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WHO'S LAUGHING NOW?

The coming of a new decade and a new era for the global world

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EDITORS LETTER

Dear readers,

The decade finally got to an end but not without some major plot twists! The fast and deep connections forged by globalization, now more evident than ever, have put into question old concepts and assumptions of global democracy, governance and political institutions all over the world. As our protagonist in the cover, part villain part victim, civil society has engaged in nervous laughter as it faces brand new 21st century challenges while still trapped in the ways of the past.

In this issue, we address some of the contradictions the decade has brought to the global agenda, from the threat of climate change to the rise of nationalist discourse; from the precarious of labour in the Gig economy to the transformation of journalism in an ever-connected society. We've also included an exclusive interview with Russian Ambassador to Sweden, which might help us clear the picture whether the dynamics of the post-cold war world still apply for current foreign diplomacy.

Enjoy your reading!

The Editors,

Patricia da Matta and Nathanäel Fritz

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How Bellingcat is changing the game of investigative journalism

Text by Albert Vollebergh

On January 8th a Ukrainian flight was shot down above an Iranian airbase, adding fuel to the prolonged crisis between Iran and the United States. Within a day of the crash, a video circulated on the internet showed the alleged missile, that would prove that the aircraft was indeed shot down. Bellingcat jumped on the video and was quickly able to prove the whereabouts of the launching site. The next day the Iranian government admitted that the missile was fired due to a human flaw.

It was not the first time a civilian aircraft was shot down. In 2014, Malaysian Airlines flight **MH17** was downed by a Russian **BUK** rocket. The plane was shot down over pro-separatist territory in Ukraine. It killed 200 passengers, the majority of which were Dutch, Malaysian and Australian citizens. After some investigation, it became clear the rocket came from Russian territory, which happened in coordination with the Kremlin. President Putin denounced the allegations and argued that the crash was the fault of the Ukrainians, a consequence of the conflict. The Americans disagreed, based on their estimates, the rocket could not have been used by the pro-Russian separatist. Foreign Secretary John Kerry argued that the separatists did not possess these weapons nor the know-how. There was no conclusive proof that the Russians had downed the plane.

A more conclusive answer came from **Bellingcat**. They were the first to provide an answer to what had caused the tragic event. The international collective of researchers used open-source data to retrace the missile from Russia to Ukraine and back. These sources include; scanning videos and pictures shared on social media, using Google Street View and flight trackers. By doing so, Bellingcat was able to provide the public with important answers on this international crime.

One of such was the identity of the operatives in Ukraine. The Dutch-led **Joint-Investigation Team** (or **JIT**) watched in astonishment at how this small organization had done their work for them. The **JIT** ultimately used many of Bellingcat's resources. Through verification, the **JIT** was able to make a case for an international investigation and request extraditions for hearings. These have not been approved.

Employing this method, Bellingcat has provided many other revelations. They are also able to follow international criminals, support Interpol's efforts in fighting child abuse and investigate cases of human rights violations in the Middle East. For example, the chemical gas attacks in Syria in 2017 were hard to prove due to the hazardous environment that it brought on. However, with the Bellingcat technique, they were able to map out Russian attacks in Syria and store them in the Syrian Archives. This is not done in solitude. Bellingcat uses social media for support. Globally people join their efforts, providing them with the necessary technical and language expertise, and also on-ground data.

The organization can be understood as a cooperation with the power of the internet. As the amount of information on the internet increases, so do the number of false claims, manipulation of videos and framing of issues. With the **Bellincat** method, people are able to verify facts themselves using trusted sources. It is a pleasant divergence from the current narrative of fake news and increasing polarization. Everyone can use these means to investigate their government and international crimes. Nevertheless, it does require some time investment. The burden of proof is exceptionally high. Investigators have to substantiate their findings with good sources and plausible inference. The internet rigorously checks the information and builds on it. The result is a transparent process, which differentiates it from more traditional investigative journalism.

Currently, the organisation established a new office in the **Hague**, where it works with the International Criminal Court to increase efforts on international prosecution. For the prosecution, open-source data is often not sufficient. **Bellingcat** hopes that these hurdles will be overcome so that evidence can be integrated into the international court system. The organisation further hopes to become financially independent by providing courses in the "Bellingcat method". In their ambition to become a larger organisation, now operating in two countries, Eliot Higgins and founder said in the Dutch paper **NRC**: "We want to conquer to the Netherlands." With a growing organisation and the internet on their side, they might stand a chance.

Iran's internet shutdown: is Social Media a political agent?

Text by Eric Manook Sarkisian

Social movements are quite an old phenomenon and have been omnipresent throughout modern and contemporary times. Nowadays, with the rise of the internet and social media, the morphology of social movements has also changed over time. Their emergency significantly reshaped the organization, practice and even the control of social movements to a great extent. Since the Arab Spring in 2010, the new social media such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram has become a major factor in the quick, efficient and informal transfer of news to the farthest spots in the world. Their role in distributing news about revolutions and social movements has challenged the formal means of broadcasting and influenced the public sphere quite intensely. The recent demonstrations of November 2019 in Iran represented the intersection of social media and social movements.

On the 15th of November 2019, the Iranian government announced an increase in fuel prices up to 300 per cent. The increase was justified in state media as a means to help the government fund subsidies. According to the New York Times, an announcement carried on state-run television described the changes as a way to help "fund subsidies for about 60 million Iranians, or around three-quarters of the population". However, the sudden rise in prices added with an estimated inflation rate at 40 per cent got the government worried about a possible e a backlash f. Indeed, this event and other dissatisfactions towards the state sparked several protests around the country, which were severely repressed by the military forces. Philip Luther, writing for Amnesty International, said that "Iran's authorities are carrying out a vicious crackdown following the outbreak of nationwide protests on 15 November, arresting thousands of protesters as well as journalists, human rights defenders and students to stop them from speaking out about Iran's ruthless repression".

