpower and Iran’s military are said to have “reversed the course of the war.”^{xiv} Russia’s involvement is namely the reason al-Assad is still in office; why he is still alive. Russia provided a military presence which has been quite vital to al-Assad for “not only holding onto power, but actually regaining substantial portions of territory.”^{xv} Russia does have some interest in the war, seeing that Russia has a regime of its own. They have been quite firm in their opposition towards insurgency, their opposition to Libya’s civil war attests to this. After seeing Al-Qaddafi’s fall, they decided never again do they want to see another regime fall.

Iran and Russia have made strong appearances in the war; the United States, on the other hand, has surprisingly not. The U.S normally jumps at the opportunity to insert itself into a Middle Eastern country, but they are yet to have a strong influence on the war. The U.S has little to no leverage in Syria. They have provided assistance humanely rather than militarily. The nearly 10 billion dollars in aid provided since 2011 has been the extent of U.S intervention. However, the provided aid has been totally misused by the regime to “reinforce its standing, rather than to help communities in need of humanitarian aid,”^{xvi} this being documented by the Human Rights Watch organization.

Ever since the regime was able to turn the tide with Russia’s aid, it has continued to upscale its presence. It was completely rejuvenated by its international assistance and has advanced to completely abolish the “last major resistance and erase any global doubt of its staying power.”^{xvii} The regime was successful in delivering a fatal blow to the insurgents by regaining majority control of the major Syrian cities of Damishq, Der’a and Homs. Evacuation

deals were offered to the insurgents who were unwilling to abandon their cause. The deals were also offered to average Syrian civilians- who were apprehensive of an al-Assad controlled government for the rest of their lives.

The violation of Syria and its people by Bashar is yet to stop. As of the time of writing, the conflict has killed, verging on, half a million Syrians while simultaneously displacing 11 million others- the biggest internally displaced population in the world. This is the largest refugee crisis the world has faced since the Second World War, and the pace of Syrian’s displacement only continues to rocket. Syrians are now facing internal displacement for their third time. The major metropolitan cities of Halb and Dimashq were completely disfigured by the regime’s continuing attacks and whole cities have ceased to exist. In addition, the war has near-obliterated Syria’s infrastructure and economy. According to a report by the World Bank, on average “538,000 jobs were destroyed annually during the first four years of conflict, and that young people now face an unemployment rate of 78 percent.”^{xviii} The already bruised economy continues to worsen. Syria’s GDP contracted 63% between 2011 and 2016, equating to the cumulative loss in GDP of 226 billion dollars.

The effects spread further than Syria’s borders. The hundreds of thousands of Syrians who have fled their war-torn country have sought refuge in neighboring countries. The neighboring countries being Iraq, Lebanon, and Jordan; countries that are not yet stable themselves. The population influx has hurt these countries severely, seeing that they were originally undergoing economic problems themselves. According to the United Nations, the total number of Syrians registered as refugees in the countries of Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, and Iraq is 4.9 million. In

addition, nearly 1 million Syrian nationals are estimated to have sought asylum in Europe.

The long and violent proxy war that is Syria’s civil war is draining the country in every possible sense of the word. The rebuilding of Syria is going to be nearly impossible, and the effects of this war are and will continue to be deleterious. The revolution has been going on for nearly 10 years and the regime is not giving in and neither are the protestors. Syrian’s have lost everything: their families, homes, and overall safety, but what they refuse to lose is hope; hope, that their Syria will return.

Its Future

Many say that children are our future, this statement cannot be truer in regard to the Republic of Syria. Syria’s civil war was not only ignited by young school children but will end with Syria’s children. With the war beginning 10 years ago, it is evident that the front runners of the insurgency have been replaced. Young Syrians have begun to make a loud presence in the rebellion against Asad and his regime; however, it is also young Syrians that have suffered the most. In addition to the 30,000 brutally murdered children, the psychological effects of the survivors will unarguably hinder the rebuilding of Syria. There is no ceasefire to this viciousness that can put an end to the trauma that has been endured by the children of Syria. This trauma will continue to affect Syria’s population even after the nation is rebuilt if it ever gets rebuilt. It is also children who are the most optimistic towards the future of Syria. To quote only one of Syria’s many suffering children, “Who will rule Syria next? I do not know who yet, because we have not seen the names. Another president, but we will choose him,”^{xix} Rahaf, aged 11, said with confidence.

The chances this war will be solved are slim to

none, rather it will likely be managed and downsized. This approach, or conflict management, is “non-ideological and based on a tactical, flexible approach typical of powers that do not have the means to project hegemonic dominance on the other actors involved.”^{xx} This method is primarily used to manage the destructiveness of the war in lieu of actually solving it. Because of this, it is deemed as “improper” to speak on the conclusion of Syria’s conflict, rather one should speak on Syria’s “long-term status of low intensity conflict, emerging as the result of a process of conflict management.”^{xxi} In other words, the conflict is far from over.

The BBC says that predicting Syria’s future is a nearly “impossible art,” and they are quite right. There was a widely believed concept in the very beginning of the war that Assad’s days in office were few; however, ten years later, in 2021, he is yet to be removed from power. Revolting against minoritarian regimes is exhausting and violent, and the bloodshed does not stop at the war. Syria will most likely remain a dysfunctional state, long after its conflict. The proof is the path set by the other countries in the Levant: Iraq, Lebanon, and Israel. If Syria follows the same pattern as the other countries, it will undoubtedly be an unstable nation. To blame for the Levant’s instability are the colonial powers.

After Europe successfully dismantled the Ottoman Empire, they designed fairly haphazard borders in the Levant, placing people of differing ethnic and religious backgrounds together, people that did not necessarily want to be placed together. This is shown in the relationships between the Kurds and the Arabs, the Alawites and the Muslims, and the Shias and Sunnis. The dislike grew to a point where Sulayman al-Assad, grandfather of the incumbent, Bashar, petitioned France in 1936 for an unshared Alawite region. The

The problems in the Levant were due to the colonial powers’ interference, and yet they continued to intervene. To cement their rule, they gave preferential treatment to the minorities. This is shown in Lebanon when the Maronites got the lion's share of power. This led to the 15 year long civil war between the majority Muslim population and the minority Maronite elites. The Muslims were ultimately successful and removed the Maronites from power; however, successful is used quite loosely. The war resulted in about two hundred thousand deaths, many civilians, and a third of the country’s population displaced. Lebanon is still a dysfunctional state.

A similar scenario took place in Iraq. The Sunnis were left in power by the British, regardless of the fact that they represent only 30% of the population while Shias represent the overwhelming majority. When the U.S demolished Saddam and his regime, the Sunnis’ power was taken, and they were thrown to the lowest rank of society. The Sunnis were not going to silently take this violation. They fought back hard with the formation of Al-Qaeda and the attacks it carried out. Car bombs and violent attacks in Baghdad and throughout the entire state are anything but unusual. The Sunnis are “on the warpath,”^{xxii} the very little bit of power that they were holding on to is now being thoroughly undone by Maliki who is casting them out even further, causing more disruptions in the streets. Iraq is yet to be a functional state. Israel can also be placed in this mold. The British’s Balfour declaration gave the only 15% Jewish population a leg up- that gave the minority a dramatic advantage in the long run. This brings us to Syria, which fits perfectly into the pattern created by Lebanon, Israel, and Iraq.

Syria has treated the Kurds mercilessly in the past and the future seems to be no different. During Hafez Al-Assad’s reign, the Kurd

population was completely marginalized. The Kurds were not only deemed as not Syrian, but were also denied access to all schools, hospitals, and government jobs, causing them to seek autonomy. They did just that in 2012, forming The Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria, or the Rojava. This autonomous administration posed as “a real strategic threat”^{xxiii} towards the Turks seeing that they have a strong Kurdish intolerance as they aimed to eliminate Rojava. The combination of President Trump allowing the Turks to invade and the withdrawal of U.S troops, puts the future of Rojava in serious question.

The Kurds, “victims of the order carrying the names of Sykes and Picot,”^{xxiv} have two main avenues to reach total autonomy. The first being they fight alongside the resistance in hopes for a new Syria and the second being they negotiate peace with the Assad regime, the latter being much more likely than the former. Regardless of the path taken, the Kurds goal remains the same: “a democracy for the new Syria with all its inhabitants, groups, and components...and a federal state with a separation of religion and state, with equality of men and women and with religious freedom.”^{xxv} They hope to be able to “play an autonomous political role in the Middle East,”^{xxvi} which would be easier once aligned with Assad.

The Middle East Institute suspects that the city of Idlib ultimately defines Syria’s future. Idlib is by far the deadliest city in Syria, with the United Nations warning that it could undergo “the worst humanitarian disaster of the century.”^{xxvii} From late 2019 to early 2020, more than a million Syrians were forced out of their homes by the endless bombing, making it the largest single displacement in the history of Syria’s ten-year-old war. Being one of the governorates of Syria, the fight over territorial control is critical. The regime has been able to regain some territorial control; however, Idlib

remains up for grabs and the result of the battle over Idlib will truly affect Syria's future. If the insurgency wins Idlib, it will give them an unprecedented amount of strength to their cause. The opposite remains just as true. Losing Idlib will set the revolution back years, destroying their chances.

According to the Middle East Institute, the sole antidote to an “intractable Syrian insurgency and all its inevitable regional spillover effects remains genuine justice and accountability in Syria.”^{xxviii} Accountability in Syria seems farfetched seeing that Bashar believes that he is “just a headline — the bad president, the bad guy, who is killing the good guys.”^{xxix} He is fully convinced that is misrepresented by the media and misunderstood by the Syrian people. Bashar’s lack of responsibility is only dragging out this convoluted conflict.

Removing the Alawites from the pinnacle of rule will be extremely difficult, and has proven to be so, and it will likely not be done through betrayal. The Alawite community will surely never turn against al-Assad and his regime. There are no other sources of power to the Assad regime and the Shabiha- Syria’s state sponsored militia, which are constituted of al Assad’s cousins. They have treated Syrians mercilessly and fear they will be treated the very same if Assad falls, thus it will be impossible for them to betray Assad.

It will also not be done through negotiations. Rafif Jouejati, co-founder and director of the Free Syria Foundation, said “the only negotiation with Assad is regarding the size and the length of the rope that hangs him.”^{xxx} Al-Assad cannot be expected to negotiate, he simply has no other option except to fight to his death. With what happened to Al-Qaddafi in Libya, he cannot surrender. If he does, he will undoubtedly be captured and butchered by the Sunni majority for his countless crimes. Even

if negotiations could be met, it is still “naïve to assume that a negotiated settlement in Geneva will magically be able to convince Syrians to live together again in peace and harmony.”^{xxxi}

Another unlikely end to the war is that Syria will split. These chances are slim to none seeing that a fragmented Syria would require deliberations and negotiations between the Assad led regime and the opposition, which is highly unlikely seeing that neither side will bend. Regardless, there has been talk about the possibility of another Sykes-Picot in Syria; however, the world superpowers simply won’t allow it to happen, mainly because a “divided Syria would cause no end of headaches,”^{xxxii} there is simply too much at stake.

There are many other different plausible routes that Syria can take. Assad could take a page out of Kim Jong-un’s book and completely separate Syria from the world economy, totally solidifying its global standing as a worldwide pariah. A more devastating route Syria could take is “crashing into a debilitating crisis that tears every fiber of the country apart,”^{xxxiii} a crisis much worse than its current conflict, thus resulting in further “destitution, famine, and worsening criminality and predatory behavior.”^{xxxiv} This would leave Syria in a situation much like Somalia, a nation that is not only a disaster in terms of human rights violations but also of being a home for religious extremist groups that cause and subsequently exploit political vulnerability.

