

NAVIGATING COMPLEX REALITIES: POWER, CONFLICT, AND HUMANITY

A Hoot About The World

AUGUST 2023

Democracy In Danger
Rise of New Challenges



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A HOOT ABOUT THE WORLD

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A HOOT ABOUT THE WORLD



Priscilla Durling

Priscilla Durling is the lead editor of this year's volume of "A Hoot About The World", having already worked on design for the magazine on previous years. As an avid enjoyer of literature, she chose to write a book review for "The Things They Carried" by Tim O'Brien. Priscilla plans to use her skillful writing and enthusiasm for books in her career, hoping to incorporate them in her studies of International Relations. Apart from the world of books, Priscilla also dedicates herself to several NGOs, for with the wisdom she's obtained throughout her 18 years, she has set goals in being part of the change she wants in the world.



Andrés Posada

Andrés Posada is a passionate writer, who enjoys volunteering in his spare time. He is a secretary from the board of directors on AIP4PAWS, an ONG who fights for "those who have no voice", rescue dogs for adoption and raises awareness on animal violence. He also is very dedicated as a vice president on EARLY STEPS, an ONG that raises funds and provides donations for orphans. He is passionate of learning new languages and so far speaks spanish, english, french and japanese. He dreams of becoming a future psychologist and has started his journey attending a summer program on Oxford University.



Adriana Abood

Adriana Abood is a hard-working student, known for speaking about politics, or any controversial. Her time spent discussing controversies led her to become the Co-President of the AIP Debate Team and the Captain of Team Panama. As the Captain, Adriana will lead her team through the World Schools Debating Championship taking place in Vietnam. She also leads various clubs such as Girl Up, acting for gender equality, and the Writing Club. Every Sunday, you will find Adriana watching the Formula One Grand Prix, which is likely what inspired her article, where she addresses Formula One's inconsistent stances on global politics.



Luciana Lloyd

This writer is a well-rounded student invested in making the world a better place. Managing to balance her academic responsibilities while leading one of the biggest NGOs in Panama, Ni Uno Más, she is dedicated on promoting awareness and assistance to those suffering bullying and harassment. Besides her continuous effort towards honorable causes, Luciana is very outspoken, with a particular interest for world issues and international matters. In her article, "The beginning of an era of immunity", she discusses the Syrian civil war and President Bashar Assad empirical domain.



Isabella Modai

Early in life, Modai developed an insatiable interest in literature, which has only grown stronger over time. She perseveres to leave a mark on the world by engaging in several community service activities. Dedicated to her position as president of the NGO Inspirando Mentes, she focuses on helping teach children in low-income communities around Panama. During her Comparative Literature course, she discovered a dystopian masterpiece, 1984 by George Orwell. In her book review, she affirms the storyline relates to recurring themes on today's reality. The novel's themes of surveillance, totalitarianism, and the power of language are parallel to the current events inside North Korea.



Stephanie Cabezas

From theater to debate, Stephanie Cabezas is a woman of many talents, be it in argumentation or singing, she is not shy of being heard. Presently, she partakes on AIP's most accomplished group, the debate club, and has been on the receiving end of several awards. As a well-rounded individual, she also is the woman in charge of the "Early Steps" NGO, specialized in orphan care and wellbeing. Cabezas remains a compassionate human with a special passion for advocating for those who are not heard, hence her stance on her article "Online Propaganda", written eloquently with her co-writer Andrea Duque-Estrada.



Andrea Duque-Estrada

As a skilled debater and eloquent speaker, Andrea Duque-Estrada is used to speaking on global issues and politics. Apart from being very present in the world of argumentation, Andrea also dedicates her time to AIP's theater club, playing a nun in last year's production of "Sister Act" and the role Kelsi this year in the world-famous "High School Musical". Dedicating herself to multiple activities, she currently maintains her title as President of AIP for Paws, showcasing the very same Duque-Estrada social-justice determination which led her to co-write her article "Online Propaganda".



Mariana Brenes

The Co-Leader of Obsequio de Vida, an NGO seeking to help children with heart disease, is a passionate and determined young woman. Brenes thoroughly enjoys doing volunteer work, hence her active participation in NGOs such as Girl Up AIP, Operation Smile, and more. Mariana's passions revolve around books, as she is an avid reader. This passion, altogether with her desire to spend time with her closest friends, led her to join All Booked, a reading club. In her article Regionalization is the new globalization, she explains why regionalization is indeed better than globalization, listing and contrasting their sustainability, reliability, and efficiency.



Luis Posada

Luis Posada varies in interests, from learning new concepts to watching soccer, especially when Messi plays. One of his kind acts was being a volunteer for social work in Hawaii. During his stay he aided locals and helped restore fish sanctuaries. He's also certified from a course in NASA's Kennedy space center, where he helped grow plants in a Mars simulation. Luis is trilingual, speaking Spanish, his native language, English and French. He also loves dogs, which he loves to play with, especially his dog Pancho. Posada decided to write about "The North Korean Food Crisis" because he is an altruistic human being, who cares to speak on topics such as this country's hunger issue in proximity.

EDITOR'S LETTER

Dear Esteemed Readers:

In an era of constant change and evolution, the vulnerability of democracy comes sharply into focus. Within this edition, we grapple with the profound challenges that threaten the very bedrock of democratic governance. As we delve into "Democracy in Danger: Navigating Current Challenges," we are met with intricate displays of issues that cast a shadow over our treasured principles.

Andres Posada's thought-provoking article, "Democratic Illusions: Unmasking the Impact of Latin American Politics" takes us on a captivating journey through the complex terrain of politics in the region. As the veneer of democracy conceals a landscape riddled with corruption and manipulation, we are reminded that the noble ideals of transparent governance are too often eclipsed by the self-interest of those in power.

The pervasive influence of propaganda and psychological warfare in the Russia-Ukraine conflict is thoroughly examined in the compelling contribution of Stephanie Cabezas and Andrea Duque-Estrada. Their exploration underscores the power of information as a tool of empowerment and a weapon of division. Their rallying call to uncover the truth amidst the uneasiness reminds us of our collective responsibility to shape a more enlightened world.