Besides the military crackdown, the government also started to disconnect the internet network of the country from the rest of the world, beginning with cell phones' data and then home networks. The objective was to block the violence news going on in the country to foreign countries, media and humanitarian organizations. "Nearly a week after Iran imposed a near-total Internet and mobile data blackout amid protests over a rise in gas prices, its connectivity to the rest of the world remains limited and reflects what researchers and activists claim, disputed by Iran, is a "tool of repression" used by regimes from Ethiopia to Venezuela. But the shutdown in Iran, which began Nov. 17 and remains below 20% of normal levels, according to NetBlocks, a firm that tracks cybersecurity, has not only allowed officials in Tehran to exert control over information about the unrest", stated Hjelmgaard 2019 for USAToday.

Last but not least, is the question of internet shutdown as a strategy exerted by governments. Is it worth doing so? It is not a question to be answered easily but here are some figures and statistics. According to NetBlocks's online costs estimate tool, a non-governmental organization to monitor cybersecurity, the hourly and daily expenses of the blackout can be respectively about 2.5 and 61 million USDs.

The significance of the shutdown is even more tangible when nowadays. Whilst everyone has access to personal cell phones and social media, it becomes easier for them to act as independent nodes in the vast network of global news. The transfer of information, particularly news, in this case, becomes multidirectional and more democratic, thus to some extent breaks the dominance of state apparatus who mainly represent the interests of the state and not necessarily the interests of people.

This event seems to have democratized the flow of news and a wider variety of interests are now represented in the public sphere. It made it easier for people to circumvent the particular agenda that formal media has and to some extent neutralize the goalkeeping tactics that are exerted by state media.

From sea rescuing to financing Libyan militias

Text by Ida Flik

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The sea between Northern Africa and Europe continues to be the by far the deadliest border, accounting for over one-third of all migrant deaths recorded worldwide. In 2019 about three people died every day on average in attempts to cross the Mediterranean.

Meanwhile, state-run operations are moving further away from rescuing people and instead, are focusing on securing EU borders.

In 2013, after over 600 people drowned in front of Lampedusa, Italy started a sea rescuing mission: "Mare Nostrum". One year later, it was cancelled and replaced by Triton – a program that was not only much smaller but also run by Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, which is tasked with border control of the European Schengen Area.

In May 2015, the EU added an anti-smuggling "European Union military operation in the Southern Central Mediterranean", which became known as "Operation Sophia".

While both Triton and Operation Sophia (officially EUNAVFOR MED) were never primarily search-and-rescue missions, their ships did rescue people in distress if they encountered them on their missions, as they are bound to by international maritime law. However, in recent years, these EU-powered ships are kept closer to the Italian coast, usually within 30 kilometres from the Italian territorial waters. This is far away from where most ship-wrecks occur: close to the Libyan coast.

Part of Operation Sophia's anti-smuggling efforts was the destruction of smuggler boats, which was found to only lead migrants to embark on Mediterranean crossings with even less safe boats. The operation was also sharply criticized for funding, training and cooperating with the Libyan Coast Guard, who are staffed by several militias, and who are regularly accused of severe human rights violations.

Operation Sophia was discontinued in March 2019 because Italy threatened to block the efforts "on the grounds that rescued migrants were almost exclusively brought to Italian ports".

Today, the EU (and Italy in particular) increasingly transfer responsibility for a safe sea to Libya. Libyan coast guards, in turn, have been reported to be unresponsive to calls for help and allegedly have ties with smugglers and forced labour camps. The EU nevertheless funded and helped Libya build the infrastructure to formally take on the responsibility of a large part of the international waters between the Libyan and Italian coasts. In June 2018, the UN's International Maritime Organization officially acknowledged Libya's declaration of this widened search-and-rescue (SAR) region.

Human Rights Watch commented on this: ***"Enabling Libyan coast guard units to intercept people in international waters, when it is known the coast guard will return people to cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment in arbitrary detention in Libya – conditions that have been well-documented – may constitute aiding or assisting serious human rights violations"*****.**

Furthermore, in August 2019, an international investigative unit uncovered a £95m EU investment into unmanned drones. The Guardian article reads:

"This spending has come as the EU pulls back its naval missions in the Mediterranean and harasses almost all search-and-rescue charity boats out of the water. Surveillance drones operated by Frontex, or by agencies or service providers with which Frontex co-operates, appear to be flying over waters off Libya where not a single rescue has been carried out by the main EU naval mission since last August, in what is the deadliest stretch of water in the world."

Criminalization of civil sea rescuing missions

Civil society actors in both newly founded as well as established NGOs started responding to the lack of state-run rescue missions on the Central Mediterranean as early as 2015 by buying or leasing ships to run their own missions. These,donation-funded,volunteer-run crews searched for people in distress and helped them reach safe harbours, as obliged by international

At times, 16 of this civil Search-and-Rescue (SAR) boats were out in the Mediterranean. Many of them were small boats, incapable of taking dozens of people on board or transporting them to a safe harbour themselves. Usually, with the help of the Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (MRCC) in Rome, a bigger ship would be sent or de-toured to take the rescued people on board, while the NGO boats would provide life jackets, water, and first-aid medical care if needed and continue their monitoring once the rescued people were headed off towards European mainland.

The cooperative relationship between NGO missions and state authorities changed as the European right-wing and their anti-immigration views gained power. In the summer of 2017, all civil SAR organizations operating in the Mediterranean were pressured to sign a Code of Conduct, which amongst other things prohibited NGOs from transferring migrants to other boats. Transporting ship-wrecked migrants to the shore themselves would have cost them days' worth of further monitoring presence on the water, where at times, over 700 people had to be rescued each day. Considering that most NGO ships are small and don't have capacities for transporting dozens or hundreds of people, following this code of conduct would have rendered their work impossible.

Jugend Rettet, a German NGO, saw their ship Iuventa seized only days after they had refused to sign the code of conduct. The Iuventa had come under the Italian Secret Service's scrutiny after agents of a contracted security firm (who were later suspected of ties to the far-right "identitarian" movement) onboard another ship claimed to have proof of them cooperating with Libyan smugglers. The legal proceedings have been criticized because of "legal irregularities and gaping holes in the prosecutor's narrative" and Forensic Architecture from Goldsmith's College released counter-evidence and findings of their investigation. The seizure was confirmed in April 2018. SOS Mediterranee's "Aquarius" had to stop operations already in November 2018 after the Italian government pressured the Panamanian state to withdraw the flag of the ship. 24 staff members were still under investigation from Sicilian authorities for "illegal management of waste" as of June 2019. 10 crew members of the before-

mentioned Iuventa continue to be investigated and risk up to 20 years in prison.
Two ships belonging to the organization "Sea-Eye" also stopped operations after Dutch authorities withdrew their flags.