ISIS, or the Islamic State of Iraq and Al-Sham, is among the extremists' groups in Syria Syria’s seemingly endless state of turmoil raises many questions about ISIS’s resurgence. After their anticipated defeat in 2017 by the hands of the Trump administration, the continuous “endemic corruption, bad governance, dismal services, and a lack of opportunities”^{xxxv} in Syria has only accelerated ISIS’s return. The

The ten year-long nightmare that is Syria’s government strengthens ISIS’s popular support, regardless of how extreme the terrorist organization is. The preference of ISIS militants over Syrian government attests to the cruel nature of Syria’s military. As long as Syria remains a dysfunctional state, ISIS is “determined to regain territory in the region.”^{xxxvi} Serving as the United States Central Command, Kenneth Franklin McKenzie Jr., predicts that ISIS, is “going to be with us for a while.”^{xxvii}

The National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces already has ideas for post-Assad Syria. Ausama Monajed, Syrian dissident and prominent member of the coalition, says that a transitional government needs to take over. This transitional government would hold not only Sunni insurgents, but “members of the regime who have no responsibility in crimes or major corruption.”^{xxxviii} This transitional government would be tasked with not only governing a new Syria but creating a new constitution. Some officials are uncertain if the Syrian National Council would be able to do this. Edward Djerejian, former United States diplomat, said that “there’s a lack of coordination amongst the insiders, and they represent the outsiders, not the insiders. It’s not a coherent opposition leadership.”^{xxxix} Nonetheless, the plan seems much more pleasant than the current state of Syria.

The reconstruction of Syria will be so unbelievably expensive, that repairing the entire country seems nearly impossible. If the regime stays in power, it is likely the reconstruction will be only for “those who demonstrated their loyalty to the regime while marginalizing the rest.”^{xl} This goes beyond Alawite versus Sunni, it is about unsevered loyalty to Assad, this is the “main criterion that will determine the post-war Syrian identity from the regime’s

perspective.”^{xli}

It is possible that Syria could undergo sporadic moments of stability during the instability of its rebirth; however, it is much more than likely that Syria will become completely “engulfed in violent instability, with its population mired in misery and destitution.”^{xlii} Post-civil war Syria will not only enable both national and international terrorism but also “aggrandize American rivals like Russia and Iran.”^{xliii} Additionally, Post-Assad Syria will be in constant threat of housing additional conflicts. The anticipation of conflict relapse is a very real threat that Syria will be forced to struggle with. A 2014 study conducted by the UCDP and PRIO study proves that a vast majority of nations that survived civil conflict have suffered a sequel, and in some cases a full trilogy of civil wars.

If Syria’s civil war results in the capitulation of the Assad regime, then Alawites face a very legitimate threat of extermination. Not all Alawites are Assad supporters; however, that does little to change the perception engraved in the minds of Sunnis. Post-Assad revenge killings are bound to happen. The children of Syria are already speaking on revenge. “I hate the Alawites and the Shiites,”^{xliv} 11-year-old Ibtisam says, “We are going to kill them with our knives, just like they killed us.”^{xlv} This pure detestation towards the Alawites from children is obviously inherited. They are merely parroting what they hear from their parents, who have an even stronger hatred.

This hatred explains why the majority of Alawites have supported Al-Assad, regardless of if they agree with him or not, he is their only defense against the Sunni majority. Alawites will always view him as their “best protection against sectarian annihilation.”^{xlvi} Their refusal to back down and surrender is predominantly due to this detestation from the Sunnis. They

are certain that if they do, they will be met with even more violence than they inflicted on the Sunnis. Professor Joshua Landis, head of the Center for Middle East Studies at University of Oklahoma, says “I don’t see any way out of that, except to say that we are in for a long, difficult ride, and you pray that the Syrians are going to get over this somehow.”^{xlvi} Revenge killings are just the beginning of the end of the war. If the Sunnis gain control of the government, the Alawite population will not sit silently and let the Sunnis rule them, they will demand autonomy, causing additional conflicts.

The opposite is also true; however, less likely. If the Assad regime “wins,” destroying the revolution, the majority Sunni population will pay, and quite dearly. It is a genuine threat that Sunnis face as it seems evident the regime would exterminate them to prevent another uprising in the future. Seeing that Sunnis are the vast majority, total extinction seems improbable; however, maltreatment and persecution are highly likely. The fear of revenge killings is a common drive shared by both forces; they refuse to surrender seeing that the future of their religious group in the country depends on it. The hostility does not stop at the Alawites and Sunnis, but extends to Christians, seeing that they surely have “no future in Syria.”^{xlvi}

Along with the “sectarian division”^{xlix} that is Syria’s future, division with the rest of the world is expected. No matter who emerges victorious, al-Assad or the insurgency, there will be no future relationship with Syria and the western world. If al-Assad defeats the opposition, he and his regime will remain a “threat to Israel and an adversary of the West”^{land} if the revolution prevails, they will hate the west for deserting them in their time of need. In addition, they will not forgive their Arab neighbors, who totally abandoned them.

The antagonism will prevail long after the civil war.

Although Syria's election is months away there is no question about its results. With the election lacking any legitimacy, it is clear Bashar will continue to rule Syria through fear, doing little to change Syria’s situation. Kelly Craft, the United States ambassador to the U.N, said that Syria’s presidential election will have “little meaningful progress toward a political solution,”^{li} calling it a sham. Millions of Syrians, aware of the corruption, refuse to participate in any polls. To add to its illegitimacy, the United States refuses to recognize the election and accept its results unless Syria adopts U.N Resolution 2254, which states that “the Syrian people will decide the future of Syria,”^{lii} which Bashar will not allow to happen.

The year 2021 will allow a new United States President to enter the white house, granting Syria with a potential friend. The president-elect- Joe Biden- will need to make up for the Trump’s administration’s actions during the war, or lack thereof. He will need to “revitalize diplomacy”^{liii} to fully assess the Syria conflict. Biden is expected to actively promote a “genuine nationwide cease-fire and unfettered humanitarian access to ameliorate civilian suffering in all areas of the country.”^{liiv} A major factor that will determine how the Biden administration will treat Syria is their perception of the role Turkey played in exacerbating Syria’s conflict. The question remains, will Biden’s foreign policy, specifically his approach to Syria’s conflict, permit Turkey to remain a vital player in this conflict, taking into consideration the blatant disregard Turkey has towards U.S allies? The answer is related to how the Biden Administration views the other major players in war, Iran and Russia, these nuclear powers have more at stake than Turkey. It is also

expected that Biden will “restore aid provisions and increase support to civil society actors.”^{lv}

The result of Syria’s conflict does not only determine its own future, but also the future of its western neighbor, Lebanon. Lebanon, the fragile nation that it is, is malleable to Syria’s dysfunctional state. The conflict’s “repercussions on internal fragmentation are constant concerns.”^{lvi} The volatile surroundings will spread to Lebanon, it goes beyond an influx in Lebanon’s refugee population. Al-Assad actively undermines Lebanon’s sovereignty. if Al Assad fails to leave, Lebanon’s future will be put into question.

With Syria’s hegemonized past and its dysfunctional present, one can only imagine grim things for its future. It is ten years after the war started, and not a single concern of the revolutionaries has been adequately addressed. Every injustice that drove Syrians to start a full out civil war remains not only unanswered but has escalated. Neither side of the conflict will reach ultimate victory, the regime will not be removed from the hands of the uprising, nor will the Assad regime “be able to restore their authority throughout their national territories.”^{lvii} The egregious abuses of the Syrian people along with the worsening relations between the Syrian people will be impossible to fully recover from. The war is yet to end, but when it does, it will do little to nothing to end Syria’s suffering because “even if guns are silenced, social and political wounds from this managed and decade long horror story will fester.”^{lviii} Syria is a nation “already destined for many more years of instability and suffering.”^{lix}

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LE MOUVEMENT POUR LES VIES NOIRES: HOW #BLACKLIVESMATTER RESTRUCTURES GLOBAL POLITICS

CHARDONNAY WATKINS

“ Justice pour Adama!” and “Sans justice vous n’aurez jamais la paix” echoed Place de la République this past summer as part of the global mobilization for Black Lives, sparked after the extrajudicial killing of George Floyd in the United States. The central Parisian square hosted nearly 15,000 protesters advocating for the Black and Brown lives systemically lost to police brutality in France. Black Lives Matter — the rallying cry heard around the world to advocate for Black people of the African diaspora experiencing anti-Black racism, is also a cultural and technological statement that addresses social ills with a historical lens; leaving a global imprint and framework to approach systemic racism. Black Lives Matter began as a hashtag created by three Black, millennial women to assert the humanity of Black people worldwide, which later grew into a social movement popularized through social media. With over 100 million posts, shares, and likes circulating the internet in regards to #BlackLivesMatter, this hashtag activism shows its strength in creating public discourse and adapting culture.¹ Also known as digital

activism, hashtag activism is the “protest on social media united through a hashtagged word, phrase, or sentence”² in which #BlackLivesMatter established a precedent, influencing millions around the world to join and rally around political issues on a daily basis. Once thought to be domestic problems of racial justice, digital activism tends to a wider, global audience, where many young Black activists identify the parallels in social issues and stir a public already at unrest.

By forming a networked base through the #BlackLivesMatter and #JusticePourAdama³ hashtags, Black millennial women are transforming new technologies to cultivate and nurture a counterpublic which centers those most marginalized by the mainstream.⁴ With nearly identical stories, the killings of Adama Traoré and George Floyd while in police custody expose the dangerous patterns of policing, even with the legal differences between the two countries. Despite the longstanding push for clarity around her brother’s death, Assa Traoré waited four years for hope of justice and the racism her brother

experienced to be addressed by French government officials. Consequently, the death of George Floyd in the US hitting world news and sparking a larger, global Black Lives Matter following — primarily by non-Black Europeans, cleared a pathway for anti-racist activists like Traoré to gain traction in addressing France’s historical issues of colonialism and racism. Furthermore, with an overwhelmingly Millennial and Generation Z⁵ crowd, Assa Traoré capitalizes from social media as a key means to mobilize people. With nearly 400,000 followers on Instagram, Traoré has struck a chord with younger generations, becoming the new face of France’s racial justice movement, as well as a potential politician.⁶ As world superpowers like the UK, US, and France embrace right wing, authoritarian rhetoric⁷ that is racist and harmful to a diverse, urban public; a growing trend of Black women millennials are emerging in the digital sphere to push a radically left agenda globally — gaining an increasingly large following as the world recognizes the need for the Black Lives Matter movement.

The global political landscape significantly shifted in 2016 when several western world superpowers trended to the right, subsequently causing major polarizing historical events such as the UK’s Brexit and US presidential election.⁸ Thus, showing the shift in recent voting patterns, particularly amongst the youth⁹ in both the US¹⁰ and France¹¹. Many people around the world saw much more than party affiliation on the line, but rather the ability, or lack thereof, for communities of color, low income households, immigrants, non Christians and the LGBTQ community to have the freedom to exist peacefully in the world. Furthermore, with Donald Trump and the right wing’s fear mongering — the 2016 US presidential election showed that many Americans fear a more accepting, multiracial nation under a Democratic president.¹² The

Democratic Party, however, naively underestimated the transcendence of polarizing issues across the partisan divide¹³ — which further led to the election and insurrection of the far right.¹⁴ As a global empire, the political direction of the United States directly affects other parts of the world, including France. Despite defeating the far right presidential candidate, Marine Le Pen the following year, much of France’s current politics, and social issues, are reflective of those in the United States.