Luciana Lloyd's piece, "Immunity's Dawn: Unveiling a New Era," peels back the layers of conflict to reveal the profound impact on innocent lives caught in the crossfire. Through the saddening story of Safi, a young boy forever altered by the Syrian Civil War, we are confronted with the enduring consequences of today's actions rippling through generations.

Directing our gaze to the dire North Korean food crisis, as meticulously detailed by Luis Posada, we are faced with the urgent need for international intervention. The tales of suffering and desperation emphasize the importance of unity in the face of human adversity, compelling us to transcend differences and collaborate to alleviate the struggles of the vulnerable.

In Mariana Brenes' perceptive article, "Shaping Trade Horizons: Embracing the Rise of Regionalization," we are prompted to reevaluate global trade dynamics. The disruption caused by the stranding of the "Ever Green" ship in the Suez Canal reminds us of the fragility of sprawling supply chains. It sparks an essential dialogue about the potential advantages of regionally focused trade networks.

Adriana Abood's exploration of the politics within Formula One transports us from the roar of engines to the complex world of geopolitical influence. The sport's response to the Russian-Ukrainian conflict is a reminder that even seemingly apolitical pursuits wield the power to shape policies and global perceptions.

Transitioning into literature, my profound analysis of Tim O'Brien's "The Things They Carried" immerses us in the emotional burden carried by soldiers in the Vietnam War. O'Brien's masterful storytelling rekindles our recognition of the indomitable human spirit amidst harrowing circumstances.

Lastly, Isabella Modai's deep dive into George Orwell's timeless masterpiece, "1984," confronts us with haunting parallels to our modern reality. The portrayal of a dystopian society governed by surveillance and disinformation is a clear reminder of the fragility of freedom and the urgency for resistance.

In this edition, we invite you to journey with us through the treacherous challenges that endanger democracy and to reflect on our role in safeguarding its principles. The forthcoming pages attest to the power of knowledge, awareness, and an unwavering commitment to shaping a more fair and honest world.

Warm Regards,
Priscilla Durling

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“THE THINGS THEY CARRIED”

BOOK REVIEW

by Priscilla Durling

The Things They Carried by Tim O'Brien is a book that ventures into the realities and complexities of the Vietnam War. It has received widespread praise for its powerful and evocative portrayal of the Vietnam War experience and is regarded as one of the most significant pieces of literature on the historical event. It has been praised for its raw honesty, vivid imagery, and empathy it elicits towards the soldiers by giving the reader perspective on what they had to endure. All this merit the book has received lies in its ability to convey the universal human experiences of war and its profound effects on those who endure it. Although the book is categorized as fiction, the book heavily draws from O'Brien's experiences as a soldier in the war. Due to this, the author's firsthand knowledge from serving in it from 1960 to 1970 and his reflections greatly inform and influence the narrative. Combining elements of fiction and memoir, O'Brien entwines a collection of interconnected stories that delve into the soldiers' physical, psychological, and emotional burdens and the moral complexities they faced during the war. Through his masterful use of storytelling and language, O'Brien creates a narrative that challenges the conventional notions of truth and blurs the line between fact and fiction.



The Vietnam War, which took place from 1955 to 1975, was a drawn out and highly controversial conflict that deeply impacted both the United States and Vietnam. The groundwork was laid out during the Cold War when the United States and the Soviet Union were both trying to become the world's superpower. The conflict was surrounded by the desire of North Vietnam to unify the country into one communist regime. It involved the North Vietnamese Army and the Viet Cong fighting against the South Vietnamese Army, which the United States and other anti-communist allies backed. The United States provided for the war and drafted around 2.2 million men from a pool of 27 million, where over 50 thousand died. What all of them had in common was the fact that they ranged between the ages of 18-24, all very young and immature. This immaturity translated into the war upon their lack of knowledge of what they were fighting for, making all that they were doing feel meaningless, a thought Tim O'Brien shared. The war was marked by guerrilla warfare, heavy casualties, and controversial tactics such as napalm bombings and the spraying of Agent Orange.

One of the aspects of The Things They Carried, which makes the book highly praised in the realm of war literature, is the exploration of the weight carried by soldiers in both a literal and metaphorical sense. The title of the book, "The Things They Carried," refers not only to the literal items the soldiers carried, such as weapons, ammunition, and survival gear, but also to the intangible burdens they bear, including fear, guilt, trauma, and the weight of responsibility. In the book's first chapter, O'Brien carefully describes the physical objects that soldiers carry with them, ranging from guns and ammunition to personal moments. The listing was written with such attention to detail to the point where one, as a reader, starts feeling the heaviness of the items, shifting the tone to feel heavier and heavier as the list continues while highlighting their significance and the memories attached to them. These physical burdens were reflections of the soldiers' emotional baggage, such as fear, guilt, and grief. Moreover, he foregrounds how the intangible burdens can end up being even more daunting than the tangible ones due to how they leave lasting scars on the mind of the soldiers. Through this attention to detail, O'Brien provides a representation of the soldiers' experiences and offers a touching reflection on the impact of war on individual lives. With his vivid descriptions, he invites his readers to empathize with the soldiers and appreciate the profound toll that war takes on the human spirit.

For O'Brien to portray the raw aspect of the weight of the war, he manipulates the line between fact and fiction. Even though the story is categorized as a work of fiction, much of the book's inspiration comes from the author's own experience as a Vietnam War veteran. O'Brien challenges the concept of objective truth, blurring the line between reality and imagination to convey the emotional truth of war. By doing so, he challenges the reader with the concept of objective truth and raises questions about the reliability of memory and the complexities of storytelling. He skillfully employs literary techniques, such as metafiction, where the author emphasizes a narrative structure that constantly reminds the reader they are reading fiction to create a compelling narrative that is as much about the act of storytelling itself as it is about the war. O'Brien's unique approach forces readers to question the reliability of memory and struggle with the complexities of truth in storytelling. The book blurs the line between fact and fiction by the author basing the stories on his own experiences but fictionalizing certain events and characters to capture the emotional truth of war. This blending of fact and fiction helped heighten the book's impact, allowing readers to engage with the stories on a deeper level and encouraging them to contemplate and reflect on the larger truths beyond mere facts.