The NGO Mission Lifeline saw their ship seized a few months ago and are now working on getting a new one to be in operation again by May 2020 the latest. In an interview, their spokesperson Axel Steier mentioned the political dimension of regulations and the interpretation of the law: "The states confiscate the ships on whatever legal basis. […] They interpret the legal frameworks as they want to."

For example, German authorities place high technical standards on operators of ships exceeding a certain size, which makes it costly and time-consuming to maintain ships with a German flag. The Netherlands used to have looser regulations for ships up to 400 gross registered tons (GRT), but have now introduced new regulations that require higher technical standards, as well. Steier mentioned that other organizations such as Greenpeace and Sea Shepherd, who are not active in the Mediterranean, have many of their ships registered in the Netherlands as well and will be affected by these new regulations.

In 2019, Salvini closed the Italian harbours for NGO ships with migrants on board. This leads to ships with sometimes over 100 people on board waiting for days or weeks, while European politicians discussed how many migrants on board different countries and cities would allow in. In some cases, captains declared an emergency state onboard and entered harbours, ignoring the coastal authorities' orders. Captain Carola Rackete was arrested this summer after entering an Italian port against orders from a military vessel. Investigations are ongoing.

Both Mediterranea's "Mare Jonio" as well as Mission Lifeline's "Eleonore" were confiscated by Italian authorities in September 2019 too. In both cases, fines of 300.000€ were issued against the captains for entering Italian ports, with dozens of migrants on board.

Vessels and their current status as of December 28th, 2019.
Blurry = not operational any more
Red cross = seized or otherwise legally prevented from operating
Full-colour = operational

In June 2019, the Italian government under right-wing interior minister Salvini announced legislation that could fine sea rescuers with up to 50.000€ for bringing migrants onshore. In August, new laws were added that increased fines to 1 Mio € and decided the automatic impoundment of vessels. Resistance to Italian security forces' attempts to block rescue ships from entering a safe harbour is punishable by up to ten years in prison.

In December 2019, only 2 out of a total of 24 NGO ships were running missions in front of the Libyan coast: The "Alan Kurdi" and "Ocean Viking". Two other rescue ships, the "Open Arms" and "Aita Mari", were operational at the time but not allowed to leave Maltese waters, according to Steier from Mission Lifeline.

Steier concludes:

"When it comes to pushing through their migration policy interests, EU states don't mind using even illegal means, like financing the Libyan Coast Guards. [...] Those who financially contribute to human rights violations are responsible for them, but they don't care."

WHO'S LAUGHING NOW?

How the Joker became a symbol for anti-government protests around the world

Text by Patricia da Matta

WHO'S LAUG HING NOW?

The last weeks of October 2019 have been marked by a series of manifestations by civilians in different parts of the world, notably Chile, Lebanon and Hong Kong. Naturally, their motives and claims are just as diverse as the social, cultural and political contexts these people are in. However, a popular figure has (not so) coincidentally become a symbol in each of those events: the famous comic book character known as

"The Joker"

But what has the Joker to do with the financial crisis in Lebanon? Or the claims for the better social policies in Chile? Does it really relate to Hong Kong's clashes against Chinese rule? How can people with such different cultural backgrounds resort to the same American-made character to represent their sorrow? The answer lies in the complex relationship between globalization and culture.

According to several news reports, the characteristic colours and lines of the clown-villain appeared in masks, face paint and graffiti drawings on the walls often associated with declarations of protest against neoliberal policies adopted by governments in disregard of social welfare. The inspiration for this had come just days before with the premiere of the movie 'Joker', nominated for 11 Academy Awards (for which Joaquin Phoenix won Best Actor), in cinemas all around the globe. The film presented the known Batman series' villain now depicted as a tormented man experiencing the chaotic environment of fictional Gotham City. France 24's coverage of the protests includes an interview with author William Blanc in which he attributes the film's "evocative power" to the fact that it would "echo an unwillingness to perpetrate an inflexible and non-inclusive political system". After all, Gotham City is the epitome of the capitalist society – a place where major corporations control the economic and political relations, where inequality generates violence and division between social classes and where the less privileged are neglected and explored for basic needs.

Another crucial factor that contributes to the emphatic response towards the character is that, for the most part of the movie, Arthur Fleck struggles with fair employment before becoming the Joker. He works in the streets dressed as a clown, without any labour rights and or job security. In this context, he relates to the 'precariat', a new social class that is ever-growing in the globalised world and is characterised by, in the words of Standing, " chronic insecurity, detached from old norms of labour and the working class " .

It is notable that the asymmetry between nations set by capitalist society often leads to reinforcing influence from most established economies over others. This might contribute to understanding how values nurtured in Europe and the United States are adopted elsewhere with less resistance than if it was the other way around.

The Joker as an American product has influenced people in Lebanon and so forth, but one can also infer that the people in Lebanon, after resignifying what the character represents, have perhaps inspired others to do the same. The great popularity of the character resides also in the fact that it has been featured as one of the key antagonists of superhero Batman, whose original platform was a comic book in 1940. Comic books and the super-hero stories have for decades been a part of the declared 'pop culture' in different parts of the globe, commonly associated not only as an Americanized type of product but also with great influences of other cultures, notably Japanese 'animes' and 'manga'.

WHO'S LAUG HING NOW?

Another interesting aspect of culture in globalisation is its political reach. The "hero narrative" is the perfect example of a cultural product being explored for political purposes. It relates to "soft power", where influence is exercised as a form of coercion as opposed to military force. In this context, culture has proven to be highly effective in order to project a certain imaginary regarding nations. Comic books, for instance, are recognised as a crucial tool for the global imaginary of "good versus evil" in between wars, placing the American heroes as "champions of the land of the free and the home of the brave".