Although not as right leaning as Trump, Emmanuel Macron’s political party, La République En Marche (LREM) is centrist in its political views and behaviors, much like US democrats and some republicans.¹⁵ Macron and LREM are highly criticized by the gilets jaunes, or Yellow Jackets, labor movement, refugee and immigrant populations, as well as racial minorities in France.¹⁶ Accused of upholding “heartless capitalism,” Macron positioned himself in French politics as a better alternative than the racist and xenophobic opposing party, while simultaneously making unfulfilled promises to left leaning voters.¹⁷ Similarly, blatant racism, sexism, and xenophobia plagued the US campaign trail in 2016 as voters questioned the numerous comments Trump made about Latinx immigrants, referring to them as “rapists”¹⁸ and his interview for ABC with Billy Bush where he mentioned grabbing women by the genitals.¹⁹ Clinton was also questioned about her previous positions with the 1994 Crime Bill and her use of “superpredators” language,²⁰ making many of the Democratic Party’s base — the youth and people of color — skeptical of a Clinton presidency and unenthused to vote along party lines.²¹

Subsequently, the 2016 US presidential election taught white moderates globally several key political constants. First, Trump, Le Pen, and

world leaders like them, run on white resentment of people of color and immigrants which appeals to white people, particularly those from countries with histories of colonialism. Second, the working class — the Democratic Party’s base and whose votes are needed to win elections²² — is no longer²³ rural, Ivy League, male, white centrist voters,²⁴ but diverse, urban, left-leaning, immigrant,²⁵ communities of color, specifically, Black women.²⁶ The election of Donald Trump in 2016 emphasized these constants. The hate and misogyny that filtered his campaign and election symbolized a white American public against the progression of the United States into a more diverse and socially progressive state — leading to an increasing counterpublic led by young women of color. Accordingly, this escalated digital organizing globally and increased voter turnout for younger audiences to combat the election of such government officials in other countries.²⁷ Furthermore, these same millennial Black women activists propel youth politics further left with the adoption of political positions inclusive of Black Marxism, propagating the new Black radical politic, poised in an intersectional framework,²⁸ mobilizing marginalized communities across the world through their digital activism.

For those whose identities lie on the margins as immigrants, women, people of color, and the working poor — the pressure to organize a stronger electorate against far right political parties was paramount in both the US²⁹ and France.³⁰ Jumpstarting the catalyst to a contemporary youth movement, the 2016 US election sparked a moment of contention in the world. Young marginalized voters, including those marked ineligible by age or nationality, forced themselves into mainstream political dialogue, effectively transforming and structuring a youth party in global politics.³¹ This voting bloc aims to address issues of historical disenfranchisement,

an overall stagnation of progress.³² Although previous research indicates a history of youth engagement in politics around controversial policies such as various wars, civil rights, women’s reproductive control, and LGBTQ rights, today’s young activists are turning to new technologies and strategies³³ to nurture a counterpublic that centers the voices of the most marginalized of these communities.³⁴ Although there is significant information emerging about online activism and social movements, there are limited studies about how specifically younger generations of voters are engaging and showing up at the polls in response to their new found political power. More so, studies are not considering the ways in which pop culture and social media influencers are becoming political figures and leading a new charge in political engagement via internet proxies.

Documenting the strategies employed by young Black women activists in the US and France is imperative to understanding the globalization of sociopolitical movements. Whereas in previous centuries of colonization, slavery, and genocide, western powerhouses like France, the UK, and US had the upper hand against marginalized people; now these same communities generate a unified global counterpublic which demands reparations for these countries’ crimes against humanity and a general upheaval of the unjust systems they created³⁵ via the internet. Employing the Black Marxist theoretical framework, we can interpret the collective action of Millennial women of color as examples of shifting global political alliances. Based on Michael Dawson’s³⁶ definition of Black Marxism, this young Black woman electorate operates within the ideological core of modern Black radicalism through the fundamental principles of class conflict and the racial nature of capitalism, gender equity, culture, and Pan-Africanism.³⁷ Moreover, these young women of color

regenerate a contemporary Black consciousness that considers the multiple marginalization of class, race, gender, nationality, sexuality, and disability play into socioeconomic status. Building on previous scholarship, this rising proletariat understands the alienation of people of color and as such, concisely identifies capitalism and its interaction with socially oppressive constructs as the antithesis of an equitable future. Capitalism in conjunction with systems that uphold racism, sexism, classism, ableism, and queer-phobia constitute Black people as the antagonist in the world³⁸ — consequently informing its politics.³⁹ Thus, through various online platforms Millennial women of color activists are charging the call for a new, reimagined Western society that liberates the most marginalized — subsequently freeing everyone of the chains of oppression.

The Black radical imagination is the catalyst for political engagement. According to Kelley⁴⁰, radical feminists of color reveal how marginalizing race, gender, and class work in tandem to oppress most of society. Without a vision of a new world, women of color would be stuck in a never-ending cycle as victims to racism, patriarchy, and classism, respectively. By rallying around the Black Marxist tradition, Millennials⁴¹ are divesting from traditional⁴² capitalist institutions⁴³ and reimagining a new world.⁴⁴ Capitalizing from online activism and the Black Lives Matter movement, young women of color are taking up the Black radical imagination as a praxis to reimagine a society in which they can thrive and prosper⁴⁵ by incorporating traditions of Black Marxism. Thus, the Black radical imagination allows us to visualize a more expansive, fluid, and accepting world⁴⁶ to create the new radical politic.⁴⁷ Women of color who are subordinated by class, gender, and race can engage in politics by wielding their power with this new radical politic which generates new knowledge, theories, and questions to challenge systems of

oppression.⁴⁸ Furthermore, as young women of color continue to work for liberation, their vision of emancipation isn't confined to those who look like them, but for all marginalized people,⁴⁹ thus shaping this new radical politic around solidarity.⁵⁰ As a result, a key observation from the 2016 election in the US and the 2017 French presidential race is the ability of Millennial women of color to hold and apply universal values of liberty, freedom, and justice in their activism, polls, and elected offices.⁵¹

Social media reshaped the dynamic in how candidates engaged with multi-axis issues. For the first time in a major presidential election, several issues that have been overlooked by political campaigns in the world were finally brought to center stage. For example, centuries have gone by as the United States and France have greatly ignored calls for reparations of African Americans and Francophone countries,⁵² the end to their colonial rule in the Caribbean,⁵³ and France's unjust indemnity contract against Haiti.⁵⁴ Even France's labor and immigrant rights groups turn to social media⁵⁵ as means to organize and call out the classist and xenophobic⁵⁶ systems that subjects them to police brutality.⁵⁷ Millennial women of color employ online campaigns to take on powerful political parties by creating a counterculture, using hashtags to unite different groups, garnering the attention of the people and major stakeholders. For the first time, special consideration was given to multiple marginalized groups such as transgender women of color, young undocumented immigrants, and working class college graduates with high student loan debt in the 2020 US presidential election.⁵⁸

Additionally, in France President Macron commits to an end to police impunity, urging the Interior Ministry to make recommendations for police practices,⁵⁹ while French politician,

Nicole Belloubet, extended a meeting with the Traoré family after the growing popularity of Black Lives Matter France. However, these centrist approaches prove to be performative acts by politicians that fail to appease young voters.⁶⁰ Still, they continue to protest in-person while sharing their demands and knowledge digitally. Ultimately, the Traoré family is unsatisfied with the French government's lack of response and urgency as they continue to experience retaliation from the state and the open letter Assa Traoré penned in 2018 to both President Macron and Belloubet remains unanswered.⁶¹ Although Traoré contends that she represents 'the people's interest' and plans to stay in grassroots activism, she continues to gain tremendous popularity online with many hoping for her run for parliament.⁶² Aligning herself with historical figures such as Angela Davis, a great contributor to Black Marxist theory, Assa Traoré often seen with an afro, fist high in the air, and a shirt that reads, "Justice pour Adama! Sans justice vous n'aurez jamais la paix" is also heavily supported by a broad range of climate activists, students, healthcare workers, and gilet jaunes protesters — showing solidarity across race and class.⁶³ With an emphasis on the youth vote and their influence in politics, it's imperative to note the ways in which Black millennial women like Assa Traoré demonstrate their leadership in both the digital and public spheres to profoundly alter global politics.

Social media has received much attention for its capabilities in sharing knowledge and building global social movements. Online activism has increasingly grown since the development of social media and its ability to advance diverse narratives of marginalized communities which previously went unheard on larger platforms. There's a particular space held for young, first time, and ineligible voters, catering to the specific needs of the next generation because of online activism.⁶⁴ In particular, social media

plays a major role in the sociopolitical lives of young generations where political expression and discussing political issues is a daily practice regardless of election season.⁶⁵ With constant sharing of knowledge and ideology, a Black radical politic⁶⁶ has overcome young women's lives via the Black Lives Matter movement.⁶⁷ Following the Black radical politic, women of color activists and celebrities popularize hashtags such as #BlackLivesMatter, #DefundThePolice, and #JusticePourAdama — aligning with several key principles of Dawson's⁶⁸ Black Marxist tradition on the basis of race, nationality, class, gender and culture.⁶⁹ Given this new radical praxis, young women of color are actualizing their political power, no longer having to choose one identity over another, but rather vote in their best interest fully informed of intersectionality and the way in which their multidimensional identities show up at the polls.

Black women are a political force — by creating enough dissonance to expose a system of globalized inequality and calling out world politicians like Donald Trump and Emmanuel Macron who uphold these racist and classist institutions, they continue to influence the democratic process through digital activism. With the promulgation of messaging, policy reform, and overall a system upheaval in the US and France,⁷⁰ Black millennial activists are emphasizing the virtue in adopting a politic that centers the voices of those at the margins.⁷¹ Their development in mastering the complexity of online political frameworks and discourse through hashtag activism allows space for the dissemination of a new Black radical politic⁷² that is intentionally intersectional, furthering online activism's significant contributions made to 21st century democracy.⁷³ Additionally, millennial digital activists weave a nuanced understanding of issues, making political ideology visually appealing, more accessible,

and easy to circulate while bringing diverse solutions to national conversations via their online activism.⁷⁴ Furthermore, online engagement about climate change, the working class economy,⁷⁵ and immigration indicate these as the defining issues amongst Millennial voters,⁷⁶ further showcasing the impact young voters have on current and future politicians.⁷⁷ With their politics inclusive of the working class, race, gender, sexuality, and disability, activists are grounding young generations of voters in a foundation of solidarity politics⁷⁸ by addressing various systemic issues — having the potential to transform world politics.

Assa Traoré and other Black millennial activists popularizing hashtag activism have also made way for cultural shifts in French and American society. As social media influencers become more politicized and engaged with both celebrities and politicians, they become the bridge between politics and culture. With the influx of influencers and celebrities in politics, creative marketing strategies become tools to further engage the youth. For instance, celebrities may collaborate with international organizations, such as Amnesty International⁷⁹ as one method to spread their messages and increase youth political participation as well as create fashion lines, music, or other artwork that alters public opinion and political consciousness. There is an intertwining of politics in television shows, music, and social media⁸⁰ where celebrities have also begun to use their platforms to transform the future.⁸¹ As organizing tactics become increasingly digital, influencers and celebrities augment online activism by using ordinary social media posts as daily political updates. Whether a professional video shared on Instagram or an informative Twitter thread dissecting radical political views, social media influencers, celebrities, and politicians are bringing visibility to political issues⁸² and making political education easily accessible in order to

further engage the youth in politics.⁸³ As the number of women of color’s access to politics increased, a major shift coincided with the US midterm 2018 election,⁸⁴ 2017 French presidential election,⁸⁵ and US 2020 presidential election.⁸⁶ Despite their successes, the global Black Lives Matter movement still faces a large and powerful pushback. With the election of Joe Biden came domestic terrorists in suspected collusion with government officials, federal agents, and police who planned and executed a failed insurrection of the United States capitol just weeks before his inauguration.⁸⁷ France also launched its own right wing attack against Assa Traoré’s family to challenge their credibility and uphold the system of police brutality impunity.⁸⁸ As is French tradition viewing society with a colorblind lens under what they call “laïcité” or universalism, disregards race, religion, nationality, and other identities when developing public policy and approaching social issues. However, this allows for the institutional cover up of structural inequality where trends such as islamophobia and racism can go unaddressed by the government. Furthermore, right leaning French pundits criticize activists speaking out stating that they are attempting to divide the nation, arguing that American style identity politics is what’s harming French society and undermines the preservation of French culture.⁸⁹ However, criticism of the French government appears to hold some weight. The French State has a history of resorting to authoritarian approaches when challenged with anti-imperialist reformation.⁹⁰ The national secretary of the Socialist Party, Corinne Narassiguin emphasized the work that Black Lives Matter does is in the legacy of the French Revolution, stating that “in France, the fight ... is understood as the fight against inequalities of patrimonial, economic, and social order.”⁹¹

Furthermore, the new “loi de sécurité” or global security bill in France jeopardizes the rights of

French citizens, by restricting the recording and sharing of police images, while increasing the surveillance of the public and allowing the deployment of drones armed with facial recognition software to identify protesters.⁹² Several international organizations, including the United Nations, have strongly advised against this bill provision,⁹³ noting that it only gives way for more police misconduct and doesn’t comply with international human rights standards⁹⁴: a second warning from the UN after France’s counterterrorism law in 2017.⁹⁵

Still resilient, many French groups remain hopeful for the future. Assa Traoré has become an anti-racist icon for Francophones around the world who many left leaning and youth electorates continue to follow in uplifting Black and Arab communities. “She’s doing something no one else can do,” states 19-year-old Christopher Johnson, “she's the leader we never had in France, shining the spotlight on the police violence and injustices that we face everyday being Black.”⁹⁶ ”As the fight for fundamental change in policing continues, it’s essential that political scientists observe the political behaviors and social movement patterns of young women of color worldwide. Now, we can regard the significance of African American resistance and Black Lives Matter’s impact on the public, while studying the weight the movement carries in altering global politics via digital activism.