Behind the text of *The Things They Carried* is the transformative power of storytelling. Throughout the book, we meet new characters, such as Rat Kylie and Mitchell Sanders, inspired by real-life soldiers who served alongside Tim O'Brien during the war. However, it is essential to point out that they all continuously shared the things they saw or heard during the war with their other soldiers, narrating them as if they were storytellers saying mere tales that were too far from reality. It was done on purpose by O'Brien to emphasize that storytelling is not only a means of releasing the emotions of the soldiers but also a way to make sense of the things that did not make sense. Through storytelling, the soldiers attempt to bridge the gap between their experiences and the understanding of those who have never witnessed the horrors of war to give perspective to others, just like the author is trying to do with the readers. O'Brien's moving work immerses readers in the soldiers' experiences, making them confront the emotional realities of war and enabling a deeper connection with the characters, making it so the stereotypical perception many have of soldiers and humanizing them. The narrative becomes a shared experience, a collective relief of emotions that allows readers to comprehend the weight of the soldiers' burdens and the indelible impact of war on their lives.

There is something profound and emotionally resonant about *The Things They Carried* in the sense that it confronts the harrowing realities of war and its effects on those who are personal witnesses to it as well as on those who have survived it. There is a unique blend of fact and fiction in this novel that is the result of Tim O'Brien's outstanding storytelling and creates a narrative that transcends the traditional boundaries of war literature. The book serves as a testament to the power of storytelling and its ability to convey the profound truths of the human experience. By inviting readers to immerse themselves in the world of the soldiers and the burdens they carry, O'Brien compels us to reflect on the weight of war and its enduring impact on the lives of those involved. Undoubtedly, *The Things They Carried* deserves its place among the most influential works of war literature.



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DEMOCRATIC ILLUSIONS:

The Impact of Latin American Politics

by Andrés Posada

It is safe to say that presidential democracy has failed in Latin America. Government decisions slip away from the hands of every-day-citizens from the low and middle classes who conform to most of any country's population and fall directly into the grip of members of a handful of political parties. These members and parties are not well-known because of their transparency and empathy with the people of their countries, but rather for precisely the opposite. Politicians often abuse power. This tendency does not exclude presidents or discriminate between left and right. The reason for the constant abuse of power is simple: politicians' self-interest. Presidents, legislators, ministers, and secretaries all work together in a system that behaves more like an ideally platonic mob, with all its secrets, oaths of loyalty, and infringements of the law, rather than as an ideal democratic government, one that is transparent, that fights for people's freedom, and that accepts that their voice matters. Latin American citizens are jailed within a system that does not allow them to participate in politics freely but allows those in positions of power to keep pursuing their own interests at the cost of starvation, economic stagnation, and the liberty of their citizens. Democracy hurts people in Latin America because it is not real.

Latin American countries and regions as we know them began forming in 1810 when Colombia declared independence from Spain. Its borders and political structures have remained unchanged since Suriname's independence from Spain in 1975. Contrary to what some resented, Latin Americans, neo-Marxists, and even Africans may argue about their own continent, the region's current state is not the fault of old colonial powers. It is the people's fault. Civilians are not doing enough to face the injustices of their countries' systems. Of course, this is mainly because the government and its institutions play a role in perpetuating inequality and ignorance. Those born rich and with connections to government members are likely to study abroad, make a lot of money, sign contracts with the government, and participate to some degree in the government. While those born in rural communities are likely to starve, die of an easily preventable health condition, live and die poor, and never finish their secondary studies.

The origin of the failure of Latin American democracy is systematical. Every country in the region has what is formally known as a presidential system (even Venezuela, Cuba, and Nicaragua), in which the president is directly elected by the country's voters (except for Cuba, where the National Assembly elects the president) to serve for at least one term. All the country must abide by its Constitution. That is what is theoretically understood. In practice, however, the system is much more complex and corrupt than that. It is designed to allow cheating, and all major parties benefit from this. It also allows oligarchs (including politicians, ministers, and people in business) and the president to consult with each other on how they divide their country's wealth. This political elite rarely abides by the Constitution. None of this is written down, yet it is ingrained in the functioning of Latin American democracies.

The base of democracy, elections, is not fair in Latin America. Politicians receive millions of dollars from the government to conduct their political campaigns. They also receive millions of dollars from donors interested in having some power or leverage in the government. This money is used to invest in advertising, but it is widely and more effectively used to buy off people and votes. This means that politicians running for some government position pay other people to have them on their side because of their influence and to vote for them. In the last five years, there has been vote-buying (with money or gifts, like food and home appliances) or cheating during elections in Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, Honduras, El Salvador, Costa Rica, Panama, Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru, Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, and Argentina.



Politicians in countries like Panama, Venezuela, and Colombia are allegedly involved in international drug trafficking. The recently reelected president of Brazil, Ignacio Lula da Silva, went to jail for corruption. A Panamanian ex-president has been indicted multiple times in three countries, and his sons are jailed in the United States for collaborating in accepting bribes from Odebrecht, a multinational money laundering and construction company. Due to this and his sons' testimonies, he's banned from entering the U.S. Lula da Silva was also linked to this company. A growing tendency towards corruption and authoritarianism is evident. In Peru's 2021 elections, the daughter of genocidal dictator Alberto Fujimori was narrowly defeated by the now-impeached Marxist-Leninist Pedro Castillo, who was involved in corruption and nepotism. His presidency lasted less than two years, leading to instability and violent protests by working-class groups. Independentist movements are on the rise in Peru. In 2019, Bolivia's authoritarian socialist ex-president, Evo Morales, resigned. Guatemala and El Salvador faced corruption, violence, and repression until president Nayib Bukele reduced gang violence and ousted allegedly corrupt legislators in 2021. Presently, dictatorships prevail in Nicaragua, Cuba, and Venezuela.