Furthermore, it is impossible not to mention the increased velocity in which such associations occur due to the interconnected networks of the global world. As most Hollywood productions starring famous actors, the film was quickly being advertised, reviewed and shared in media platforms and social forums. The mechanisms of film distribution and internet-based platforms such as social media vastly empower the circulation of information, rapidly turning something that would be of local or regional interest into a global phenomenon. The same happened previously with the recurring appearance of the Guy Fawkes mask in protests after the release of the movie 'V for Vendetta' and later with Spanish TV series 'La Casa de Papel'.

Globalization has a great impact on culture and vice versa in both regards to its ability to influence behaviours and reflect upon the reality of the global world. It transforms and is transformed by the velocity and dynamic interactions of the network society. The appearance of 'Joker' references in protests in different parts of the world just days after the release of a new Hollywood blockbuster suggests an intertwined relationship between producers and consumers in a global context. The fact that people from different nationalities can relate to an American fictitious character's struggles through life suggests that certain aspects of their realities are shared.

20-years of MONUSCO and the ageing of peacekeeping missions

Text by Mélanie Alphonse

Photo MONUSCO/Guy KAREMA

The United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) has just celebrated its 20-year anniversary as a peacekeeping mission, led by the United Nations. The initiative started after the UN security council decided to step in during the second armed war in Congo, dated 1998, in order to oversee the ceasefire agreement. Twenty years later, the country is still suffering from demonstrations, violence and undemocratic issues. So, what has MONUSCO accomplished during the last 20 years as an active peacekeeping mission? And what does the future look like?

Established in November 1999, the initiative is one of the largest peacekeeping operations to date. One year earlier, Congo's second war started as a side effect of the first war in Congo and the genocide in Rwanda. The war broke out when the president of that time, Joseph Kabila, decided that foreign soldiers and Rwandan must leave the state. Due to the extent of the conflict, the United Nations Security Council decided on the mission to ensure that all involved parties adhered to the ceasefire agreement. MONUSCO, then called United Nations Organisation Mission in the Republic the Democratic of the Congo (MONUC), had a number of active tasks. They started by maintaining the liaisons and observe the ceasefire, and today they are working to protect the civilian and humanitarian personnel, and to provide for aid to the governmental stabilization projects, as well as protecting human rights. As seen, in the last 20 years, the responsibilities of the UN peacekeeping mission have increased, but how has their work affected development in Congo?

An ongoing stabilization project

To mark its anniversary, MONUSCO has published a report in partnership with a number of related organisations in which they summarized their main achievements, alongside further plans for their future. One of the biggest challenges was to strengthen and rebuild the political framework, with MONUC playing a major part in the presidential elections, notably in 2006. Even if the mission has been active for a long time, they have struggled to maintain a good relationship with the Congolese government. But they claim to still have a commitment from the United Nations and exterior governments. Due to the weak relationship with the government, the credibility and legitimacy of MONUSCO have decreased, especially since the presidential election of 2011.

Both MONUSCO and MONUC have been engaged in several election, protection, and stabilization programs since the start of their mission, but they have had their ups and downs. For instance, the mission has worked to protect the civilians and demilitarise armed groups in conflict zones, such as the eastern parts of Congo. Even though challenged to disrupt some armed groups, the mission has not been able to efficiently corporate with regional actors, both within and outside the national border, resulting in unequal reaches within the mission. This question has been a bigger priority within recent years. On the other hand, they did succeed in cutting down child soldiers recruitment and they also increased the awareness of "gender sensitivities" which occurs during the civil conflicts.

A new president and improved cooperation

The relationship between the Congolese government and MONUSCO seemed to improve after the election of president Felix Tshisekedi in 2018. The president priorities to maintain and strengthen the control over the military forces in the country, but he also seems to struggle with the cooperation with party members of the ex-President Joseph Kabila and a complex economic agreement. MONUSCO has currently one of the best relationships to the government for all time. If they can communicate with other oppositions parties and supports, MONUSCO believes that they could go through exit plans who still consider the future peace and stability, without risking financial cuts or basic needs.

As the national actors seem to be more willing to cooperate with MONUSCO, uring last years, MONUSCO 's scope has been reduced. The mission, which had previously employed around 20.000 people, has now lost the support of one of its largest donors, the United States of America, which claimed "that they were no longer supporting the unproductive peacekeeping missions".

And what will happen next?

One idea is that the exit plan will go through much faster than the United Nations imagine, especially considering the budget cuts the mission has already suffered. However, before exiting, they need to be able to provide "economical and stability guaranty during departure". The terms of such stability remain unclear as the Congolese government and MONUSCO already tried to develop an exit strategy with former President Kabila, without much success. Even if MONUSCO's main task would be to provide security, humanitarian and political support, the financial matter plays a big part in this mission. So far, the initiative has failed in both national stabilization and humanitarian improvement, mainly due to the poor relations between MONUSCO, the local, and national actors in Congo.

Russian public diplomacy and its transformations in the 21st century

Text by Anna Ryzhova

One of the central conacepts in the discussion on global value promotion is "soft power" coined by Nye in the 1990s. It refers to the capacity of actors to use attraction to their culture, policies, or political ideas in achieving their political purposes. Public diplomacy, another key concept in the debate, serves as an umbrella term for government activities aimed at influencing the opinions of the public in foreign countries with the prospect of changing its foreign policies in a favourable direction. In this regard, Russia represents a curious case. Some scholars have argued that Russia has taken an oppositional approach to soft power. This means that instead of focusing on creating a positive image of Russia per se, government activities in Russia focus on improving the perception of Russia by criticizing and undermining the messages projected by the Western countries. The reality, however, is more complicated. Russian public diplomacy has significantly transformed in the past 20 years and now includes elements aimed at attraction, persuasion, and creating doubt.

"A latecomer to the soft power game"

Despite the violent events of the last decade and a half, such as the Russian-Georgian war in 2008 or the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014, in 2019, Russia still ranks among the top 30 countries of the world in terms of soft power. Moreover, in recent years, we have witnessed the growing support for Russia's policies and values resonating with some groups of the population both in the Western world and in the former Soviet republics. This makes it essential to look into the recent history of Russia's public diplomacy to gain a better understanding and theorize about its future developments.