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HOW VIOLENCE AND CORRUPTION IS FORCING CENTRAL AMERICAN IMMIGRATION

JAIME VELASCO

Central America is one of the most dangerous regions in the world; violence and poverty provoke mass migration from the countries of El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala. Violence in Central America is not a new issue; these nations have experienced very turbulent times over the past forty years, including the decades of civil wars in the 1970s through the 1990s. In socioeconomic terms, Central American nations have failed to fully recover from the decades of violence - including coups since the 1900s. The establishment of multiple gangs in the region has led to the increase in poverty and violence since the 1990s. According to a United Nations Refugee Agency survey, twenty percent of interviewed Central American migrants indicated that violence was their primary reason for leaving the region.¹

This article will aim to highlight the implications of these gangs in the region economically and politically. In addition, the article will use the case studies of El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala to examine the

increase in migration from these nations to the United States and other countries.

El Salvador

El Salvador is the smallest but most densely populated country in Central America, and has been at the center of violence in Central America for decades. The Salvadoran Civil War in the late 1970s-1990s as well as the increase in gang activity, have made the nation one of the most dangerous in the world. According to the Human Rights Watch, El Salvador has one of the world's highest rates of homicides.² Gang activity and the Salvadoran Civil War have consequentially forced the nation into a crippling economic stagnation which has pervaded the country for years. This is further exacerbated by the massive exodus of Salvadorans which arises in response to these conditions.

Historical Context

The growing upper class of El Salvador and the decreasing resources for lower class

Salvadorans led to revolt and war. After failed attempts to decrease agricultural inequality, El Salvador was on a war footing. Beginning in 1979, El Salvador was ravaged by a gruesome civil war leaving approximately seventy-one thousand dead, a staggering 1-2% of the population.³ During the Salvadoran Civil War, gruesome techniques were used by the Salvadoran National Guard. Furthermore, the government of the United States of America was involved in the training of the death squads. During this time, children were being recruited to fight in the war.⁴ The violence and poor economic conditions led to a significant increase in migrants fleeing from El Salvador to northern nations. It is important to note that during this time, civil wars and violence were widespread in the nations of Central America. According to the Migration Policy Institute, approximately twenty-five percent of Salvadorans fled the nation during the war.⁵ Many of those migrants trekked through Central America and Mexico to the United States. The greatest increase in migration was in 1982 with approximately one hundred and twenty-nine thousand Salvadorans fleeing the nation.⁶

Gang Violence

The prominent gangs in El Salvador are Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) and Barrio 18 (18th Street). An article written by Andrew Grascia in the Journal of Gang Research, explains that the Mara Salvatrucha gang originated in the United States after the large migration to the U.S. from El Salvador during the Salvadoran Civil War. After mass deportations in the 1990s in the United States, these gangs began to spread and take hold in El Salvador. It is important to note that during the years following the civil war, El Salvador was still undergoing many institutional reforms,⁷ a fact which allowed for gangs to expand their territory in El Salvador.

Gang activity has ravaged the nation in the past few decades. According to the Humans Rights Watch, the gangs of El Salvador have control over certain neighborhoods in which they “extort residents in the country.”⁸ In many instances, young men and children are recruited into the gangs. These children are taught methods of intimidation and violence. There are many factors in which a person becomes at most risk for joining a gang throughout Central America. These factors can include poverty, neglect, unemployment, domestic violence, and lack of education.⁹ Violence has been normalized throughout El Salvador since the country's civil war in the 1980s. This may also be a factor in the growth of gangs in the region. The major concern for Central American youth is based on how at risk they are in joining a gang based on socioeconomic conditions rather than being forced into a gang.¹⁰ The National Republican Alliance (ARENA) in El Salvador has supported making the use of children a crime. In addition, there is support for making the recruitment of children in criminal activity within gangs a crime as well.¹¹

The State Department of the United States has declared El Salvador a critical threat.¹² In 2015, the crime rate in El Salvador reached one hundred and three homicides per one hundred thousand citizens. However, after an agreement in 2016 between MS-13 and 18th Street to stop competing for territory, El Salvador's homicide rate decreased by half.¹³ It is important to analyze the structure of the gangs and how they operate. These gangs are not on the same level as other international criminal enterprises. For example, their financial status is minimal compared to other enterprises; financial status is unequal within the gang. The reasoning for their stronghold in the region is the “pay or die” demand according to the New York Times.¹⁴ Mara Salvatrucha and Barrio 18 are not as sophisticated as other criminal organizations like groups in Mexico and around the world.

Effects on the Salvadoran Economy

According to the New York Times, gangs extort seventy percent of businesses in El Salvador. Furthermore, violence in El Salvador costs the country approximately four billion dollars per year.¹⁵ The stagnant economy is promoting violence in the nation as there are extraordinarily little resources for citizens. According to the World Bank, money sent from families in the United States to residents of El Salvador accounted for approximately five billion dollars in 2017.¹⁶ The current COVID-19 pandemic has worsened economic conditions in the country. The International Monetary Fund predicts that the Salvadoran economy will decrease (-4.3% GDP) in 2021.^{17 18} Furthermore, job opportunities in the country are severely slim; the unemployment rate was 7.9 percent in 2020. Lack of adequate healthcare is also a major concern in the country. For example, training for healthcare workers is a challenge as well as the country experience a 43% deficit of workers within the healthcare system.¹⁹ Moreover, sufficient education is not available to all Salvadoran children. An issue within the educational system in El Salvador is attendance. According to the website El Salvador INFO, many parents need their children to help make money and stay afloat financially which is the most probable cause for the decrease in educational attendance.²⁰ This cycle is the leading cause of El Salvador’s lack of economic prosperity.

Outlook

In the past, there have been programs aimed at improving economic conditions in El Salvador. The governments of El Salvador and the United States have been working with each other to establish better training to eradicate drug trafficking and gang violence.²¹ In February of 2019, El Salvador elected a new president who ran on eradicating gangs and corruption in the

country. President Nayib Bukele has focused his attention on doing those issues. Although the COVID-19 pandemic has complicated the situation, President Bukele has remained confident in the country’s efforts to eliminate the Salvadoran gangs. Over the course of Bukele’s presidency, the nation has seen a decrease in gang activity. President Bukele negotiated a deal with MS-13 in 2020 in which the gang agreed to decrease violence.²²

Honduras

Honduras is remarkably similar to El Salvador in terms of history and the countries’ current challenges. Honduras borders El Salvador to the east. Like its neighbor, the country also has a history of military occupations by other nations and has been crippled by gangs over the past few decades. The effects of El Salvador’s violence have spread across the Central American region. Currently, there are thousands of Hondurans fleeing the country because of its conditions. However, the country has seen a decrease in crime rates over the last decade.²³

Historical Context

In the 1980s, Honduras began to feel the effects of Nicaragua’s unfolding war. In 1988, then President of the United States Ronald Reagan ordered three thousand troops into Honduras.²⁴ Although there was little evidence to support the claim that the Sandinistas of Nicaragua were advancing into Honduras and were supported by the Soviet Union, the Reagan Administration moved forward.²⁵ This action sparked decades of military involvement in the country. The civil war caused by this military intervention cost thirty thousand lives.²⁶

Violence

Like El Salvador, Honduras struggles with eradicating gangs. According to the United

States State Department, there are approximately ten thousand gang members in Honduras. Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) and Barrio 18 (18th Street) are present in the country.²⁷ To understand how gangs are affecting the nation, The Association for a More Just Society explains the following:

Violence at the hands of gangs can result for various reasons:

If extorted businesses do not pay “war taxes” (payments demanded by the gangs), gang members may kill them.

*If multiple gangs want to sell drugs in the same area, they may fight over that territory. Gangs have strict codes for their members that, if broken, are punishable by death.*²⁸

Gang violence in Honduras has reached unprecedented levels causing mass migration to the United States: because similar to El Salvador, these gangs are complicating life for Honduran youth. Like El Salvador, the risks associated with poverty and domestic issues increase the risk of Honduran youth to become recruited by MS-13 or 18th Street. In 2018, the crime rate for Honduras was thirty-eight per one hundred thousand residents.

Corruption

In Honduras and many other Central American nations, there is an enormous amount of corruption in law enforcement and public office. In 2018, a study found that corruption cost Honduras an estimated two billion dollars, or 12.5% of GDP. In many cases, corruption in the country can be traced back to gang influence over local law enforcement and government.²⁹ As a result of this corruption, many families are left without assistance in an already challenging economy. This is yet another example of how gangs suppress the Central American people, and further the endless economic and political cycle in the region. The system of corruption has led to

Honduras having a significantly higher poverty rate than most nations. Approximately 64.5% of Hondurans live in poverty with 42% living in extreme poverty.³⁰ The effects of gangs have severely weakened Honduran institutions. For example, the judiciary and law enforcement are at high risk of conflict and are vulnerable to corruption through bribes.³¹ Corruption in Honduras by the highest levels of government have been highlighted in recent years by investigations conducted by prosecutors of the United States.

The country faces a major problem in the trafficking of narcotics. Most recently, the United States federal prosecutors found that current Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernandez was involved in the trafficking of narcotics through his country.³² In the investigation, prosecutors found that the Honduran president was using the armed forces to traffic the drugs. These narcotrafficking actions have also been a reason why Honduras has not been able to achieve prosperity. Narcotrafficking has impacted the nation by controlling many areas within the nation for the transportation of narcotics. The geographical location of Honduras places the nation in between the largest narcotrafficking nations in the world.

Outlook

Most recently, Hondurans have fled the nation by a caravan of thousands of migrants.³³ This is largely due to the ubiquitous presence of gangs and corruption, but also economic conditions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and a historically devastating hurricane season in Honduras. Like most nations, Honduras has experienced a significant economic recession due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has only worsened the economic conditions of the nation and most Hondurans do not see a path forward in their country. Furthermore,

hurricanes Eta and Lota have destroyed many homes in the region, creating a humanitarian disaster for Honduras. The nation is deteriorating quickly, and eradicating gangs must be the first step toward recovery post-pandemic.