In the middle of all of this, Uruguay remains a beacon of light for democracy in the region, considered the eleventh most democratic country in the world by The Economist Intelligence Unit. It is placed above countries like the United States, Germany, France, Spain, and Canada and surpassed by Taiwan, Norway, and Switzerland. It is also considered one of the freest countries in the world by the Freedom House. For the rest of Latin America, Uruguay contrasts a lot with them.

In this region, activists and politicians commonly claim politics is not done every time there is an election but every day. This statement is fundamentally true, but two key issues prevent Latin Americans from actively participating in a democracy. One is a lack of education. Latin Americans do not have easy access to schooling. Millions in the poorest rural areas must walk through unsafe paths for hours to go to school. Although they might do so for some years, they are not likely to finish their secondary studies. Even those who finish secondary school still need a quality education to improve their lives and opportunities significantly. The school needs to provide a better understanding of their country's economic and political system and teach how to participate in it. Thus, politicians benefit from having a dumb, uneducated electorate that does not comprehend what is going on.

Another problem is bureaucracy. For the few who know how to propose laws, demand responses from politicians, and hold the government accountable, it is tough to do any of these things. Members of government and legislators frown upon civilian participation and see it threatening their power. That is why citizens who try to get responses from their government only receive vague answers from somebody whose job is exactly that, not to provide transparency and collaboration. They might also receive no answer at all. Latin Americans will eventually hit a wall when trying to participate in a system that should allow them to do so easily while improving their quality of life. The system is designed to prevent civilian participation. It does not desire democracy for and by the people.



The attitude of Latin Americans towards government across all social strata has rendered cynical. Most do not act to improve the system and the life inside their communities. This is true for the poorest, least educated, and the richest and most educated. Corruption and authoritarianism are allowed to blossom by the nihilism and inaction of the people.

There has been much improvement in quality of life, urbanization, education, and the economy. However, it needs to be more significant, and it is a side product of economic growth (which could be way larger if governments did what they had to) and hard work rather than a direct product of civilians and governments fulfilling their responsibilities to achieve that improvement. There is so much that has been accomplished. The people must be credited. Although there is so much more that could be done, it is because of the hard work of the people and their relentless spirit of "hechar pa' 'lante" (move forward) that Latin America has progressed to where it is today.

Still, there is no time to rest and relax as long as people in the region suffer and perish unjustifiably. From the Western side of the world, the Soviet Union is often called the first big socialist experiment, and it is commonly assumed that it failed. It did. There is no question about that. However, such rhetoric takes for granted that, on the other hand, democracy and free trade have triumphed. These claims are hard to back up when looking at Latin America. How is democracy working for the people in Latin America? Is it truly democracy? There is no need to look closely at the current state and the recent history of Latin America to realize that the political and economic systems established in the region's nations need to be revised for their citizens. By simply looking at headlines in recent years, it can be observed that the region lacks political stability, social security, transparency, and safety. One in every three inhabitants of the region lives in poverty. Democracy is not working in Latin America.

Democracy is not perfect. It cannot be perfect. However, in a region where children starve to death and politicians become rich by stealing the tax money of their voters, it is hard to claim that it is working.





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FORMULA ONE: *ARE ITS POLITICS SUPERFICIAL?*

by Adriana Abood

As the deafening roar of high-performance engines engulfs the racetracks, the world of Formula One seems to exist solely in the realm of speed, adrenaline, and glamour. However, beneath the surface, this global sporting spectacle significantly impacts economies and politics, sometimes to an extent that surpasses its original purpose. A glaring example of this is their response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, where the influence of Formula One intertwines with geopolitical dynamics, raising questions about its role in shaping nations and policies while perpetuating the phenomenon of sports washing.

Formula One, the pinnacle of motorsport, has evolved into a multi-billion dollar industry that transcends national borders. Notably, it began as a chance for countries to create their cars and highlight their advancements in innovation and technology, akin to the progress seen in the space race. Nowadays, teams are owned by manufacturers. Nevertheless, Formula One remains a hidden stimulus that impacts geopolitics. This happens when nations worldwide vie for hosting rights, striving to showcase their cities and reap the economic benefits that come with it. While some countries experience an economic boost they depend on, some use it to lead to questionable practices such as sports washing, where countries exploit sporting events to divert attention from political issues or human rights abuses.

Formula One's deep entanglement with the global economy and politics raises serious questions about the ethical considerations surrounding the staging of the Grand Prix and their predominantly Western lens in these issues.

The economic impact of Formula One cannot be underestimated. Host countries invest substantial sums in building state-of-the-art racetracks and infrastructure, attracting tourists, stimulating local businesses, and generating employment. For some nations, the economic boost from hosting Formula One events would be crucial for sustaining economic growth and international visibility. This implies that holding the Grand Prix in these countries could lead to sports washing, which incidentally would allow countries to project an image of prosperity and stability.

In addition, likely because the phenomenon is well-known and publicly criticized, the sport takes implicit political stances through its decisions. For example, the cancellation of the Russian Grand Prix in response to the invasion of Ukraine while continuing to hold a race in Saudi Arabia, despite the country's military actions in Yemen, demonstrates the sport's involvement in geopolitical conflicts. Such decisions inherently align Formula One with certain positions, making it challenging to claim political neutrality while also severely influencing the economic capacity of these countries.

Lastly, both the FIA's actions and the drivers' statements approach politics through a predominantly Western lens, focusing on issues that resonate with Western concerns. This perspective is reflected in the behavior of Formula One's predominantly Western fan base. This approach risks promoting a colonial attitude that implies Western superiority and assumes linear development, perpetuating a simplistic narrative of "us versus them" based on inconsistent moral positions.