Russia is often called a latecomer to the soft power game. In the 1990s, following the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Russia has struggled with defining its image for both internal and external audiences. Was it a new country, created on the ashes of the Soviet Union, or was it an empire, losing its territories?; Did it belong to Europe or Asia, or was it a country that serves as a bridge to connect both? This situation was further complicated by the fact that Western politicians and elites held generally negative perceptions of Russia and that after regaining their independence, many of the former Soviet republics were not enthusiastic about the prospect of coming back to Russia's geopolitical orbit. All that meant that Russia had to figure out its way of doing soft power to attract both Western and post-Soviet audiences at the same time. As a result, the foundation for the new Russian soft power strategy was laid only during the presidency of Boris Yeltsin in the 1990s. Its realization began in the 2000s, with Vladimir Putin taking the lead.

With the countries of the former Soviet Union, Russia had a strong foundation to build its soft power upon. This includes its shared past, Russian diasporas, post-Soviet nostalgia, the Russian Orthodox Church, etc. In contrast, with Western audiences, Russia had to develop a different approach. As a result, from the very start, there was a distinction between the public diplomacy efforts directed towards Russia's "near abroad" and the West. Still, in the 2000s, the strategies for both strands were primarily based on boosting Russia's attraction through the means of cultural, educational, and economic instruments. During these first stages of Russian public diplomacy formation in the early 2000s, the Russian language served as a basis for Russia's soft power strategy – in Putin's words, it created a living space for the Russian speakers all over the world, transcending national, ethnic and political boundaries.

In order to support this ideological vision, a number of multilateral institutions were established, the most notable of which were Rossotrudnichestvo and Russkiy Mir. "Russkiy Mir" or the "Russian world" is a foundation established in 2007. It is similar in idea and structure to Germany's Goethe Institute and France's Alliance Française, and today "Russkiy Mir" possesses more than 80 offices in 48 countries of the world and promotes Russian culture through language courses, public lectures, and workshops. Rossotrudnichestvo or the Federal Agency of the CIS, Compatriots Living abroad, was established in 2008 and represents an organization that coordinates different forms of Russian humanitarian assistance, similar in its mission and methods to the United States's USAID. In order to increase the value of Russian education, several universities, sponsored by Russia, were opened (e.g., Russian-Armenian University). Existing Russian universities expanded with the overseas branches, as well as smaller-scale steps were taken, such as providing school textbooks or opening libraries abroad.

From building its media to investing in digital diplomacy

However, by the middle of the 2000s, there was a significant shift in the paradigm of the Russian understanding of soft power, when Russian elites saw the necessity of integrating international broadcasting into the toolkit of Russia's public diplomacy and reinforcing its media presence. The reason why this expansion took place was that Kremlin was concerned with Russia's portrayal in the Western media, but could not influence it. Creating a Russian voice in the crowded global media landscape that would offer its original outlook on events and potentially change the attitude of the audiences was seen as the best solution. Following this, several new media outlets were established.

Russia Today, established in 2005, is likely to be the most prominent one, followed by Sputnik News. Sputnik News appeared in 2014 as a response to the events in Ukraine when Russia felt like the Western media severely misrepresented its actions. After the Russian-Georgian war, and especially in the aftermath of the Ukrainian crisis, when Russian foreign policy paradigm has got a clearly anti-Western sentiment, this media dimension of the Russian public diplomacy gained much greater significance. Even though in Putin's initial words these media outlets were aimed at "creating a positive perception of one's country, based not just on its material achievements but also its spiritual and intellectual heritage," both Russia Today and Sputnik focus heavily on critical reporting of the EU, US, Baltic States, and the Western media, instead of creating a positive vision of Russia. This trend has become especially apparent after 2014 and was further complemented by integrating more populist, anti-elitist, and anti-Western conspiracy theories into the agenda of Russia Today. Consequently, this has resonated with the ideas of the populist and right-wing groups in Western countries and gained their support. Currently, Russia Today operates in six languages, and Sputnik possesses 30 adjoint websites in foreign languages covering local affairs. In combination, the Russian outlook is accessible to a wide range of audiences.

Finally, another notable development in Russia's approach to soft power and public diplomacy, which has gained momentum in the last decade, is its increasing usage of digital diplomacy. Since political life today is heavily influenced by what is happening online, in the recent years Russia has developed a number of formats and instruments to participate in online discussions and promote its vision, e.g., the short viral videos published on Youtube by Russia Today, for example about Julian Assange's case or numerous accounts of Russian embassy on Twitter and Facebook, that readily engage in discussions. There are other Russian methods of using modern internet technologies for the benefit of its public diplomacy., which are viewed by scholars and practitioners as highly unethical but efficient. They include not only innocent provision of Facebook or Twitter platforms for discussions, but also the production and spread of fake news, as it happened during the US elections in 2016, disclosure campaigns i.e., obtaining sensible information and making it public.

All in all, in recent years, it is evident that Russia puts a heavy emphasis on building its public diplomacy strategy on developing its international media outlets and enlarging its presence and influence online, while the strand of its public diplomacy based on Russian culture and language is neglected. This is a grim tendency, as the success of public diplomacy and soft power measures depend on the persistent promotion of a positive message. Russia, in its turn, due to its failure to produce a positive message, has shifted its strategy to "question more" as the motto of Russia Today says or "doubt everything" and to criticizing the Western regimes, values and policies. While this latter approach might attract the attention of some foreign publics as an alternative perspective and may generate support from the populist and right-wing groups in the United States and Europe, in the long-term, it does not improve the image of Russia. Instead, this reinforces the vision of Russia as an underdog in opposition to the West. The contradiction here is that behind all these critical opinions that Russia promotes towards the West, we can see that it still uses Western formats to frame the information, it aspires to bring international media outlets in line with the Western giants, such as BBC or CNN, and it aspires to win the hearts and minds of the Western audiences.

Russian ambassador in Sweden Viktor Tatarintsev to call for cooperation with the EU

Interview and text by Nathanaël Fritz

After serving the Embassy of the USSR and the Russian Federation in Sweden for several years, Viktor Tatarintsev has also been appointed at the Embassy of Iceland and worked at the Ministry of the Russian Federation in the Second European Department before coming back to Sweden as Ambassador in 2014. Invited by the Society of International Affairs of Gothenburg (UF Gothenburg) last November, the Russian Ambassador accepted to answer a few questions on current Russian interests in the international arena. For instance, he calls for cooperation between a European army and the Russian forces. He also wishes very good coordination in the fight against terrorism in the Middle-East, especially with the USA which did not consult Russia while moving in the region. He then criticizes the role of the USA as a global Hegemon, while claiming that China does not pretend to behave as such.