Guatemala

Guatemala is similar to El Salvador and Honduras in history and current challenges. Guatemala borders El Salvador and Honduras to the north. Gang violence has sparked a mass migration from Guatemala to the United States in the last couple of decades. It is estimated that in 2015, the Guatemalan immigration statistics was 76,352. This number represents the number of native-born Guatemalan citizens living in another region.³⁴ Guatemala becomes overwhelmed with migrants at some points because of the large number of migrants from El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua traveling through the country.

Historical Context

Like El Salvador and Honduras, Guatemala has experienced decades of violence. In the 1950s, the United States organized a coup in Guatemala hoping to end then Guatemalan President Jacobo Arbenz’s progressive policies. This sparked decades of gruesome civil war in the 1960s through the 1990s. During this time, there were egregious human rights abuses and violations including genocide. The war lasted thirty-six years and killed approximately two hundred thousand people. Since the civil war, gangs have overwhelmed the nation.

Violence

Similar to El Salvador, the United States State Department has declared Guatemala a critical threat.³⁵ In 2018, the homicide rate was 22 per one hundred thousand residents.³⁶

MS-13 and 18th Street control portions of the country. According to a United Nations Refugee Agency study, nearly thirty percent of migrant youth indicated that violence was the main reason they were fleeing the region.³⁷ Like most Central American nations, gangs have diminished opportunity for youth. The same risk factors for joining gangs mentioned earlier apply to Guatemalan youth. Additionally, gangs in Guatemala are involved in other crimes ranging from narcotrafficking and kidnapping.³⁸

Poverty

Poverty in Guatemala has reached elevated levels. The country is the fifth poorest within Latin America.³⁹ According to the World Bank, Guatemala is experiencing a poverty rate of 59.3%. Furthermore, 23% of Guatemalans are living in extreme poverty.⁴⁰ The implications of violence and corruption are the leading causes for the stagnant economy and lack of financial security for many Guatemalans. Furthermore, the issue of income inequality is a major concern. 0.001% of the population owns half of the nation’s wealth.

The effects of poverty are widespread throughout the country. The lack of proper investment into public programs and safety net programs has led to elevated levels of malnutrition in the country. According to the World Bank, Guatemala has the sixth highest rate of malnutrition in Latin America.⁴¹ Like Honduras, Guatemala was recently hit with a historic hurricane season. The impact of these storms led to loss of lives and property.

Outlook

Guatemala has made some progress towards eliminating violence and poverty in the nation. Some estimates indicate the nation is improving the economy and increasing its national GDP according to the World Bank. There are some

improvements regarding education in the nation over the past two decades as well. According to the United States Agency for International Development, Guatemala has made significant improvements to primary school enrollments over the course of the last twenty years.⁴² However, as explained earlier, Guatemalans are facing enormous challenges from dealing with gangs and natural disasters. Going into the future, Guatemala’s government must rely heavily on its agricultural production and international aid to keep its economy afloat and improve economic conditions for its citizens.

Migration

It is important to recognize the number of migrants fleeing Central America over the last decade. As highlighted throughout this article, migration is at elevated levels is because of the rampant violence throughout the region. A study conducted by Doctors Without Borders found that nearly two-thirds of migrants fleeing the region had reported a family member who became a victim of the ongoing violence.⁴³ In 2019, it was estimated that nearly eight hundred thousand people from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras had migrated to the U.S. southern border.⁴⁴ The US News and World Report analyzed the number of migrants to the United States in 2017 and how the migrant number compares to 1990. For El Salvador, the migrant population ranked 12th in 1990 and 5th in 2017. Guatemala was ranked 19th in 1990 and ranked 11th in 2017. ⁴⁵

U.S. immigration policy is also important to analyze. Many immigrants are denied asylum at the southern border of the United States. The immigration process of the United States came to light in 2018, when poor living conditions at U.S. immigration detention centers were revealed. The ‘zero tolerance’ immigration policy of the Trump Administration came under scrutiny when reports of children being

separated from their parents were revealed during that time. At present, there are still hundreds of separated families. In late 2019, the Trump Administration began to deport denied asylum seekers to Guatemala, including migrants with no Guatemalan origins.⁴⁶ This process of deportation was approved in an asylum deal between the Central American nations and the United States. In many instances when unaccompanied children return to their homeland, they have very little and are on their own. Furthermore, many children have psychological trauma after returning home; without proper healthcare in the region, many children suffer from depression.

The government of the United States, similar to most nations, has needed to dramatically change border procedures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. At time of writing, the southern border of the United States has experienced a dramatic increase in the migration population from Central America. The Biden Administration is hoping to return to usual immigration procedure and border normalization by summer of 2021.⁴⁷ Southern border facilities have been subject to controversy since the Trump Administration in 2018. Many of the migrants have been unaccompanied minors. President Joe Biden has made it a priority to process children at the border as well as reuniting hundreds of families separated under the Trump Administration’s ‘zero tolerance’ policy. In terms of immigration reform, President Biden as well as members of the U.S. Congress are hoping to ensure the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program is strengthened.

At time of writing, President Biden has tasked Vice President Kamala Harris with managing the current migration situation.⁴⁸ Vice President Harris will also be tasked with working with America’s regional partners Canada, Mexico, and the countries of the ‘northern triangle’ (El

Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras) to mitigate the crisis in the migrants’ home country.

Conclusion

As shown throughout this article, the violence epidemic and corruption have caused poor economic conditions in Central America, resulting in one of the most dangerous regions in the world. International economic assistance is essential in keeping Central America financially afloat amid their pursuit to eradicate gangs from the region. Non-governmental organizations have also made great improvements to the region. However, these efforts only affect a small fraction of the enormous suffering masses of Central Americans. Lack of leadership and corruption at the highest levels of government contributes to the deterioration of Central America. In the 2020 U.S. Presidential Election, President Biden proposed more investment in Central America. Moving forward, the Biden Administration has proposed a massive immigration reform bill to better manage the crisis in Central America. The overall conditions of Central America are worsening and major investment in the region is urgently needed.

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MEXICO: A PROPER DIAGNOSIS

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Misdiagnosis and Miscomprehension of the Problems

When people talk about the beautiful state of Mexico and its various faults they always seem to take the “trickle down” approach. The “trickle down” approach begins with attributing the woes of the struggling nation to the actions of those in the executive branch of the Cartels such as “El Chapo”, the Felix brothers, and “El Pelon”. This approach typically continues with over analysis of drug shipments for example the tonnage “recovered” by law enforcement vs the tonnage successfully smuggled into various countries and the money it generates. Such “trickle down” analysis beginning with drug kingpins is woefully insufficient as it does not address the material needs and concerns of the Mexican people yet it is the prevailing dogma when discussing the failures of the state as a whole. This dogma is less apparent among those within Mexico as it is in the United States where anti-drug propaganda runs rampant as the only justification for the increasing militarization of police and anti-immigration sentiment which has infected its population. This paper will attempt to diagnose the various symptoms of unrest within Mexico, their root

causes, and the attempts by the Mexican political establishment as well as the everyday citizen to take matters into their own hands.

Symptoms of the failing state: The Damnation of Children

First and foremost: when discussing the ills of Mexico come the Cartels, the violence they bring, and the most important question no one seems to ask: Why are people so dependent on the Cartel’s in the first place? The book “Un Sicario en Cada Hijo Que Te Dio” (translation: An assassin in every child I gave you) contains real life testimony of various children who have been convicted for various violent crimes committed during their employment with various Cartels.¹ A common theme among the children (some joining the Cartels as young as 8 years old) is financial dependency, educational disillusionment, and familial unrest/ties to cartels. A child (Codename: Jesus) admits to cold bloodedly murdering and decapitating a 17 year old prostitute belonging to a rival cartel; This was his first of approximately 20 murders he personally committed during his time in the Cartel as he worked his way up to Comandante status. He was 12 years old when he committed the

atrocities in question. The motivation for the murder and torture of his fellow man was a consistent monthly paycheck of 15,000 pesos (approx \$760).² In the United States this could be achieved working a minimum wage job PART TIME. For Jesus to earn the same amount of money would be responsible for extracting information from rival cartel members via torture and murder; he also admits to openly bribing state police for protection, coordinating drug shipments, and even purchasing guns and munitions confiscated from rival cartels.³ Young children do not have the capacity to engage in such egregious criminal behavior for extended periods of time without some form of training or education about the intricacies of crime. Jesus and others admit to being trained in various Narco boot camps in the rural mountains of Mexico free from the prying eyes of the state.⁴ Jesus admits to being taught rifle handling, drug making/smuggling techniques, and the art of torture in one of these narco education/indoctrination centers.

On the other side of the coin there are children fighting against the cartels in Ayahualtempa and other towns/villages in the rural south. The cartels have the most power and influence in the rural south where the federal and state governments refuse to protect in part because of corruption and in part due to an unwillingness to risk men in what they see as a lost cause. Because of the failures of the state in curbing the incessant violence, community leaders have stepped up in taking the anarchist solution; a community police force (Autodefensas).⁵ Some community police forces enlist men, women, and children as young as 6 years old to begin training with wooden guns until the age of 12 where they are promoted to full fledged rifle handling techniques. ⁶ These children were not conscripted; they joined voluntarily. It is not for a desire for power, arms, and money as it is for the Narcos but rather a demonstrable need for a proper peace keeping force in the

underdeveloped and abandoned region. An example of this demonstrable need would be the murder of community police members a mere 200 yards away from a local middle school, ostensibly shot by a Narco (WAPO).⁷ When the photographs of prepubescent children carrying rifles made global headlines the president at the time Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (AMLO) responded by denouncing the community police force as an organization that promotes child abuse. While yes it is true that children should not be forced to take up arms, AMLO fails to acknowledge the factors which culminated in the creation of these Autodefensas in the first place. His centrist neoliberal solution to the problem was to have a small patrol show up to the village every once in a while; a woefully insufficient response indicative of AMLO's incomprehension of the situation. The families in these villages have personally been wronged and mistreated by police in these areas and as a result no longer trust the state in providing for their defense. The undeniable fact that the police are egregiously corrupt in Mexico only serves to compound the anti-government sentiments in these rural areas. According to polling data from "Centro de Estudios Sociales y de Opinión Pública" (CESOP) the majority of Mexicans do not believe in the police force with 29% believing the police do not function at all and 36% believing the police actively engage in crime (Insight).⁸ If AMLO truly wishes to curb Narco violence and put an end to the need for Autodefensas then he should deal with the criminogenic factors which create such violence and unrest in the first place as opposed to merely throwing more men, guns, and money at the problem in the hopes that it will magically disappear.

Historical Analysis: How did we get here?

Mexico historically has been an agricultural state, however in the 19th to early 20th century

economic expansion and industrialization was the mantra of the oligarchy in charge. In 1824 the Ley de Colonización was passed.⁹ This law was intended to increase immigration to the recently liberated Mexico with the goal of increasing direct foreign investment as well as manpower. The oligarchy knew that industrialization would be no easy feat particularly with a mostly indigenous workforce which has traditionally been seen by the Mestizo and Creollo classes as a lost cause of sorts and unable to be modernized. Because of this racist sentiment among the ruling class the Ley de Colonización promised security and 10 years of no taxes to individuals willing to purchase and inhabit designated land areas. The poor and indigenous were not financially able to acquire the lands they had already been living on and were subject to eviction and/or peonage when their land was purchased. While at first this was not a huge problem as land and military might to quash revolution was very abundant in the beginnings of the industrializing nation however with the implementation of Ley Lerdo by Benito Juarez in 1856 many more indigenous and poor would be rendered landless and reduced to peonage. Ley Lerdo forced the sale of non-essential land belonging to the church as well as common land (ejidos) owned by the indigenous.¹⁰ Typically monetary compensation was minimal and transfer of land was done by force to facilitate the creation of encomiendas where the indigenous would be placed into peonage. Benito Juarez, successor to Porfirio Diaz, took it one step further with his infamous slogan "Pan o Palo" (Bread or Baton). Diaz was more authoritarian than his successors but was successful in his industrialization efforts such as the creation of railroads, increase in extraction of oil and precious metals, as well as the creation of a booming bourgeois class. This bourgeois class owned approximately 93% of indigenous land at their pinnacle of oppression.¹¹ Obviously the peons would not

stand for their indefinite indentured servitude, and in 1910, they overthrew the dictator Porfirio Diaz marking the beginning of the brutal 7 year Mexican revolution.