Decisive action is needed to address the ethical concerns surrounding Formula One's influence in economies and politics. Formula One must establish clear guidelines prioritizing human rights, social justice, and environmental sustainability when selecting host countries for Grand Prix events. This will prevent inadvertent and inconsistent endorsement of oppressive regimes and sports washing practices. Furthermore, Formula One should actively support initiatives promoting social responsibility and positive change. By partnering with organizations and campaigns focused on human rights, sustainability, and inclusivity, the sport can leverage its platform for meaningful impact beyond the racetrack. This includes investing in sustainable infrastructure, supporting local communities in host countries, and advocating for social justice on a global scale. Formula One can transform into a responsible force through these decisive decisions, setting a precedent for other industries and sporting events to follow. It is time for Formula One to utilize its power and become a driving force for positive change, upholding the values of fairness, justice, and respect for human dignity at all times.

THE START OF AN ERA OF IMMUNITY

by Luciana Lloyd

Imagine leaving your home, bidding goodbye to your mother with a kiss, and heading to school full of enthusiasm to learn and play with your friends. Once there, your world is shattered when a bomb drops from a passing plane detonates nearby. The shrapnel fragments get stuck in your face and back, as a result, you get scars. Now, your friends don't approach you out of fear. Trying to make friends is now tough, since kids are running away from you. They don't understand the scar on your face, and those who do, cringe knowing the event that caused it. This is the story of Safi, a nine-year-old boy who suffered from the effects of the Syrian Civil War, and the violent measures President Bashar Assad took to quiet down the protests. Safi's childhood was ruined, and now he lives in a state of angst. This is one of hundreds of thousands of stories from people and children, affected by Assad's violence.

Teenagers in the city of Deraa, located in Syria, were inspired by the wave of protests (The Arab Spring) that were taking place in the Middle East; therefore, they decided to make a graffiti art as a representation of their support for democracy. They were arrested and tortured for days. Worried citizens joined in protest for their release, yet President Bashar Assad's response was an order to kill many of the demonstrators. This was the beginning to the Syrian Revolution and Civil War. The commencement took place on March 15, 2011, and the demonstrations ended on July 28th, 2011. As the number of protests increased, Assad started heightening the violence forced upon these protestors. This ended with hundreds of thousands of deaths. His regime began using tanks, artillery, planes, and helicopters. This choice resulted in millions of Syrians, fleeing the country, and seeking refuge in neighboring countries.

Two opposing sides formed, the ones in favor with Assad's regime, and the ones who were opposed. The U.S was strongly against Assad's methods, Barack Obama even expressed how Assad "must go", and how his actions towards his own people, were unacceptable. Many countries in the European Union agreed with the U. S's stance. On the other hand, Russia, and China supported Assad's regime. The Arab League, European Union, and the U.S started imposing heavy sanctions on Syria. Given the fact that Assad's brutal crackdown on his people never wavered, the protests gradually became less frequent. Meanwhile, Assad's hold on his regime was only got stronger. Hopes for change and reforms depleted. The Arab League threatened to suspend Syria if it didn't halt its repression on the protestors. Syria didn't follow through, so they were eventually suspended.



Bashar Assad's regime has caused countless deaths, yet the Arab League keeps turning a blind eye to them. They have not asked for Bashar Assad's resignation. They are too forgiving; they're authorizing Syria's entrance back in the League because they have this notion that Assad's regime has already won. They have accepted this new reality and they're trying to navigate with it. It's also crucial to point out they plan to return refugees to their respective countries, which may be of influence to their decision to normalize ties with Syria. This new passing sets a dangerous precedent in history for future cases. The message that is perceived from this decision is that mass murder is forgivable, and that there will be essentially, no repercussions for it. Now, what is going to stop future malevolent tyrants or dictators from doing the same? Taking into consideration that they could be eventually forgiven and accepted. We are living in an era of immunity, where atrocities are forgivable and forgotten, just because it's easier to accept and manage the status quo.

Bashar Assad has not made any shifts to his rule, even with the heavy sanctions. Assad has not accepted any of the blame for the past crackdowns. His regime has not made any effort to undergo reforms, and he is not planning on stepping down. There are speculations that believe some of the neighboring Arab countries have decided that it would be easier to pass the page, deciding to move on. After years of isolation, Syria is now in contact with some countries trying to rebuild that relationship. It's these countries who pushed for Bashar Assad's formal invitation to re-enter the Arab League. They have essentially given up and have accepted the status quo. After Bashar Assad regained most of the control in Syria after rebellions, according to an article from Al Jazeera, "some Arab countries began to soften their stance towards Damascus," the capitol of Syria. Now, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Iraq, and Jordan are on track to normalize their relationships with Syria. It has been reported that on May 10th, 2023, foreign ministers from countries such as Turkey, Syria, Iran, and Russia have met, to essentially mend the relationship between Turkey and Syria.

Another factor that is making these neighboring Arab countries turn a blind eye to his atrocities, is their need to return the refugees that have settled in their own countries, back to Syria. According to the UN Refugee Agency, there was an approximate of 5.2 million Syrian refugees established in countries like Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan. The appalling conditions the civil war provoked is the prime motive of their need to flee the country. They left with the impression and hope for a better life, only for them to find out, what was waiting for them out there, was not as impressive. Many of these refugees live in the urban cities and the other 5% live in refugee camps. Although life in the city is not as glamorous, according to the UN Refugee Agency 70%, of them live in poverty. There's lack of education and necessities. There is reasonable belief as to why countries, like Turkey, would want to mend relationships with Syria, since according to the Council of Foreign Relations, "Turkey is host to more than three million Syrians, straining government resources." They require assistance with the refugees, they cannot handle them anymore.

PROPAGANDA & PSYCHOLOGICAL WARFARE

Powering the Conflict Between Ukraine & Russia

by Stephanie Cabezas & Andrea Duque-Estrada

Ukraine and Russia accuse each other of blowing up Nova Kakhovka dam. “Ukraine blamed Russia for the destruction of a dam on the front lines of the war in Ukraine on Tuesday, threatening a nearby nuclear power plant and hundreds of thousands of people.”