His last comment is on the militarization of the Swedish Gotland Island, which is less than 300 km from the Russian coasts. For the Ambassador, Sweden or the EU have no reason to be sceptical or even afraid of Russia. On the contrary, Russia calls for more cooperation with its neighbours.

"We are in favour of every proposal [...] to build a European army"

Utblick – The French president Emmanuel Macron has recently mentioned that the NATO alliance is experiencing brain death and that the EU should work towards an EU army. From a strategic point of view, is it more interesting for Russia that European countries build an efficient European army, or that they maintain an efficient NATO alliance?

Viktor Tatarintsev – Well, that is an issue internally up to NATO countries to decide upon. Nevertheless, as the French president pointed out, establishing a European army would be aimed not against Russia, but instead, would be made to act together with Russia.

So the general idea is positively approached by the Russian Federation. Our minister of foreign affairs, minister Lavrov commented on that. We are in favour of every proposal whatsoever, including this proposal, a very deep proposal by the French president to build up a European army together with the Russian forces.

Fight against terrorism and disagreements with the USA

Utblick – Donald Trump was proud of killing Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi a few weeks ago. He thanked the several countries, including Russia, for enabling this operation. However, Russia did not welcome this operation. What is the position of Russia about this operation?

Viktor Tatarintsev – Well, the question is not that we are not welcoming that operation. Naturally, we are supporting all the operations aimed at combating international terrorism, aimed at killing the leaders of international terrorism as Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. But in part of the answer to your question, if we are welcoming the American forces to pass by through the Russian positions on their way towards the killing place of al-Baghdadi, that was not exactly the case. Our military representative officially commented on that saying that we haven't had any slightest idea that Americans were asking us to go through the territory which we were controlling.

So that answer could be divided into two parts:

– We are in favour of destroying and combating international terrorism and their leaders for the first;

– For the second, well, it should be very good coordination between all the actors combating those terrorist attacks. In that case, American and Russian to act in common, to act actively and with full responsibility for their actions.

Utblick – We often hear about a global rivalry between China and the USA for global hegemony Comments on the World Hegemony: China or the USA?

. What is the ambition of Russia in world politics today

Viktor Tatarintsev – I don't know exactly about the Chinese trying to become world hegemony. They have never declared that it's their political goal. Therefore, we are not in a position to comment on something which has not been expressed by one side, by the Chinese. Well, give me please some example or any direct quotation that they are striving for becoming world hegemony, or to become a world leader. I've never seen such a declaration.

As far as President Trump is concerned, well he has made a lot of different declarations, also about the American highest responsibility or divine goal to become responsible for everything which has taken on our mother Earth. So they have tried to take upon themselves the role of World hegemony. We have never agreed to that. We have all the time taken our negative stand on that issue.

No need to be afraid of Russia, but "Swedes should think twice" in their moves!

Utblick – Sweden announced on the 1st of July the deployment of a new air defence system in the Baltic Sea on the Gotland Island. What does Russia think about this move?

Viktor Tatarintsev – Well that is the same question of the priorities which the Swedish side should take by itself: Where to build up their air or missile defence system in Gotland or in Gothenburg for example, or on the east coast, or on the west coast, the south coast or on the north. But we cannot naturally.

Since the attempts to build up their new missile defence system just on the eastern coast of Gotland... We are interpreting that tactic, that action, as being aimed at protecting Sweden from an alleged attack from the Russian side on the Swedish territory. We think that the Swedes should think twice before they take such steps because we don't have any plans whatsoever to attack Swedes, and Swedish territory, Gotland in this specific case. In that concrete case, Swedes only pay their money for nothing so they would have used that money for better goals in that specific case I think.

International human rights treaties: widely accepted, widely violated

Text by Lauriane Selimi

December 2019: Aung San Suu Ki, a Nobel Peace Prize laureate and current State counsellor of Myanmar, was in The Hague to defend her country against the allegations of genocide presented by Gambia; Farida Adelkhah and Kylie Moore-Gilbert, two academics locked up in Tehran started a hunger strike « in the name of academic freedom » and claimed they were subjected to psychological torture; the trial for the Khashoggi assassination was qualified as a « mockery » by the United Nations special rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions.

While human rights were violated before, even after the creation of an international system, breach of human rights has remained frequent and are still part of our world reality. What requires an explanation is how human rights continue to be threatened and violated, in spite of the international treaties ratified by a large number of countries.

Today, human rights treaties are widely perceived as being in need of further development, in order to promote those rights and protect people ("all human beings, regardless of race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, or any other status", according to the UN definition). The creation of this international system started with the proclamation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948. Like the current French Minister of Foreign Affairs Jean-Yves Le Drian puts it, international human rights treaties "are commitments, principles of law guaranteed by solemn declarations or legally binding treaties with a universal scope. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights has been the foundation of this protective edifice".

Over the years, nine other treaties have been adopted, aiming to protect civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, as well as women, children, people with disabilities, etc. In order to monitor the treaties' application by the member states' governments, committees have been created. Their role is to oversee the states' adherence to their obligations, and, if not, to make recommendations.

Almost all the advocates of this system agree it is still far from being perfect. First of all, human rights violations remain constant and serious: "people in power are often tempted to discriminate against a disfavored minority, order torture in the name of fighting terrorism or silence a pesky critic if they can get away with it", says Kenneth Roth, the executive director of Human Rights Watch. Another problem is the lack of resources: according to the former United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay, talking about the monitoring bodies, "there has been chronically insufficient attention given to properly resource this fundamental human rights mechanism".

Nevertheless, they consider that the international human rights system is useful. First, it is the driving force of some significant advances. In Europe, the European Convention on Human Rights has been the basis for improving prisoners' living conditions. It also provides stable and solid justifications for the governments. For example, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) has been cited so as to pass the Matrimonial Property Act in Kenya in 2013. It may offer grounds for civil society to condemn states' behaviour, in front of the Human Rights Council for example. Moreover, some argue, like Cassel, that international human rights treaties have "indirect effects": they can enhance domestic dialogue and public debate about issues related to human rights and facilitate the creation of a transnational process.