In the wake of the revolution led by famous anarchists such as Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata, finally came an era of relative freedom and a moderate redistribution of land as well as dismantling of the dreaded encomiendas and with it the end of peonage. This era of economic and political liberalization came with a new, more powerful constitution and a 73 year long rule of a singular political party: El Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI). The PRI is known to be corrupt with egregious scandals being the norm; The PRI has been caught colluding with Drug traffickers in a boss-client relationship on numerous occasions (JSTOR).¹² The ostensible goal of this collusion is to minimize death and assassination attempts on elected officials with some level of success for politicians willing to participate in corruption. The real goal of PRI is the neoliberalization of Mexico and with it the slow and painful impoverishment of the Mexican people unlucky enough to be born into a poor family. With the neoliberalization and privatization of land and industry in Mexico came the creation of monopolies and the bribery of politicians and union leaders (JSTOR).¹³

Many would argue that the most harmful neoliberalization effort in modern Mexican history would be the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994. NAFTA removed tariffs on imports and exports between the U.S. Mexico and Canada. While good for big business and Wall Street, NAFTA did not benefit small farms and other small scale means of production as it created a huge balance of trade deficit across various sectors of the economy. These balance of trade deficits were not immediate however, over time

the balance of trade would decidedly go one way or the other, many attribute this to the slow removal of subsidies for small scale food production(FERN).¹⁵ These balance of trade deficits created fierce competition among farms, incentivizing the consolidation and acquisition of small scale family owned farms into large scale corporate farms. With the large-scale sale of land by the impoverished farmers as a result of financial necessity created by this legislation came an increase in immigration to cities and manufacturing towns both within Mexico and the U.S.. Luckily enough for the working class, there was a mass creation of jobs particularly in the manufacturing sector. The only problem is that these jobs only pay minimum wage; as of December 16, 2020, the minimum wage in Mexico has been increased to a measly 141 pesos a day (\$7) from 121 pesos (\$6).¹⁶ That comes out to approximately \$2,500 USD a year pre tax. Therein lies the main problem with NAFTA from the perspective of the working class. Unemployment is currently at approximately 3.8%,¹⁷ and the per capita GDP has been on an upward trend since 1994. However, the people are becoming squeezed by a stagnant starvation minimum wage in the face of rising property values and the slow decrease in food subsidies as a result of neoliberalization. In essence, NAFTA caused a boom in the Mexican economy for the bourgeois, but has left the common man behind. As a direct result of NAFTA came the creation of the Ejercito Zapatista por Liberacion National (EZLN) led by Subcomandante Marcos. The EZLN is an anarchist group of mostly indigenous people living in Chiapas. They are famous for wearing balaclavas as well as their organizational efforts in shutting down major highways and armed demonstrations to ensure that their voices are heard. The EZLN was successful in getting some concessions such as land autonomy within the region of Chiapas however they were unable to do much for those living elsewhere.

In the years after the signing of NAFTA large discontent emerged towards the PRI and their political hegemony, culminating in their first presidential loss in the year 2000 to Partido Acción Nacional (PAN) candidate Vicente Fox. Fox ran on ending the overt corruption of PRI, increasing wages, and increasing investment in education. While these policies were greatly needed at the time of his inauguration, Fox did not consider the fact that he would not be blessed with a “rubber stamp” congress as previous PRI presidents enjoyed. As a result of a divided congress and overt corruption which never left the country, Fox had many problems in fulfilling his campaign promises; however, the significance of a non-PRI president winning office cannot be overstated.

The War on Drugs: Why punish the workers for the sins of the bourgeois?

Following Fox came Felipe Calderon of the PAN party in 2006. He is most famous for his controversial war on drugs which has largely been attributed to the accelerated downward spiral of violence and corruption which plagues the nation today. Calderon thought that the drug traffickers could be stopped with stern words, bullets, and manpower. His plan backfired spectacularly as official homicide rates increased 29% between 2007 and 2008, 22% the following year, and 28% in 2010. In 2010 alone there were 20,600 murders reported (Economist).¹⁸ This does not even take into account the unofficial murder rate as most crimes are not reported in Mexico due to a distrust in the police force among the populace. In fact, according to the Mexican National Executive Secretary of Public Safety (SESNSP) 92.3% of crimes in Mexico go unreported, this number increases to more southern, rural, and violent areas such as Guerrero where estimates are closer to 98% (Un Sicario).¹⁹ To be fair to Calderon, many of these reported murders were committed in Northern cities such as Ciudad

Juarez which borders the U.S. with crime rates in southern states ostensibly decreasing (Economist).²⁰ Some attribute this shift to a domestic crackdown of meth production in the U.S., others attribute the shift to be a direct consequence of Calderon’s policy of increasing troop numbers and checkpoints across the nation. What is without question is that the people suffering as a direct consequence of the war on drugs do not have kind things to say about Calderon. When a children’s birthday party was massacred in Ciudad Juarez by Cartels vying for power against the government and each other, protestors took to the streets; Their message: “Until we find who is responsible, you Mr. President are the assassin” (reuters).²¹

The various methods utilized by the U.S. and Mexican governments to curb narcotics trafficking do not even address the crimes of big corporations. Arguably the most egregious narcotics scandal committed during Calderon’s term would be the slap on the wrist the U.S. based chemical conglomerate Eastman chemical c.o and its subsidiary Taminco enjoyed for its large role in Methamphetamine production within Mexico (bloomberg).²² In 2010, it was discovered that Taminco had been selling MMA to unverified shell companies. MMA is a key ingredient in the production of meth and its manufacture/sale for legitimate purposes is supposed to be heavily regulated and controlled. One of the addresses of the shell companies led to an empty parking lot, and the other was found to be directly controlled by a Taminco employee, clearly the chemicals were to be used in drug production as opposed to legitimate purposes.²³ 22,000 gallons of MMA were sold to these illegitimate companies between 2007 and 2010, enough to produce \$3.2 billion worth of Meth.²⁴ These illegal sales accounted for 60% of revenue for the unscrupulous company. In a U.S. court (where the jurisdiction of this crime was granted), it

was found that Taminco approved sales to these companies without doing even the most basic of background checks. The CEO at the time was rewarded with a \$12 million exit package for the dramatic increase in profits as a direct result of the crimes committed by the subsidiary.; None of the executives were incarcerated for their hand in trafficking illegal substances across the border. Following a guilty plea by the chemical conglomerate Eastman Co, the punitive damages to be paid were a mere \$1.3 million; According to Bloomberg the company produces this much revenue every 1 hour and 13 minutes.²⁵ Felipe Calderon did not so much as denounce this crime or even attempt to prosecute those responsible in his own courts. This scandal truly brings into question the legitimacy of the war on drugs from both nations as it is abundantly clear that the true criminals behind the production of drugs can get off the hook so long as they plead ignorance.

Criminogenic factors: The real criminal is the system itself

When analyzing drug violence in Mexico it is important to understand the socio-economic conditions which create criminals as opposed to merely blaming those who “chose” a life of crime for all the wrongs of the cartels. As stated earlier, the children who join the cartels mostly have 3 things in common: financial struggles, educational disillusionment, and family unrest and/or ties to the cartels. Interestingly, enough of these are the same challenges that children who join the Autodefensas face on a daily basis. In fact, practically all children in Mexico suffer from these conditions. It is safe to say that the disillusionment and inaccessibility of changing one's status in Mexican society is what pushes the young and impressionable to either a life of crime or to be forced to fend for themselves.

Mexico currently spends approximately 4% of its GDP on education but this does not account for the whole story.²⁶ In Mexico, only K-9th is tuition free (in public schools) with high school and college having tuitions which are inaccessible to the average working class family. According to a study by the OECD comparing 44 nations, Mexico ranked 1st in its high school dropout rates leading to 28% of youth aged 17-28 being both unemployed and not seeking education (ICDFN).²⁷ The OECD also reports that Mexico has the lowest productivity rate of all OECD countries, a whopping 60% below the OECD average.²⁸ In the globalized world of today where corporations have taken over industry as a result of neoliberalism, these kids have no chance of providing for themselves or their families via legitimate means. At least not without a college education, or at the very least, a high school diploma which the state refuses to pay for in full. With the starvation minimum wage of \$7 a day, it is impossible for working class families to send their children to higher education institutions and put food on the table at the same time, unless the state picks up the tab. The disillusionment of education in Mexico as a result of financial inability only serves to push the working class to jobs in the black market. As stated previously according to testimony from Ex-cartel member Jesus, the cartels will provide education on the tactics needed to live a life of crime free of charge (complimentary drugs are provided as well) (Un Sicario).²⁹ The fact that the cartels are willing to step in and educate their own workforce while the government refuses to provide even a basic high school education is indicative of a system designed to funnel children into perpetual poverty.

Speaking of funneling children to a life of crime, the book “Un Sicario En Cada Hijo Que Te Dio” speaks about a lesser known fault in the juvenile justice system which the cartels have

been known to abuse. Prior to a criminal justice reform signed in 2008 only to be implemented on a state by state basis completed by 2016, 20 out of 29 states had a maximum penalty of 5 years for minors (Juv justice).³⁰ Children under 14 were never subject to incarceration as the Mexican constitution protects young children from a cycle of incarceration, instead opting to take custody of the accused children in the hopes of rehabilitation and reintegration into society. The cartels would take advantage of this by enlisting children to do the dirty work such as assassination. The cartels would inform the children of the law and its low penalties for minors and offer to pay them “hush money” if incarcerated. Furthermore they would use the prisons as a recruitment agency with bonuses granted for each person successfully recruited (Un Sicario).³¹ This “revolving door” of crime allows for cartels to indoctrinate children who perceive no other way to make a living in Mexican society.

Dreams of better days: What is being done to help the people?

AMLO has made his own attempts to reform the failed state of Mexico, however the problems are many and the solutions are few. Some of these “solutions” include controversial criminal justice reform, denial of the impacts of COVID, and education reform.

As a result of previous legislation enacted in 2016, juveniles now only face incarceration as a last resort with the maximum sentence being increased to at least 7 years across the board, some states even go as far as increasing the maximum penalty to 20 years.³² While seemingly harsh, it does function to disincentivize the most egregious of criminal behavior. Non punitive measures were expanded for the juvenile justice system under this legislation, with a greater emphasis on rehabilitation such as mental health treatment

and counseling (Northwestern).³³ The standard of evidence was also raised with this legislation which has been met with much pushback after some high profile cases in which individuals who were caught red handed engaging in drug trafficking were set free due to a mishandling of evidence (NYT).³⁴ In response to the highest recorded homicide count in recent memory (34,500 in 2019), AMLO started working on his own reforms. AMLO’s reforms leaked and were faced with much backlash because it seemingly reverses many of the policies which were difficult to pass from 2008-2016.³⁵ Some of these reforms include an increase in the use of pretrial detainment, elimination of special “due process” judges, and the permission of illegally obtained evidence which encourages police misconduct. After the leak AMLO attempted to pin the blame on his attorney general and has yet to pass any criminal justice reform since (NYT).³⁶

AMLO’s scandals are not limited to criminal justice but also public health in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Towards the beginning of the pandemic AMLO took to Facebook with a video of him out and about, mask-less, making the following statement “If you’re able and have the means to do so, continue taking your family out to eat ... because that strengthens the economy.” (VOX).³⁷ AMLO has also been seen hugging constituents and kissing babies during the pandemic indicative of his ignorance on this public health crisis. AMLO also refuses to pass any meaningful stimulus bills during this pandemic which has been met with mixed reactions.