“The Kremlin, in turn, said Ukraine was responsible for the disaster as water surged through the Nova Kakhovka dam in a Russian-controlled area of the Kherson region.”

The ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine serves as a clear indication of how propaganda and psychological warfare can cause immense harm. Each nation’s representatives look to blame each other using psychological warfare through social media, television, radio, films, audio recording and reproduction, and specially propaganda. In today’s technology driven era, both countries have utilized these dangerous tactics to mold public views, burn nationalist sentiment, and manipulate perspectives. The consequences have been devastating, intensifying the already tense relations between these two nations, and threatening the stability of the region itself. It is crucial that we analyze the role of propaganda and psychological warfare in this and past conflicts and work towards neutralizing their impact.

The Russia-Ukraine war has been heavily influenced by propaganda, with both sides actively spreading biased information that frequently includes half-truths, exaggeration and even entirely made up lies. By omitting certain details or giving precedence to one fact over another, news outlets can frame a story that benefits their operation or high-ranking individuals as it is in the case of Russia and Ukraine. The primary objective of this is to manipulate the narrative, support their own agenda and make the opposer the villain. This manipulative tactic has fueled hatred and division between Russian and Ukrainian populations and spectators around the globe.

As mentioned before, psychological warfare also plays an important role in this war. Tactics such as disinformation campaigns, cyberattacks and the manipulation of social media have been employed to create chaos, obstruct communication, and sway public opinion. By exploiting the weaknesses of society and individuals, psychological warfare seeks to shape perceptions, manipulate narratives, and finally gain an upper hand in the conflict. Consequently, this war is not just a physical one, but a psychological one.

No matter how harmless it seems, propaganda and psychology always target and manipulate emotions without the benefit of dialogue, making two-way communication or debate, impossible. They undermine democratic principles and the autonomy of individuals. Citizens must have the independence to think for themselves and free themselves from these authoritarian practices that are coming from their governments, emerging leaders, and the media.

In the Russia-Ukraine conflict, both sides blame each other, making the other the antagonist, to maintain that bias their populations have, making the undefendable, defendable. The Nova Kakhovka dam isn’t the only evident occasion where propaganda and psychological warfare have played an important role, both things were also a part of what happened in August of the year 2022, when both nations accused each other of being the responsible for the nuclear plant shelling. Russia and Ukraine, used media casts and persuasive speech to favor their perspectives, leaving the population with no choice of thought and a biased belief. Even if one of both sides was right to blame the other, not spreading fact-based news and manipulating them to benefit one side over the other, has gone over all democratic principles.

While the political and strategic implications of this conflict are significant, it is essential to recognize the human cost and regional implications. Propaganda and psychological warfare have deepened the polarization between Russian and Ukrainian populations, encouraging antagonism and mistrust. Both families and communities have been torn apart, and both society’s bases have been destroyed. Moreover, the conflict has surpassed the borders of Ukraine and caused repercussions like the surge in prices of oil and grain internationally, back in 2022.

“1984”

Book Review

by Isabella Modai

George Orwell was an English novelist, essayist, and critic. He was a man of strong opinions who addressed some of the major political movements of his times, including imperialism, fascism, and communism. In his novel 1984, Orwell depicts a grim and stern reality where the Party, Big Brother, controls its citizens' thoughts, actions, and even their perception of reality. It gives readers a brief glimpse of a world in which the government controls every detail of a person's life, down to their private thoughts. Because the government controls the version of the truth and owns the press, they can twist and bend the truth in whatever direction they choose.

Orwell displays his thoughts through the fictional world of Oceania. Oceania is a world where the people with power manipulate the truth and reality of the rest of society, and anyone who defies them, whether publicly or privately, is assumed to be dead or disappears. There is no free speech or free will. Everything is a delusion. It is scary how both worlds share some similarities. 1984's dystopian society could represent North Korea's government and serve as a cautionary tale of how a totalitarian regime can control people through the manipulation of media or information. An element of society that presents itself both in 1984 and our current social environment is social control. Social control is employed through disinformation and constant surveillance in both societies.

In the book, whatever the political Party in control said was true unquestionably became so. In this world, reality is subjective. It even morphed according to the Party's wishes. This did not quite happen on its own. A government cannot just say that $2+2=5$ and expect us to believe them. They had to consciously and calculatedly impose social control over the people. In 1984, three classes made up their society: the Inner Party, which was the ruling and most powerful class, and the Outer Party, which followed the Inner Party's instructions and were the ones who did the work. They were also the most socially controlled and observed of all. Lastly, beneath all of them, those considered too absent-minded to be helpful were the uneducated proles. Through Winston Smith's perspective, a member of the Outer Party, we see how the Inner Party manages to enforce and establish total physical and mental dominion over the Outer Party. Their mechanisms exist in our daily lives. Their complete and utter power allows the Party to bend everything under their will. This allows them to say that $2+2=5$ is true and for people to believe them. Orwell wrote this book because "he was deeply disturbed by the widespread cruelties and oppressions he observed in communist countries and seemed to have been particularly concerned by the role of technology in enabling oppressive governments to monitor and control their citizens." 1984 is a book that makes the reader see the ugly parts of society close up. Primarily, the book deals with a type of government called totalitarianism. Totalitarianism is an ugly form of governing. Those in power or control aggressively hover over citizen's actions, lives, and desires.

The novel encapsulates many societal issues that are more present in our societies than we might think. For example, disinformation and the invasion of our privacy are more dominant and present in our society than we might realize. Technology, invasion of privacy, and manipulation of news are very much part of our daily lives. It is not uncommon for governments to use social media and news as they desire, with their own obscure purposes. A clear and irrefutable example of this is North Korea. They fully control the media and, therefore, control the truth. Kim's dictatorship has granted him the unconstrained power to, at his disposition, decide what is truth and what is not. The story is not fiction nor a book; instead, it is a real-life situation where real people succumbed to fake and manipulated history. Sadly, they do not have the liberty nor the means to deny those lies, just like in 1984. Also, just like in 1984, anyone who has an opposing thought is instantly banished along with any disagreeing thought they had and emptied into a memory hole.