However, there are also critics who consider that this international system should not exist. They explain that it is not affordable for some of the member states to enforce many provisions of the treaties (for example, the right to a fair trial requires funding). They also claim that there are too many obligations the states' governments are supposed to follow, and these obligations are too imprecise.

A more nuanced answer would be the one developed by Oona Hathaway, Professor of international law at the Yale Law School, thanks to an empirical study. She shows, on the one hand, that international human rights treaties are efficient in the fully democratic countries, and particularly when associated with an engaged civil society. On the other hand, she identifies an "expressive role" of human rights treaty ratification, since states with less democratic institutions are more likely to violate the treaty they have ratified. In fact, as soon as a state with fewer democratic institutions ratifies the Treaty, it improves its image and avoids pressure from other states. Moreover, the monitoring bodies' capacities being very weak, states do not really face any repercussions.

Hence, international human rights treaties seem to be effective, but not for everyone, not all the time. Many factors have to be taken into account and the system needs to be improved so as to achieve its ambition of universality.

To ensure the compliance of the states with their obligations, a global mechanism has been created at the Human Rights Council: the Universal Periodic Review. It carries out a review of all the UN member states' records regarding human rights, with one part of the control being dedicated to the compliance with the ratified treaties. This kind of review is likely to be more efficient than the one carried out by the monitoring bodies of the treaties, as the use of the Council as a "chamber of peer review" can lead to certain member states being put under the spotlight so to speak, and often being subject to pressure from other members.

Nowadays, the issue that needs to be resolved urgently is the lack of resources at the UN. It is an overarching problem for the organization but has huge consequences on the efficiency of the human rights system. It is one of the three pillars of the UN (together with peacekeeping and development) but only receives around four per cent of the budget. In 2019, budget cuts have threatened the hearings scheduled by the monitoring bodies' committees. Like the Chairpersons of the committees said: "the cancellation of sessions will also have numerous other negative consequences, and will seriously undermine the system of protections which states themselves have put in place over decades".

THE KING, THE OCEAN AND THE NEW CAPITAL CITY

Text by Giovanni Zanaroli

Once upon a time, there was an Asian city. It was built centuries before by European colonizers and became the capital of a very large kingdom. Over the years, the city grew and expanded exponentially: it became a never-ending metropolis. Due to tropical rains and its close proximity to a river delta, flooding had always been an issue. But then it started being recurrent and very costly for the king of that land.

One day, the king was informed by his advisor that the city was slowly sinking down, even below sea level. That was the reason for all the flooding! So it happened that the king of the city -persuaded by powerful businessmen- made up his mind to move his palace and the capital of the kingdom to another island.

"A new, perfect city will be built" announced the king. "No more flooding and no more chaos or dirt in the streets. Order, equity and safety will be the shibboleth of our new capital". Just one question was bothering the king (and everyone else): What will happen to the old capital? Will it be taken by the ocean and be forgotten forever?

As you can imagine, this is no fairy tale. **I made it up based on a real story. The city is Jakarta and the "King" is Indonesia's president Joko Widodo. In the fall of 2019, while Venice and other European cities were flooded, Widodo revealed more details concerning his plan to relocate Indonesia's capital to another area of the country. The province of East Kalimantan, situated on Borneo island and in a more central area of the country, will see a new city on its land and will host diplomacy and government offices starting from 2024. At the same time, Jakarta will remain the economic and financial centre of Indonesia.**

This decision is an attempt to provide "economic equality and justice" as stated by the President in front of the Parliament. Alongside with alleviating the burden on Jakarta. In fact, the city is already overcrowded and is expected to reach a population of 35.6 million by 2030. This doesn't make things easy: for decades, problems such as chronic traffic congestion and bad air pollution have affected the city. But also, studies have demonstrated a link between human activity and exposure to flood risk.

As in many other parts of the globe, flood risk is no recent news. Since its foundation in 1619 by the hand of the Dutch, Jakarta has experienced several coastal and river flooding events. Besides the disastrous tsunami of 2004 where 167 000 people died in the capital, major flooding events have occurred with surprising regularity in the past years (1996, 2002, 2007 and 2013), while minor events are normally registered during every rainy season. Every flooding event costs the government millions of dollars.

But the most worrying aspect is that the ground is sinking down. This phenomenon is known as "subsidence" and is caused by drilling in search of drinking water: the space left by the pumped water makes the ground sink under the weight of human constructions, which are still being built. Due to subsidence, the ground of Jakarta is sinking between 5 and 25 centimetres per year. More than a third of the surface is already below sea level and has become more exposed to flooding events. Other problems, such as the uncontrolled development of the city and an inefficient sewage system (often clogged due to ignorance of the citizens), are also connected with high flooding risk. The picture only looks worse for the years to come, when climate change will result in even more frequent extreme events and higher sea levels.

What to do about that? **Water management infrastructure was introduced already during colonial times (dams, canals etc.). Massive adaptation measures were announced and partly implemented, in the last 15 to 20 years. For example, a 32 km long wall ("The Giant Sea Wall") will be built all along the shore of the city. Mega pumps and two flood-canals, one eastern and one western will bring the water out of the city in case of a flood. However, the decision to build a new capital city suggests something new: bring people away in order to save the city.**

Please note that this is no isolated event. In case of worsened conditions, man has often preferred to move to a new area, rather than fix or adapt to the problems at the source. For example: when some activity is causing too much pollution in a surrounding city, it's often easier to move the population somewhere else, rather than to cease the activity and remediate the area.

This has been the case for many towns and villages in the proximity of mining caves. But when we are talking about the metropolis with millions of people, that is no piece of cake nor a realistic thing to do. So a government can try to create a new city and give a possibility to move there.

This is happening in Egypt, where a new capital is being built in the desert, 30 kilometres away from the overcrowded and polluted Cairo.