In a news conference, AMLO stated that he is against a neoliberal stimulus bill because it will only serve to benefit the rich and not the common man. Because of the corruption and failures of the PRI during its neoliberal hegemony, AMLO’s anti- neoliberal and anti-stimulus rhetoric is far more successful

than one would expect. At of the time of writing, there is still no national mask mandate in Mexico, no large stimulus package, and COVID counts continue to rise globally.

In terms of educational reform, AMLO has worked to undo a previous legislation which provided a merit based system of pay for educators, shifted funds from early education to post secondary, and removed the National Institute of Education Evaluation. Under Peña Nieto (PRI president 2012-2018) a merit based system was implemented to determine the performance of teachers and distribute salary bonuses and promotions to those deemed with higher merit (WPR).³⁸ Due to a misinterpretation of the law by teacher unions fearing privatization, this merit based system has been largely demonized despite no mention of privatization in the bill itself. However, due to AMLO’s self perceived reputation as a populist candidate, he felt compelled to undo this unpopular legislation and replace it with his own, against the will of his advisors. He also controversially vowed to “scrap” the National Institute of Education Evaluation which will only serve to make education statistics in Mexico more difficult to obtain and less accurate. Last but not least, AMLO has drastically cut funding for early childhood education in favor of funding universities and vocational schools.

While it is easy to blame many of the problems of Mexico on the executive branch of government one must consider the deep socio-economic, political, and social issues which have plagued the country since its inception. To fix the failing state of Mexico is no easy feat and likely cannot be done in a single presidency; simply put, it wasn’t broken in a single presidency, rather hundreds of years of colonialism, political instability, and corruption. In terms of Mexico’s future it is clear that AMLO is not the hero, but he is not

necessarily the villain either. The process of change is slow, however the escalation of problems, especially as a result of COVID, is exponential. Perhaps there is no hope for Mexico’s future unless the people stand up and take drastic measures as has been done throughout the state's history.

ASSESSING NIGERIA: POWER, GSM, AND SOCIAL MEDIA

CHYNELL FREEMAN

The use of social media is a relatively new trend in this world. For a creation that began only a little over twenty years ago, its rapid growth can be characterized as exponential. Billions of users log onto devices each day for an array of menial reasons, including updating followers on the tasty lunch they just had to share wedding photos. While most users enjoy lackadaisical features, social media has an untapped potential that people are only recently learning to utilize. #BringBackOurGirls, #StopFundingHate, and #MeToo are all household names, whether the audience fully understands their cause or not. No matter, all of these campaigns garnered international attention, which elicited a response from their respective governments. What does this mean? This marks a potential transition to people-centered issues and global governance accountability. The governed are now able to report on governments with an honest interpretation of the quality of life, and if need be, provoke corrections by and through social media organization. While the effectiveness of this method is currently sporadic at best, it has proven on multiple occasions to be successful under the right conditions. Once honed, social media campaigning will be the future.

The shift of power that comes with social media is especially significant for developing nations like Africa. In the last few decades, African countries have become the largest market for new mobile device subscribers and social media users. This growth comes for a plethora of reasons having to do with internal instability. Developing nations like those in Africa lack the infrastructure needed for conventional devices and thus turn to mobile alternatives to suit their demand. An example of this is seen in Nigeria. The nation of Nigeria has a host of internal conflicts from domestic terrorism, corrupt political leaders, policy brutality, and infrastructure development. However, there has been an evolution in the way citizens can voice their complaints in a way that will promote change; and that is through social media. An example of the potential power of Nigeria is in the recent 2020 protest throughout the nation. The focal point of this paper is to examine the complaints proposed through the viral #EndSARS social media campaign and assess the effects social media has on facilitating social and developmental reform through coordinated grassroots efforts. This will be accomplished by first examining the infrastructural factors that continue to lead Nigerian users to social media,

followed by a critical review of the Nigeria 2020 social media campaign and its effects on users.

Assessing Nigeria: Power, GSM, and Social Media

Nigeria is Africa's most populous country, with a population of over 200 million. With such a larger population, the government struggles to provide adequate infrastructure and resources to satisfy the growing nation. The electricity sector, which is a necessity for the residential, commercial, and industrial consumers of the population as well as economic growth, is very weak, especially concerning how important a having functioning electrical sector is. Data from the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers subgroups Power Energy Society/ Industry Applications Society, referred to in short as IEEE PES/IAS, reports that only 40 percent of the population is connected national electrical grid. The report also states that the country's current production capacity is insufficient to supply existing power needs to those who have access to the national grid. So, those connected end up experiencing power problems about 60 percent of the time.¹ USAID projects that Nigeria generates roughly one-third of its potential power capacity.² The results of a weak electrical/ power sector are almost daily power losses. On average, the country experiences about 320 days a year with power blackouts.

The population copes with the electricity crisis in an expensive way, generators. Residents and businesses have turned to high-cost generators to supplement the electricity losses by the state. A National Politics Radio (NPR) interview of a tech startup in Lagos highlights the daily frustrations that Nigerian businesses experience. The owner of the startup Chris Oyeniyi likens his business to Uber, but on an industrial scale, and says unlike Uber, which is

a 24/7 operating company, his business is limited to regular business hours because of how poor the electrical system and the high cost of running generators. Oyeniyi reports paying about \$800 US dollars per month to keep the lights on and computers running in his small office. “If the power grid worked all the time, he would pay closer to \$100 [US dollars.]”³ The funds Oyeniyi spends running his generators could be reinvested in his business if the system worked properly. A survey of similar small tech startups with less than ten employees reveals that 57 percent views electricity as a “major” or “severe” obstacle to their business, beating out corruption, taxes, and government bureaucracy.⁴ Businesses are not the only ones suffering from the electricity crisis; residents are also frustrated with the all-too-common blackouts. Residents in impoverished communities will often share generators to cut costs, with a small generator only powering a house for about three hours. "Things got so bad that the National Electric Power Authority (NEPA) was nicknamed “Never Expect Power Always, Please Light Candle” by frustrated citizens.”⁵

Nigeria is referred to by power sector commentators as a generator economy; this designation alludes to the country's massive reliance on off-grid electricity being generated to satisfy the power demand. On average, Nigerians spend almost \$5 billion US dollars per year on fuel to generate their own electricity.⁶ Electricity reform bills like the Energy Power Sector Reform Act of 2005 start to address the electricity deficit but are still unable to satisfy the immense demand. The passage of the Act led to the privatization of energy created several competitive firms for the generation and distribution of electricity. The privatization of the energy sector, in theory, was supposed to allow industries more incentive to produce and distribute energy more efficiently. However, the government is still highly involved with the processes to where the

government still controls transmission and electricity prices. Political commentators from the "Nigeria Politics Weekly" podcast describes government interference as the greatest hindrance to effectively resolving the electricity crisis, commenting on the government's failure to effectively transmit the full capacity of electricity produced.⁷ The International Energy Agency reports on the transmission of energy in Nigeria corroborates the podcasters' claims. The agency reports an overwhelmed transmission network with a poor voltage profile and frequent transmission losses often in the range of 30-35 percent.⁸

The immense electrical hurdles make electricity-dependent items like desktop computers, televisions, and radios luxury items for those who can afford the extra cost to generate power for the devices. Because of the significant electrical troubles, many Nigerians opt to use mobile devices instead of traditional devices. The information and communications sector fare much better at meeting the demand and providing reliable and adequate resources to consumers than the power sector. The better quality of telecommunications is highlighted through data collected about the industry. As of 2009, 70 percent of the population is within range of the Global Systems Mobile (GSM) signal. Low mobile phone prices coupled with reliable services led to a dramatically increased demand for mobile devices, specifically mobile phones. "As a result, data for 2017 indicate that 71% of the population use mobile phones as a primary platform for communication and accessing the Internet."⁹ Currently, Nigeria has the largest mobile market in Africa with about 173 million subscribers and is rapidly expanding technologies concentrating in the rural areas where growth is needed.¹⁰ The constant expansion of mobile phone use and its capabilities brings new possibilities across socio-economic lines to connect individuals to other individuals, services, and information.

The use of mobile phones across the globe has become an extension of everyday life. Especially in Africa, mobile phones offer a range of uses, from communication to applications that connect users with services. Jenny Aker, Assistant Professor of Developmental Economics, identifies five economic benefits of mobile phone use in Africa. Aker describes how “mobile phones improve access to and use of information,” thereby “improving coordination among agents” and that “mobile phones can facilitate communication among social media networks.”¹¹ While Akers's analysis of mobile communication benefits is intended to depict how the market in Africa reacts to the increased availability of mobile phones and devices, the analysis mirrors Nigeria’s general population's usage of the technology. Other studies echo Aker's assertions on the benefits of mobile devices, including a survey conducted by the University of Ilorin. A survey of 742 professors from thirteen federal and state universities in South-West Nigeria concluded that mobile devices are essential for the dissemination of information. "The findings revealed that university lecturers had positive perception toward the usefulness, ease of use and adequacy of use of mobile technologies.”¹² The benefits of mobile devices in Nigeria are clear; the devices offer enhanced and simplified communication, coordination, and connection in a compact portable device. The uses of mobile devices have significantly expanded; one key feature that encompasses the benefits of mobile devices is the downloadable applications (apps) to access various forms of social media.

Similar to the study conducted about the benefits of increased access to mobile devices, studies have been organized to assess the benefits of social media. A survey of Kaduna Polytechnic students revealed the number one reason students visit social media sites is to

share and obtain information. The study concluded that social media is an indispensable internet platform and encouraged social media use in beneficial ways.¹³ The small sample group's conclusions reflect the sentiments of the population; over the past few decades, as power production has remained stagnant and inaccessible to millions of Nigerians, the GMS signal has been improving increasingly. This trend allows more people across Africa's most popular to become and stay connected, and this is largely by and through the use of social media applications. The sharing of information via social media is critical for Nigerian's, as much of the population does not have consistent access to the conventional forms of receiving information like television broadcast and radio. Social media offers users a way to instantly reach a vast audience as well as get important information updates. Overall, the consensus among Nigerians is clear: communication through mobile devices, using social media applications, is favored within the population to obtain and share information rapidly. The widespread availability, reliable connectivity, and ease of use make mobile communication and technology the dominant form of information transmission.

The rise in popularity of mobile communication devices directly relates to the increased number of social media users in Nigeria. It is recorded that of Nigeria’s population of 200 million, almost 30 million are users on some form of social media, and these numbers are rapidly growing.¹⁴ The number of Nigerians actually connected to social media is likely to be much higher; within the state, individuals in rural or impoverished communities are more likely to pool resources and share devices and social media accounts. Nonetheless, they reap the benefits of connectivity. "Even with the cheapest mobile phones one can still access some social media platforms at reasonable cost for information, education and

entertainment.”¹⁵ The ability to connect instantly with an audience via social media platforms is essential to how users have adapted social media to be a tool to voice opinions about governmental policies. A majority of users claim they frequent social media platforms to discuss national issues such as politics, the economy, religious matters, and more.¹⁶ The widespread reach of social media allows the people platforms to contribute to the developmental process of society by creating space for diversity of political opinion and socio-cultural viewpoints. Studies of user's social media verbiage during the 2007 Nigerian election concluded that access to social media posts "enhances the political participation of the citizens."¹⁷ Social media platforms attract increased audience participation not seen in other media forms, which contributes to political discourse.