A cult-like devotion to their leaders is present in both governments. In North Korea, Kim's dynasty is glorified, while in Oceania, Big Brother is a figure of adoration. Both symbolize utmost importance and mentioning them brings respect to the room. In both places, the government created a sense of unquestioning devotion and loyalty among the population towards these leaders. This loyalty can be very dangerous because it can blind the population to their lies and manipulation. North Korea and Oceania have severe consequences for any minimum amount of suspected disloyalty towards the leaders. In "1984," individuals who engage in "Thoughtcrime" are tortured and "reprogrammed." Almost in parallel, in North Korea, the minimum amount of perceived disloyalty to the regime can result in imprisonment, forced labor, or, in some extreme cases, execution. It shows how severe the consequences are when any person in society dares to challenge authority. Another detail that shows and reinforces the loyalty and reverence of both worlds towards their leaders is the symbols and images of them. In the book, Big Brother's image is everywhere, almost as if it were a reminder that everyone was constantly surveilled and demanded never-ending respect. Similarly, North Korea has images of Kim, monuments, and symbols throughout the country. The images and monuments serve the same purpose in both places: reinforce the central role of the leaders and overwhelm citizens with the reminder to be loyal. This causes that, in both societies, there is an atmosphere of unwavering loyalty and devotion to their leaders. Both societies are guilty of encouraging, sometimes not nicely, the complete adoration and questioning of the loyalty of their citizens to each of their respectable leaders. Both regimes promote a cult. Orwell clearly explains the importance of this heightened loyalty; in Oceania, even having a disloyal thought was against the law.

North Korea and Oceania have pervasive and invading surveillance systems to monitor citizens' activities and thoughts. This is done to keep them in control and inflict fear on whoever thinks about rebelling. In the book, telescreens are everywhere, allowing the Party to observe everything and control individuals' lives. North Korea also has a vast network of surveillance. The North Korean regime has informants and spying technology to maintain control and suppress stirrings or rebels. In 1984, the citizens were so closely vigilated that even a tiny facial twitch could lead to an arrest. One's nervous system could expose itself, becoming one's greatest enemy. They also sought to eliminate independent thought. Citizens were monitored constantly to see if they showed the minimum sign of deviation from the Party's ideology. Similarly, North Korea also has a strict surveillance method; they do their best to prevent independent thinking, harshly punishing deviations. Both systems encourage a state of doublethink, where individuals absorb contradictory beliefs without questioning or thinking about them for a second.

The leading government manipulated historical records and constantly altered them for convenience. For their advantage, the North Korean regime controls the information in their country, and they censor and distort the news to their convenience and to establish their version of the truth. Both systems have the same goal; they wish to control people's perception of the world and ensure they keep their loyalty in check. In both places, they write their truth and history at their convenience. The Party in 1984 did not allow people to keep photographs or documents so that their memories would become blurry in their memory. As a result, the citizens were perfectly willing to believe whatever the Party told them because they believed the Party's fake narrative. By controlling the present, the Party was able to manipulate the past. In 1984, the Party created a fake feeling that they were in constant war to distract their citizens from the country's internal problems. Similarly, North Korea creates propaganda that they are in danger from external forces, creating an altered and siege mentality among their people.

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We can confidently see that The Party controlled people through constant surveillance, fake propaganda, calculated distractions, and misinformation. All of those elements are very much present in many societies. These governments can both keep strict control of everyone because they keep everyone regulated and are the ones who define reality in whichever way they choose. This is why we must acknowledge the lessons in this book. "The second thing for you to realize is that power is power over human beings." We must do everything we can so we do not let governments have so much power over us. It is of utmost importance that we do what we can to not let ourselves be fooled by false news and social media. 1984's society had to suffer so that we could learn. History failed them, and if we do not learn, it will fail us too. Just like in North Korea. This is the distorted reality of Oceania:

"WAR IS PEACE
FREEDOM IS SLAVERY
IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH"

Psychological manipulation techniques such as cults of their leaders, surveillance, manipulation of truth, thought control and fear-based propaganda help them achieve their goals. They aim to maintain absolute control over the population's thoughts and actions. The tactics used in 1984 are authentic and work in their countries. We must thank the book for giving us such a clear example of a country whose government employed all the tactics and used them to prevent and learn. It is in our hands not to let our leaders do this to us because we do not know how we will end up. Both 1984 and North Korea are a cautionary tale we must learn from.



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SHAPING TRADE HORIZONS: *Embracing the Rise of Regionalization*

by Mariana Brenes

Back when we were still locked in our houses and left if necessary, companies struggled to manage their global supply chains. Imagine the protocol, the obsessive rigorous cleaning, and head-to-toe spacesuits. On March of 2021, a ship called “Ever Green” heading from China got stuck at the Suez Canal. The ship was destined to port in the Netherlands but remained in the Canal for six days, obstructing one of the finest trading channels. Couldn’t this have been prevented if the Netherlands did trade with a closer, then reliable neighboring country? Both Germany and China export textiles and machinery. The huge difference is that Germany is just five hours away by car while China is a ten-hour flight. Those crucial hours apart carry the weight of a successful supply chain.

Globalization is best described by the Oxford Dictionary as “the process by which businesses or other organizations develop international influence or start operating on an international scale.” Essentially, trade integration from a global perspective has allowed innovative technologies and high-valued brands. Aside from that, it has also caused the migration of large companies and generated job opportunities. This is how we can afford to have Zara, a Spanish fashion retail company, in Panama. Like Globalization, regionalization is trading a smaller scale, trading within the country's region or continent. Regionalization is keen on trading efficiently, as countries are closer, shipping is faster and cheaper.