One could ask: Is it legitimate to build brand new cities in 2020?
The investments for projects like this one (estimated to cost 32 billion dollars, 19% of Indonesian budget) could help secure the existing cities from flooding and tackle climate change and local problems such as traffic, air pollution etc. Especially if we think that -with current predictions of 3°C temperature increase by 2100- many other megalopolis will deal with the same problems but are still at an early stage of climate change adaptation. Shanghai, Hong Kong, Calcutta, Mumbai, Tokyo, Osaka, Rio De Janeiro, Alexandria, Miami...will they all move their population and build new cities inland?

For this and other reasons, the project was criticized. Environmentalists are worried about the impact which the new capital city will have on Borneo, an island which used to be entirely covered by rainforest and will become extremely strategic within South-East Asia. It would worry me if I was living in Jakarta because it all sounds a little bit like an admission that it might not be possible to protect the city from the water.

FASHION VS THE ENVIRONMENT: AN IMPOSSIBLE MATCH?

Text by Anna Demont

"The fashion industry is considered the second most polluting industry in the world and its impact should be questioned in the context of unprecedented global warming. Each year, 1.2 billion tonnes of greenhouse gases are emitted by the clothing industry or about 2% of global greenhouse gas emissions, and it is the third-largest water-intensive sector in the world.

Since the 1990s, fast fashion has rapidly grown throughout the world and the number of collections produced by the brands has skyrocketed., leading to terrible working conditions and unprecedented natural resource exploitation. As a consequence, one may wonder if the fashion industry can be reconciled with environmental protection.

To begin with, all the stages of clothes production are associated with pollution of the environment and harmful effects for the workers: be that production of raw materials, manufacturing of the clothes or transportation"

For instance, 70% of synthetic fibres produced in the world comes from oil. Most of the time, those materials are imported from developing countries, under the aegis of large multinationals such as the Monsanto Group. Those groups often own large amounts of land and can use pesticides as at their convenience. As a consequence, in countries such as India, we can observe an increase in soil pollution and a lot of diseases and malformations caused by pesticides and fertilizers. Then comes the actual manufacturing of clothes, characterized by the use of hazardous chemical products in countries such as Mexico, China and Indonesia. These products are used in multiple steps of the production process such as in the dyeing or the sandblasting of jeans, and are often extremely toxic to the workers and known to increase the risk of cancer or disrupt hormonal systems. In 2011, Greenpeace launched the "Detox My Fashion Campaign" to denounce the use of those products and to challenge 80 companies to re-evaluate their responsibility and change their manufacturing processes.

Finally, the transport of materials and clothes is extremely polluting due to the emission of greenhouse gases produced by cargo ships or aircraft. It is estimated that the raw materials required can travel up to 65000 km from extraction to usage in the production of clothes. However, the making of clothes is only the first step in a giant system. In fact, one of the biggest problems of the fashion industry is the overproduction of clothes as a result of a capitalist system pushed to its peak. Contrary to common thinking, it's not only a problem of consumption, but it's also a problem of production. Corporations produce too much clothing, and the system blames the consumers instead of questioning itself. Indeed, the number of collections multiplied: "Instead of 2 seasons a year, we practically have 52 seasons a year. So we have something new coming every week, and fast fashion has created this so that it can essentially shift more products", explained the fashion journalist Lucy Siegle (The True Cost). Moreover, our use of clothes is also damaging: we buy too much, and we don't take enough care of those clothes. We also wash too much, and not without consequences: synthetic fibres produce micro-particles too small to be filtered, which often end up in the oceans. Finally, the way in which we dispose of our clothes needs to be reviewed.

In Europe, we estimate that 4 million tonnes of textile waste are thrown away each year, 80% of which ends up in landfill or incineration plants. This is due to the consumers but also to the poor quality of the clothes produced by the fast fashion industry.

Unfortunately, the clothing industry is also infamous for its negative social impact. Indeed, fast fashion has a history of slavery allegations, in which powerful firms exploit workers. On 23 April 2013, the Rana Plaza, a garment factory, collapsed in Bangladesh, causing the death of 1138 people. It was a huge scandal in the industry as it highlighted the working conditions of popular firms such as Mango, Benetton or Primark. In his documentary The True Cost, Andrew Morgan tries to bring light to this dark side of the industry: workers in Cambodia beaten for protesting, farmers in India killing themselves because they cannot pay the rising prices of the seeds provided by Monsanto, big firms threatening subcontractors of delocalisation if production costs are not low enough, etc.

Nonetheless, we must not give up and accept this situation and this lack of accountability of the big groups. Indeed, a number of solutions have been in action for around 30 years, in terms of sustainability, and here are some examples of concrete actions.

First of all, the efficiency of clothes recycling has increased over the years. In 2017, in France, 3.4 kg of clothing textiles, household linen and footwear per inhabitant were collected, representing 223,000 tonnes, i.e. nearly 36% of the potential deposit. Those clothes can be reused as is, or they can be transformed and recycled (sound and heat insulation for construction, secondary raw materials.). For example in Gothenburg, people can give their clothes in places such as Emmaus so other people can use it in turn.

Another solution to fight against fast fashion is to buy second-hand clothes instead of new. They can be purchased via physical points of sale: thrift stores, sales depots, flea markets, but there are also a lot of websites offering secondhand clothing: Vinted, Depop, Grailed, Vestiaire Collective, Heroine, etc. According to Thred Up (a retail platform), in 2028, the second-hand market is expected to be larger than the fast-fashion market.

We can also buy ethical clothes, which is a more expensive but very efficient solution to promote sustainable fashion. There are new ethical brands, some of them selling clothes approved by labels, others doing upcycling (reuse of existing clothes), such as Marine Serre, a young French designer laureate of the LVMH prize – created to honour and support young fashion designers around the world – in 2017. Sweden is one of the most innovative countries in terms of ethical fashion with designers such as Flippa K or Arket (H&M group).

Finally, we should inform ourselves about the issues and abuses of the fashion industry through documentaries, podcasts, books, etc. Also, brands can be held to account on social media, and we can take part in action through groups such as Greenpeace, or Fashion Revolution, a movement created after the Rana Plaza collapse, promoting a fashion industry that values people and the environment.

We are part of an impaired system that has been around far too long and has had its day. We can no longer continue to support this, risking a major environmental disaster. From my perspective, the only way out is a radical change in global consumption behaviour.

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