Increased use of social media is not limited to the private individual; governments and public officials have begun to utilize social media as a tool to reach targeted audiences. After taking cues from Former United States President Barack Obama's successful use of Facebook during his campaign, Nigerian officials began expanding to social media platforms in an attempt to win over voters. In 2011, political history was made in Nigeria when the country used social media for the first time to engage the population about the upcoming election.¹⁸ Since then, these platforms are more widely used by government officials to communicate with voters, provide information about programs, and solicit campaign volunteers. Even former Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan utilized the promise of creating a social media account as a tool to garner more votes during an election cycle.¹⁹ In this case, the mere promise of engaging with citizens via some form of social media platform elicits enough support to sway the ballot. The old way of noninteractive one-way messages to large

audiences has proved disadvantageous for successful politicking. The political process is no longer just for spectators; through social media, individuals can interact with their politicians. Nigerian voters now have the opportunity to lend their voice to the political conversation, which is something that has not been possible for years in the Nigerian political landscape.²⁰ Through the use of social media, a dialogue is forged; governments can use social media to promote themselves and their political agenda, while private citizens are able to use their platforms to express support or dissatisfaction with the government in an attempt to invoke policy reforms.

Individuals can use social media as a tool to influence engagement in social mobilization. Social mobilization is generally defined as "a broad-scale movement to engage people's participation in achieving a specific development goal through self-reliant efforts."²¹ Individuals, communities, policymakers alike are essential in facilitating social and developmental change through coordinated complementary and interconnected efforts. Social media is a powerful tool as it can be used to penetrate specific groups by age, gender, socio-economic status, nationality, etc., and engage them with targeted messages. Facebook and Twitter are the most popular platforms for social mobilization. Facebook allows for the creation of group pages and events; pages and events can be shared and reposted if they are public, allowing the post to reach farther than the original audience. Twitter is similar in the far-reaching sharing aspect; however, instead of pages, events, and lengthy posts, Twitter caters to succinct notes of 280 characters or less. Twitter's short messages called 'tweets' are favored for their brevity. The average person can write public messages to celebrities, politicians, presidents, etc., and depending on 'virality,' prompt a response from the targeted individual(s). Facebook and Twitter create

platforms for people to coordinate organized efforts to bring attention to their chosen issues. Social media social mobilization has been seen in the Arab Spring protest in Tunisia, Black Lives Matter demonstrations in the United States, and most recently with #EndSars in Nigeria. All of these protests began on social media platforms. The issues were brought to the international stage by both the social mobilization of people out in the streets and the virality on social media as the events became 'trending' topics.

What is SARS?

The Nigerian Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), formed in 1992, was created with the purpose to “arrest and investigate violent crimes such as armed robberies, kidnapping, murder, hired assassinations, and other extreme criminality.”²² The need for SARS arose following an incident in Lagos where police operatives killed a Nigerian military officer at a checkpoint. The Nigerian military, learning of the incident, flooded the streets in search of police officers; as a result, the police abandoned the streets and went into hiding. It took two full weeks to calm the tension between the military and the police, but by that time, armed robbers were already in control of Lagos.²³ The Nigerian Police Force created SARS to combat issues of extreme criminality, as seen after the Lagos incident. In the early days of SARS, the combat-ready officers worked undercover in plain clothes and plain vehicles without any government insignia. Their main job was to monitor radio chatter to successfully arrest violent criminals. For ten years, SARS operated solely in Lagos, but by 2002, units had spread to all 36 states, including the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.²⁴ The expansion of SARS units across the country is indicative of how well the unit performed in reducing high rates of crime and criminal activity. Since its inception, many

notorious armed robbers have been taken off the streets, and over 3,000 suspected kidnappers across the country have been arrested.²⁵ While the unit has been successful at its intended purpose, numerous allegations of corruption, brutality, and torture overshadow the victories.

SARS forces are not the only unit within the Nigerian Police Force accused of corruption. In general, police officers in Nigeria are known for extortion and brutality, but what sets the SARS unit apart is the undue targeting of young people. SARS officers have been accused of profiling and detaining young men under the suspicion of being “Yahoo Boys” or cybercriminals solely based on the evidence of them owning a laptop or phone.²⁶ Once detained, individuals are demanded to pay excessive bail fees in order to be released. According to Amnesty International, “young people between the ages of 17 and 30 are most at risk of arrest, torture or extortion by SARS.”²⁷ Thousands of similar allegations support Amnesty International’s assertion. In one reported incident, citizens described the experience of being battered by SARS officers at a checkpoint until they paid a bribe. Others report witnessing SARS officers threatening to beat a man in the street because he looked too well off for his occupation.²⁸ There are many other worse citizen accusations ranging from torture to death. While those apprehended by SARS officers are met with extreme punishment, the SARS officers accused of brutality and torture are able to act with impunity. The Nigerian government has not prosecuted a single SARS officer despite numerous allegations and evidence.²⁹ The Nigerian government's lack of accountability and action to address the SARS concerns directly resulted in the mass protest against the unit.

The first instance of a social media campaign against the SARS unit appeared on Twitter in

2017 under #EndSARS. It started with the publication of a petition signed by 10,195 Nigerians and submitted to the Nigerian National Assembly to disband the unit. The Twitter campaign was sparked because a video of alleged SARS officers shooting a killing a man surfaced online. The campaign began to ‘trend’ on Twitter “with over 400,000 tweets within 12 hours.”³⁰ Nigerians began tweeting using #EndSARS to share their traumatic experiences of brutality by officers. Before the campaign, there were only isolated incidents of police brutality across the country; through the campaign, the true extent of police brutality was discovered. The culmination of similar experiences with the SARS and other Nigerian police forces revealed a rot and disfunction within the policing structure. Ultimately, no police reform or SARS disbandment came from this stint of objection; as the Twitter campaign settled down, so did the pressure for reform. However, the campaign was not a failure as it did draw attention to SARS brutality on a scale unseen before and established a platform for citizens to express their grievances. #EndSARS has been used many times since 2017 for citizens to voice dissent and demand change from their government.

A recent incident in October 2020 reignited frustrations of SARS brutality. Through social media, Nigerian demonstrators garnered international attention as #EndSARS went viral again. “Since 2017, protests have been building momentum across Nigeria, stemming from online advocacy to street protests.”³¹ Through coordinated efforts, throngs of people organized in simultaneous protests flocked to Nigerian cities to demand the disbandment of SARS. The incident that prompted the new series of protests was a new viral video of alleged SARS officers shooting a young man near Delta State and proceeding to take off in the victim's vehicle. Nigeria anti-police brutality activists were quick to use their platforms to raise

awareness of the grave conditions developing within the country. Online demonstrators were to successfully engage celebrities, politicians, and leaders to pressure them to use their larger platforms to spread awareness. #EndSARS soon received an outpour of support from influential individuals, including Beyonce, the CEO of Twitter, Jack Dorsey, and Nigerian athletes, all posting for an end to SARS and police brutality in Nigeria.³² With the pressure building for government action, a communique was published by the Nigerian government announcing the disbandment of SARS. Similar announcements of disbandment were released in 2014, 2015, and 2017, so citizens remained protesting until the government could pass beneficial reform.³³

The protests continued for weeks, with supporters both online and in-person rapidly growing. In-person protesters were able to account for their version of events via tweets and live streaming. Online participants could express support for the protests in many ways. Tweeting, sharing, and posting information about #EndSARS are some of the many ways people can contribute to the cause. By using the hashtag and engaging with other protesters, participants were able to send an overwhelming message to government officials detailing the problems within the current structure. Online crowdfunding posted to social media is another way supporters could contribute. The funds collected would go to be spent on legal services on behalf of the protesters who were arrested, to pay medical bills for those wounded, and to provide private security at protest points.³⁴ All services are items necessary to protect protesters, especially with tensions rising and interference from outside groups. While demonstrators have remained peaceful, police forces continued to respond with brutal methods, including shooting water cannons, tear gas and live rounds at protesters all across the country.³⁵

Tensions between police and protesters peaked after a limited number of rouge participants as well as unrelated groups attempting to take advantage of the unrest, vandalized cities across the country. During the period of lawlessness, a few police stations were looted, and other government facilities set ablaze; it is reported some 200 prisoners even escaped in all the chaos. Following the events of vandalism, which many believe was perpetrated by “hoodlums” disguised as protesters, a curfew was put into effect.³⁶ Military forces were sent to enforce the curfew and quell any future instances of protester violence. Protesters defied the curfew and organized at the Lekki Toll Bridge in Lagos for another peaceful demonstration. Demonstrators were singing the Nigerian national anthem and hold up the country’s flag when the lights were cut, and military forces began firing into the crowds.³⁷ The entire incident was captured on social media as some participants were live-streaming when the shots rang out, photos from the massacre show bloodied bodies covered with Nigerian flags. On Instagram, “hundreds of thousands of viewers watched live... as protesters tried to remove a bullet lodged in the thigh of a protester with tweezers sterilized in alcohol.”³⁸ The world was able to see in real-time how the events unfolded at the Lekki Toll Bridge. Participants using their social media platforms captured the severity of the situation unfolding in Nigeria.

Following the incident, henceforth known as the Lekki Massacre, Nigerian citizens were rightfully disgusted at how events transpired and even more so frustrated at the government’s response. Multiple eyewitness accounts and video footage show the military firing in the crowds of protestors, yet some officials' responses were less than sympathetic. In a statement by Lagos Governor Babajide Sanwo-Olu, he asserts 25 people were wounded in an “unfortunate shooting incident.”³⁹ The

language used in the governor’s statement minimizes the severity of the military opening fire on citizens, lessening it to an “unfortunate incident” instead of acknowledging the state of emergency. President Buhari did not officially address citizens until a few days after the massacre and being pressured by international attention. In a prerecorded statement released on October 22, President Buhari finally addressed the ongoing protest relaying a harsh message to protestors. President Buhari began by conveying his sympathies for the lives lost; however, when doing so, he failed to acknowledge the police brutality that contributed to the lives lost or address the military involvement in the shooting two days prior. Instead, the speech focused on reigning in protesters, calling on the demonstrators to “resist the temptation of being used by some subversive elements to cause chaos” with the aim of undermining democracy.⁴⁰ Following with, to do otherwise would “amount to undermining national security and law and order situation,” and under no circumstances would it be tolerated.⁴¹ President Buhari’s final remarks concluded by addressing social media, advising foreign and domestic demonstrators to research before posting, and to avoid spreading “deliberate falsehoods and misinformation.” Overall, President Buhari’s address left citizens unsatisfied as the President failed to address the plights of the people and instead criticized protesters.

The month-long #EndSARS protest subsided as November came around. Supporters were left wanting more from their government after President Buhari’s highly criticized address condemned protesters and their use of social media. Commentators speculate that President Buhari’s remarks were an attempt to delegitimize the protests and rights for Nigerians to form independent opinions of policy and actions taken by elected officials.⁴² Unfortunately for President Buhari, Nigerian’s

use of social media is embedded into modern culture and will continue to be used as a tool. The 2020 #EndSARS campaign revealed how powerful of a tool social media could be. Nigerian’s successfully pressured the domestic and international communities to be invested in Nigerian issues as well as provoke reforms from their government. While the demonstrators achieved not all goals, the campaign did have major wins. Visibility was the utmost important attribute the contributed to the success of the campaign. In this instance, the Nigerian people were successfully able to achieve one of their goals, being the disbandment of the SARS unit; however, the campaign has evolved far past the original aim. Now the citizens are aware of the control they have and used that same hashtag to voice dissent of other issues like the failures of the power sector and unemployment rates for young people. The success of future campaigns relies on a similar fervor of the participants, and should the #EndSARS level of activism continue to other endeavors; the government will have no choice but to evolve with its citizens.

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C O S U M N E S R I V E R C O L L E G E



"El Despertar"

This painting is about transitions, about leaving behind the darkness and awakening to the light of a new day. Life is all about shifts, about changes. It is our attitude as human beings which make those transformations meaningful or not. Being awake, aware, conscious, and mindful about life in a sensible assertiveness is something that I am looking for. This painting reflects my desire to inspire the viewer to be wakeful and attentive to life. I want to inspire the viewer to revive, to take action and to make something out of every moment instead of merely existing.

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