Panama’s biggest advantage is the international trade flow generated by the Panama Canal. It allows billions of trade transactions to occur and it generates large incomes for the Panamanian capital. However, depending on globalization puts the economy at high risk. Due to the latest world inconveniences, such as the pandemic and conflict wars, countries should seek more reliable opportunities for trading, such as regionalization. Focusing on Latin America, Initiatives towards regional integration, such as those of the Pacific Alliance, the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), and the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), seek to advance social advancement, boost economic connections, and encourage political collaboration among the participating nations. These resources benefit us by easing trade and working as a unified front for Latin American nations to negotiate on more equal terms with bigger nations.

Trusting our neighboring countries is a more dependable resource than to a different continent. For instance, there would be no language barrier. Since countries are easily grouped, “Central America” or “South America”, it makes trading more sustainable. As long-distance transport plays a vital role in the globalization of trade, it generates many carbon emissions and contributes to worsening climate change conditions. Regionalization works wonders in terms of sustainability, as stated by Robert Kaplan’s theories on the relevance of geography, “Bringing consumers and producers closer together safeguards the supply chain, as well as reducing the pollution and energy consumption generated by mass goods transport around the world.”

Mexico is a prime example of successful regionalization. Since the USMCA, United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement, Mexico has become the largest automobile manufacturer in Latin America, mainly exporting to the U.S. One million Mexicans are employed directly and indirectly, and the jobs they receive have greater pay and benefits than the national average. Mattel declared seeking suppliers to relocate their operations in Mexico to reach better Latin America. This has become a win-win situation. The United States gets to expand easily to Latin America, through Mexico, generating greater job opportunities for Mexicans. If so, it is working so far with Mexico. What about other Latin American countries? According to Shannon K. O’Neil for the Council of Foreign Affairs, “Outside of Mexico, manufactured goods, in particular, have been hit by what economists call ‘premature deindustrialization,’” or the shrinking of manufacturing as a percentage of the economy and workforce before per capita incomes have adequately risen.”

The globalization system has prioritized international commerce over local industries, leading to growing local economies’ disadvantages. Meaning that globalization, as it is currently structured, is flawed. It has been proven that For business it has become more efficient and more sustainable, and regionalization is critical.

THE NORTH KOREAN FOOD CRISIS

by Luis Posada



People inside North Korea are starving to death due to the severe lack of food in the country. The recent interviews conducted by the BBC inside the country of North Korea, despite difficulties and high risks, have revealed this harsh reality. The situation unveiled by these interviews is alarming and demands immediate attention from the international community because North Korea may be facing a devastating famine.

Journalists and experts have suggested that the current situation in North Korea is the worst it has been since the 1990s. This is connected to the government's decision to close its borders in 2020 due to the pandemic and North Korea's COVID-0 policy. This led to the cutting off, of basic supplies and food. Additionally, the government used the excuse of the pandemic to increase control over the population. All these factors have combined to create a devastating tragedy unfolding before us.

The North Korean citizens who were interviewed revealed the daily fear and misery they face. The closure of the borders has made people feel trapped in their own country with no hope of escape or relief. The government has not only caused people to fear dying from starvation, but they also dread the possibility of execution for breaking the regime's rules that control their lives. One interview shared a heartbreaking story about a family of three who died of starvation in their own home. After not answering the door for days, they were finally discovered by neighbors who reported this suspicious behavior to the police. These tragic deaths serve as examples of the agony and desperation North Koreans face today. Another interviewed citizen, who works as a construction worker, revealed that in his village, the situation has become so dire that five people have died due to the scarcity of vital supplies, leading to starvation. With the border closures preventing the import of food and essential supplies, the food crisis has worsened and is approaching catastrophic proportions. North Korea's inability to produce enough food for its population only exacerbates the situation.

In addition to the closures and sealing of the borders, North Korea has strengthened them even further. There are reports of new fortified fences and deployed guards with orders to shoot anyone attempting to cross the border. These measures have closed the informal markets as smuggling food from China has become nearly impossible. These markets were relied upon by many Koreans to fulfill their basic needs. As a result, entire families find themselves in a situation where securing even the most basic sustenance is almost impossible.

These accounts told by the interviewees offer the international community a glimpse into the actual situation occurring inside North Korea and the lives of those who live there. They reveal a society on the brink of collapse, heading towards an enormous humanitarian catastrophe. This situation reminds us of the devastating famine that occurred in the 1990s, claiming the lives of millions. Countries cannot afford to turn a blind eye to this disastrous situation unfolding before everyone's eyes. Humanitarian aid is crucial, as are diplomatic efforts to address this problem to intensify the focus on solving this urgent. Efforts need to be made to create channels for delivering humanitarian aid to alleviate the situation and prevent a catastrophe. These channels need to be established in a way that bypasses North Korean government obstacles.

The creation of diplomatic channels is also an essential tool that must be utilized to alleviate the situation and engage with the government of North Korea, urging them to prioritize the well-being of their population. All of this should be combined with international pressure to prompt immediate action in addressing the food crisis and potential famine. Dialogue and negotiations are key to solving this problem and alleviating the suffering of the people. The gravity of the situation should also bring about a reevaluation of sanctions and policies that currently affect the North Korean people. While it is important to hold the regime accountable for its actions, it is equally essential to ensure these measures do not harm the vulnerable population of this country. Additionally, efforts that support and promote local organizations and civil groups working to solve this crisis are imperative. These groups often operate under very challenging circumstances, but their value and impact are significant in addressing the hunger crisis.

The international community must act together in response to these discoveries coming from North Korea. This is a humanitarian disaster that affects the entire world since millions of North Koreans' lives are at stake. We have a moral duty to provide aid to those in need and to not be dissuaded by political disagreements or geopolitical complications. It is up to the international community to ensure that no one continues to be affected by the hunger crisis. The fundamental right to food is that should be protected, regardless of their nationality or political situation. Now is the moment to act, and we must not let the North Korean people down in their hour of need.





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